

Pacific Princess a Tale of 2 Ships

by Allan Fox, January 2006

'Elegant rather than luxurious' is how Gavin Smith, MD Princess Cruises Australia and President of Carnival Australia, describes the Pacific Princess and it is hard to disagree with this assessment.

Brought to Australia in the belief that there was a niche market for a premium but affordable cruise experience, the Pacific Princess (previously the R3 from the Renaissance fleet) spends 6 months each year cruising from Sydney for P&O Australia. Based upon the number of repeat cruisers, as high as 50% on some sailings, the decision has been an overwhelming success.



P&O Australia has a long history of providing affordable cruising and they dominate the Fun Ship market (families, couples and singles in the 18 to 35 age bracket) with Pacific Sky, Pacific Sun and Pacific Star permanently based in Australian waters.

There is however another group of travellers (35 and above) that are interested in a premium product, but without the formality that they believe comes with this. Enter the Pacific Princess.

When not sailing in Australian waters the Pacific Princess undertakes 'exotic' itineraries and travels the world, visiting 4 continents this year. The majority of passengers originate from the USA and the ship provides the traditional Princess 5 Star 'C.R.U.I.S.E.' service. [Princess service credo .. Courtesy, Respect, Unfailing In Service Excellence]

Some of these differences are obvious such as the use of the USA dollar as the on board currency whilst some of them are subtle.

In the passenger entertainment area you find a majority of USA entertainers and entertainment staff and there are more guest lecturers and historians brought on board than is seen in Australia. In the bars the stocks are swapped out for American brands of spirits, whilst tap beer is removed and cans and bottles replace it. In the dining rooms the wine lists feature predominantly USA and European wines and the menus are adjusted to USA tastes.

From October to May however the ship sails for P&O Australia and becomes an honorary 'Aussie'.



The transformation includes the appointment of an Australian based Cruise Director, local feature entertainers and an increased number of Australian staff. Meanwhile, menus are varied to feature more steak and prawns and in the bars draught beer makes a welcome return. The on board currency becomes the Australian dollar, with prices in bars and shops reflecting this.

The most significant change however that takes place is the *on board experience*. Mark Rheinbay (born in Switzerland but himself now a proud Australian), Cruise Director Pacific Princess, explained it the following way. An American guest arrives on board and says ‘I’ve come here to be spoilt and pampered’ whereas an Australian says ‘How you going? Have a beer, Relax – we’re here for a good time’. This relaxed approach to life is reflected in many of the scheduled activities.

On the 10 night Christmas Cruise recently there were 2 formal nights and 8 casual evenings. Whilst some people enjoy the ritual of tuxedo and finery, on board the Pacific Princess only a limited number of people elected to dress formally. Many others wore a jacket and tie however equally as many people simply chose to dress comfortably.

Sydney	18 December 2005
Noumea	21 December 2005
Mystery Island, Vanuatu	22 December 2005
Pot Vila, Vanuatu	23 December 2005
Wala, Vanuatu	24 December 2005
Sydney	28 December 2005

Similarly, Mark told me that the most popular night each cruise is the Island Night. Conveniently scheduled after a visit to one of the Pacific islands, such as Mystery Island or Wala, passengers are encouraged to wear island attire. This can include grass skirts, coconut bras, banana frond hats, the brightest and the loudest shirts that can be bought and anything else that gets you in the spirit of the evening.

For Island Night the top deck is decorated with multi coloured flags, a laser lightshow projects onto the radar domes and live music is the order of the day. Entertainment staff joins in and appear to genuinely enjoy every moment they spend enthusiastically dancing under the stars with passengers who would, under other circumstances, never be seen dead hula dancing in a grass skirt.

The hi-lite of the evening is the ‘Champagne Waterfall’ a crystal tower of 640 glasses into which passengers take turns in pouring champagne. At the same time the deck stewards circulate with glasses of complimentary champagne to ease those island inhibitions.

Other typical Australian entertainment included Beer Quoits: a game of skill requiring a rope hoop to be thrown over a wooden pole, the successful contestant winning a can of beer (or two) and Beer Boat Building: where the aim is to ship as many cans of beer as is possible from one side of the swimming pool to the other without sinking. The best boat builder is rewarded by keeping his cargo. Do you see a theme emerging?

Across the PA system one bright sunny day, the following announcement struck the right note: *This announcement is for the passenger who lost the gold, diamond encrusted, Rolex watch, on deck yesterday afternoon. The time is now 9.30.*



In addition to the above there is, of course, a multitude of other day time entertainment such as, dance classes, demonstrations, port reviews, quilting, beading, ceramics, bingo, movies etc. For those that preferred something less energetic the swimming pool and adjacent Jacuzzis provided a very relaxing venue.

In the evening the live entertainment includes Australian guest entertainers, resident bands, pianists and the show troupe, who are excellent albeit the shows are US themed.

Some things however do not change irrespective of where the ship is sailing and whilst we noted that the menus do change to suit the local tastes the extensive dining choices remain.

The Pacific Princess features the main Club Restaurant open for breakfast, lunch and dinner with full waiter service.

The Panorama buffet offers an alternative venue for breakfast and lunch where you select as much, or as little, as you feel like. One of the features of the buffet is the outer deck area over the stern of the ship, no better location on the ship to see where you have been.

The Pizzeria serves pizzas and pasta for lunch and dinner, both fast and convenient, if you prefer to have a night off from the dining room.

The BBQ prepares fresh eggs and omelettes for breakfast and then serves a range of burgers, fries and hot dogs until early evening.

There are two specialty restaurants (where a nominal cover charge applies) the Sterling Steak House and Sabatinis Italian Restaurant. Bookings are essential however well worth it because the overall food and service experience is exceptional.

And finally, if all you really want to do is sit around in your pyjamas all day, then room service is available 24 hours every day.

So in conclusion, why is the Pacific Princess so popular with Australian cruise passengers?

1. The Pacific Princess is an elegant vessel. The quality of fixtures and fittings extends from your stateroom to the public rooms. In many ways it's like being a member of a private club.
2. The food and beverage service is first class. There is an excellent choice of foods, the bars are reasonably priced and the multinational staff is always smiling and ready to ask if they can help you.
3. The atmosphere is comfortable, relaxed and casual. The result of the efforts of the cruise staff to ensure that all of their guests have a great time on board.
4. The experience is unforgettable. Whether you are a first time cruiser or an old hand, you cannot help but enjoy yourself on board the Pacific Princess.

The Pacific Princess may have a split personality, but that's obviously not a bad thing when it comes to 'Aussie' cruising, in elegant style.

If you are interested in sailing on the Pacific Princess, she has 22 scheduled departures between December 2005 to April 2007 including; 12 South Pacific Cruises, 5 New Zealand Cruises, 2 Queensland Cruises, 1 Tasmanian Cruise and 2 circumnavigations of Australia in November 2006 and Feb 2007.

Ship Statistics

Pacific Princess	Operated by P&O Princess Cruises
Cruising speed	20 knots
Gross Tonnage	30,277 tonnes
Length	180.45 metres
Width (at wings)	28.3 metres
Bow thrusters	2 x 750 kw each
Propellers	2 x 4 blades
Rudders	2 x 19.4m ² each
Stabilisers	2 x 9.9m ² each