

**Costa Allegra Review**  
**Hong Kong – DaNang – Halong Bay – HongKong**  
**Easter 2007**  
**By Allan Fox**

As the magnificent Symphony of Light and Sound took centre stage over Hong Kong harbour the **Costa Allegra** quietly set sail from the Ocean Terminal, headed for Vietnam.

Just Robyn and I, a French and a German couple, 4 folks from the US of A, 6 Italians, 7 ex-patriots and their 4 children home from school in the UK, and 900 Chinese companions.

We had selected this 6 day cruise as an Easter getaway for a number of reasons; the dates were excellent, we had not previously visited Vietnam, veterans of 9 previous cruises we had not experienced Costa Crociere, Hong Kong was close enough to Perth WA to be considered an easy flight [local almost]. So we booked it.

The ship itself started life in 1992 as a container vessel, which explains a lot about her unusual shape and superstructure however she is very comfortable, with a European minimalist décor and the use of some bold color schemes in her public areas. Whilst she is only rated 3 star, one suspects that this has more to do with her age and facilities [no balconies or rock climbing walls] than it does about the condition of the vessel.

The itinerary took us first to DaNang however we opted to venture a little farther and pre-arranged a visit to HoiAn, the mecca of made to measure tailoring in this part of the world. By the time we sailed at 5pm I had a superb cashmere suit, Robyn had 2 fitted jackets [copied from a sample], various silk tops and pants, and all of which cost less than \$500. In between fittings we sailed on a junk, dined at the local hotel, shopped in the markets and thoroughly enjoyed our HoiAn 'adventure'.

Halong Bay [where the dragon descends to the sea] was our next stop comprising some 2000 islands of all shapes and sizes. Our arrival was classically 'eerie' because of the grey seas, the heavy mist and the absence of sound and as the ship traversed to anchorage large black rocks loomed out of the mist and slipped past, hidden once again. Thanks to local knowledge and ship's pilots we arrived safely.

The days we spent at sea were pleasant, the sun battled to be seen but it wasn't too cold or windy to enjoy open decks and the Italian entertainment staff [plus translators] worked very hard to maximise participation in the dance classes, ping pong tournaments and deck games.

It was whilst you were at sea however that you became aware of the differences that existed because the cruise was being marketed to the Chinese. There was no deck service of drinks, the shop carried limited goods – no clothing or books or lotions and potions, children accompanied their parents all day and night – the late night revue had to cover up, meal times were fairly chaotic, and it was incredible noisy when passengers assembled for any reason.

Conversely, Mr Allan and Mrs Allan soon became known with the officers, the cruise and bar staff, and of course this delivered excellent service.

The Chinese market is obviously different – it's like inviting 900 people to join a soccer match and not explaining how the game is played. Chinese passengers enjoyed their cruise because they spent time with their families not because they enjoyed the culture of 'cruising'. Those of us that went along for the cruise culture literally had no-one to share this with.

Did we enjoy the cruise ? Yes we did, *is there such a thing as a bad cruise ?*

Would we cruise with Costa again? Probably not in Asia, because [as unlikely as it sounds] the Italian Cruise experience simply wasn't Italian enough. It was great when it showed its face but that really wasn't often enough.

Our next cruise ? Windstar Wind Surf, Barcelona to Barbados, November 07 and we are looking forward to it enormously.

Ciao !!