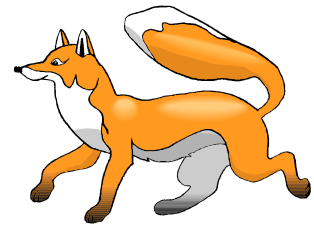


# Cruise Report

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<b>Ship:</b>	MSY Wind Surf [Motor Sailing Yacht]
<b>Dates:</b>	4 November 2007
<b>Itinerary:</b>	Barcelona – Ibiza – Mallorca – Malaga – Tangiers – Lisbon - Barbados
<b>Duration:</b>	21 Days
<b>Add-ons:</b>	Pre-cruise at Eurostars Gran Marina in Barcelona. Post-cruise at Sandy Lane, Barbados and the Intercontinental Hotel, Park Lane, London.

## Introduction ..

We've been home two weeks and for reasons that I don't understand, I've been reluctant and or avoiding the time when I sit down to describe our latest 'adventure'. Perhaps the cruise reports signals *the end*, and this is too final for me at the moment. *Just as well we only have a couple of weeks until our New Years Eve cruise on the MV Funchal.*

## 3 Flights and 2 Limos ..

The trip to Barcelona was really quite good, once we got through customs !

Now I do most of the packing and this year when I finished I had to confess [own up, lay it on the line, come clean] to my very understanding wife, that on this occasion [never before and never again] my suitcase was heavier than hers! [statistically it had to happen one day].

So the Limo picks us up and takes us to the airport [he missed the short cut but that's okay we have plenty of time]. We check in with Qantas and head straight for immigration, customs and access to the flights, shopping and the lounge.

When we get to the [very nice] customs lady we put the hand luggage through the x-ray machine, and at this time I strategically remind all of my readers that the new carry-on allowance is a single ziplock bag with 4 items in it, per person.

I produce my 50ml tube of toothpaste – that's it no more liquids for me - and Robyn pulls out 4 cosmetic bags of assorted sizes with dozens of lipsticks and lotions and medicines. I was absolutely mortified and when Robyn suddenly realized what she'd done, she joined me and we were mortified together.

Now I said the customs lady was nice and I meant it, she went through every item individually, excused anything that could remotely be called a medication, packed more bottles in a plastic bag than I thought possible and eventually only confiscated about 4 bottles of easily replaceable 'stuff', before sending us on our way.

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My ongoing concern was that we had a few more Customs people to pass through before we reached Barcelona. Fortunately for us, nobody in Singapore even asked to look at the liquids and at 04.30 in Heathrow we came across an understanding officer who waved Robyn through with a gentle shake of the head, he must have been married. Coming home we did not have this problem, we learn quickly.

A few quick comments about the journey;

- Qantas International Business Class: an excellent product by any standard
- BA World Traveller Plus: is better than economy
- BA Lounge Terminal 1: lovely place to have a quick shower in transit
- Limo Drivers: seem to get you there effortlessly

## Barcelona ..

We arrived at the Eurostars Gran Marina Hotel mid morning on Thursday, checked in straight away and settled in. I'd selected the hotel based on location, it is on the harbour, part of the World trade Centre and a short stroll to the bottom of La Rambla. It was very modern, had good facilities, staff were very helpful, the breakfast was excellent – help yourself to champagne and strawberries, and there were always an abundance of porters on duty. We were very satisfied with the choice.

The cruise began on Sunday, which meant that we had a few days to enjoy the city.

- We explored La Rambla on foot [up-down-up-down-sideways] stopped to watch many a mime and to see if the sketch artist really did capture the soul.
- Rode the 'Bus Turistic' [a great way to see the lay of the land].
- Went Gaudi at the Casa Batllo [how could one man have had so much influence on the design and architecture of the city ?] which we loved. And people are actually living there, whilst a million tourists a day traipse through.
- Dined at Port Olympic – we arrived and the restaurants were deserted but 30 minutes later they were full to the brim. At the end of the meal the waiter put a bottle of Limoncello [sp?] on the table and said help yourself, gratis. So we did, without over indulging, too much.
- Had a few pints in the Aussie Bar, owned by the Irish guys, with the Swedish barmaid.
- And shopped at the very large **Cortes Inglese** department store



Of course apart from arriving early to have a look at Barcelona, we needed to acclimatise and to synchronise our body clocks with the locals before we went cruising.

On our first day we went to bed at about 4pm and both slept 12 hours. At 4am the following day we were both wide awake, which is how we came to watch Transformers the Movie – *more than meets the eye*. With an exceptional tray of coffee & hot milk I might add.

On Sunday morning I stepped onto the balcony and looked to the harbour and to my enormous delight the Wind Surf was docked along side the hotel. I headed up to the roof to look down on her and amidst the trucks delivering food, the rubbish being removed and crew and passengers disembarking I remember thinking that she was bigger than I expected.

At noon when embarkation began, we called a porter to bring our luggage, walked across the concourse and checked in. When I selected the hotel for it's location I never guessed that it was going to be this good.

## Wind Surf ..



We had booked back to back cruises of 7 days and 14 days respectively.

The 7 day cruise took us to Ibiza, Mallorca, Malaga, Tangiers and Lisbon, whilst the 14 day cruise was an Atlantic crossing Lisbon to Barbados – no stops.

But where to start ? How to try and describe 21 days afloat, and the people we met, and the places we went, and the ship and the crew ? At the beginning.

## The Journey Begins ..

The process is to board the ship and go to the lounge to complete paperwork. You get on at deck 2 and have to go up to Main Deck [deck 4]

The first impression when you board is that the passageways are not wide, the staircase is a little steep and that the lift is small however you soon get over that when you get offered your first glass of champagne and accompanying canapés.

The ship was dry docked in December 2006 for a refurbishment and the interior layouts fixtures and fittings are in excellent condition.

Captain Mark Boylin in command

- 14,745 tonnes
  - 312 Passengers at Capacity
  - 190 Crew
  - 5 Masts @ 50mtrs tall
  - 7 Self-furling Sails
  - 187mtrs in length
  - 10-13 Knots [with engines]
  - 1990 Built as Club Med 1
- C/w Stabilisers and ballast systems

The cabin was a pleasant surprise inasmuch as whilst it wasn't large, there was an abundance of good storage space and we had no trouble putting everything away. The floor space allowed for the 2 of us to move around together [not always possible as you know] and the bathroom was a design miracle. No bigger than other ships but seemingly better use of space and a shower curtain that never once stuck to me [bliss].

The bed was comfortable and the bedding was good quality, altho I did have an issue with the number of day pillows and bolster cushions that ended up on the bed each day – you had to move half of them to get on for a little siesta – but in the scheme of things no big deal.

*We arrived to find bon voyage gifts from Bobi in our cabin, gorgeous flowers and sail away canapés. Many thanks Bobi the flowers lasted at least 2 weeks and brightened the cabin.*

## Entertainment – Wind Surf Style ..

Wind Surf entertainment is very low key, laid back, and minimalist, with little or no 'flash / glitz' [altho I suspect if I list all of the activities it might seem like an abundance].

Steve the Host conducts an information session every evening, where he tells you about the coming day and flags items of interest. This is the signal for everyone to get together for the pre-dinner drinks, a few canapés, optional dancing to the lounge band 'Lookout' and a start to the evening. Lookout also play an after dinner session but not a lot of folks seemed to go along.

'Rain' [Craig and Nicola] is the resident duo and they are excellent. Playing in the Compass Rose bar each evening they also ran the musical quiz nights, which we eventually won [with a bunch of well informed folks]. But it goes to show that if you try often enough you can prevail, *or at least get used to the questions*. I have their CD in the car and enjoy reflecting on the trip and the nights we spent drinking and dancing.

Craig also played acoustic guitar during afternoon tea, because we all know you can eat more if you're soothed by an accomplished guitarist.

There are no shows, movies are screened on the in-house system [during the crossing we had a couple of matinees in the lounge], and there is a very large DVD library that you can select from and take to your cabin, where you have a player. There's also a Bose docking station for an ipod which can be booked out for personal use. The book library was excellent and I think I averaged a book every 1 to 1.5 days.

I got quite excited when I read that there was a Windstar Porno Channel on the TV, however I should have had my glasses on because it actually read Windstar Promo Channel.

The 'crossing' brought out a whole new style of entertainment which sometimes felt a bit desperate.

- Origami classes
- Napkin & Towel folding [separately of course]
- Galley tours
- Fashion show
- Casino competitions [isn't gambling already a competition ?]
- Cooking demonstrations
- Golf tips from the Aussie Pro, who was working in the Casino as a dealer

*I do admit to going to some of these*

My personal *favourite* was the **Galley Lunch**. The idea being that the buffet lunch was set up in the galley and you streamed through to get your food, in one side and out the other – just like the waiters do. They [Rob the first officer] laid carpet for the occasion, draped sheets over everything that wasn't part of the buffet and added some dried flower arrangements, batik art etc for décor. It was a claytons kitchen – the kitchen you have when you don't have a kitchen.

Now whilst it made a nice change to sit in the dining room for lunch, and Craig did play and I always enjoyed that, I didn't get the point. Maybe it's because I know my way around commercial kitchens and worked as a waiter on cruise ships in my teens. It just wasn't necessary and it was a pain in the arse having to walk through the kitchen several times when I only wanted one thing each trip. BUT others thought it was great so it must have hit the mark with them.

There were some hugely popular activities and these included, the mixology [cocktail] demonstrations where everyone got to taste, the golf tournament played 18 holes over 5 days on a course laid out in the lounge, the F1 motor racing with remote controlled Audis and of course the boat building contest where the contestants had to scavenge the material from ship waste. The afternoon that they judged the boats was exceptional fun on deck and well lubricated.

The crew show [we saw 2 of these and whilst they were similar there were different acts] was also hugely entertaining.

During the second show we had a medical emergency [Bright star to the lounge] which resulted in an early arrival in Barbados. But he seemed to be ok as he was transferred to the lifeboat.

Perhaps not a true activity but the Transatlantic Photo reminded me of being back at school and was a hoot. That's us on the right of Mark [el capitaine] I have the yellow Aussie shirt on.

## Passengers ..

On the subject of our co-adventurers we met some lovely people on both cruises and it was really strange saying goodbye to Charlie & Penny, Denis & Chris, Mary Jo and Marti and then to meet new folks like Wyn and Marilyn, and Jean.

Dave & Carol not only did these two cruises but stayed on for a third .. lucky sods.

Wind Surf carries 190 crew, on the first cruise we had 169 passengers and on the second we had 189 and 26 of us completed both cruises.



What was *really strange* was the way the people who got on in Lisbon all seemed to know each other. It was like a high school reunion. Hugging ! Kissing ! Screeches of delight !

The first day out, it looked like a social club on deck, card schools, needlepoint, jewellery making, knitting, oh so different from the nice quiet crowd we'd just spent 7 days with. We even had to mark out our favourite spots all over again.

The 'crossing' is a tradition with these folks and they travel every year [and sometimes twice if they do the return] and they meet up and have lengthy friendships on the back of the cruise.

## The Ports ..

We never booked this cruise for the ports, it was for the ship and the crossing, so where we had a nice time that was a bonus.

**Spain:** it was the end of summer season, the afternoon siesta was being observed, and accordingly it often seemed at half pace. Having said that we managed to find 'bus turistic' in Mallorca and Malaga and thoroughly enjoyed the ride around, and the walk around, afterwards. I had expected Ibiza to be awash with drunken Brits however none were to be seen, wrong side of the island apparently and too late in the season.

**Tangiers:** I know that many of our companions found this to be the hi-lite of their trip but I don't concur. My own feeling is one of discomfort when we visit North Africa [Casablanca last year] and an overwhelming sense that the folks don't like us and cannot help but try to take advantage of us. And by us I mean anyone that might look like an American. So my future policy is to avoid these places, I'm only going where they like me !

**Lisbon:** on a 'fresh' day, with most people heading home, we met Carol and Dave at the tram stop and rode to the Prac de Comercio [town square], where lo and behold we found the Portuguese equivalent of the 'bus turistic' and hopped on.

At this point I confess that none of us spoke Portuguese, we were all short of Euro coins and failed to pay the fare on the tram. If caught Dave was to offer double the going rate to get us off the hook. Surely a little bribery and corruption must exist in Portugal.

The weather, by the way, was fantastic. Flat seas for 90% time, the odd shower, but it really wouldn't have been possible to expect better. The day she rolled was quite something and I actually moved to an inside recliner – to avoid the possibility of rolling through the railing and being lost at sea.

## The Ship ..



Pictures stolen from Win .. thanks.

I liked everything about the ship except the external presentation, which I thought seriously let the ship down. Remembering that the vessel had a major refurbishment less than a year previously and that I work in facilities management, so I'm picky and I look at this stuff.

**Deck Umbrellas:** threadbare to the point you could see through them. I was shocked and, perhaps naively, passed my observations to Steve. I received a letter advising they would all be changed in Barbados, thanks. Only Dave & Carol can tell us if this happened? Cynic moi?

**Brass work:** clean on the bridge [open policy to visit anytime is nice] but tarnished to buggery and rusty on all of the step edges etc. and everywhere else.

**Paintwork:** lots of rust and discoloration but an obvious effort was being put into making the paint look better – I still ask the question why and how had it gotten to this stage so quickly ?

**Spa:** not cleaned properly in the first week. Sand and grit apparent when the bubbles subsided, but only on the starboard side because the bubbles didn't work on the port side.

**Life boats:** paint spattered and grubby.

**Sails:** covered in black soot from the engines. *Ok I agree hard to address at sea.*

**The pointy End:** a very congested area because it's used to store things but the deck was paint splashed, the dinghy's similarly decorated and there was an engine in pieces from the day we got on until the day we left.

**The top pool:** I think it took the best part of 14 days to repair and fill this and even then I overheard a conversation that went along the lines they were going to remove the pool next year and the repair only had to be good enough to last till then.

**Near enough – good enough.** The First Officer was responsible for the appearance of the ship and I reckon this reflected Rob's view on life. Sadly, the Captain was letting this happen.

After the second drill a couple of passengers accosted Rob to complain that staff was not taking the drill seriously. Rob's comment to us afterwards was 'Remember the first rule – No Poofs !'

In this area I felt that Windstar sold a much better product than they actually delivered.

### **Food on Board ..**

With the exception of the hot bain marie in the Veranda, I thought it was good. And I suspect one of the problems with the hot bain marie was that it had no lighting, which makes food look more appetising.

The morning egg man was quick and well presented, specialty stations always had good variety, and the basics such as smoked salmon, lobster and prawns were always very good;

- breakfast *smoothy* was terrific
- burgers were excellent
- cheese board was sensational
- the soup man deserved a pay rise

There are 2 restaurants on board; the specialty venue is Degrees [no extra charge but booking required] which has a different menu structure than the main restaurant. Degrees is flagged as a steak house but I didn't think this was reflected in the menus. We dined in both and enjoyed both. Others felt that the smaller and brighter degrees afforded better service and they may have been right.

### **The Crew ..**

The interaction between crew and passengers is a Windstar trademark, in effect a marketable difference between them and other cruise lines.

- The crew were very good at learning what you liked from the bar and during meal times, iced tea or water, special diets, etc.
- First names between passengers and crew is the norm.
- Hugging and kissing literally daily is the norm.

Personally, this familiarity is probably half a yard over the line for me, I enjoy being called Mr Allan in the bar at night and I don't want to hug any of the guys.

But the crew, mostly Indonesian and Philipino, were real friendly and worked very hard at ensuring that you had a memorable time.

### **Barbados ..**

At the end of the cruise we felt as though we were being abandoned. There was no-one to look after our every need and to fetch and carry for us and [sacre bleu] we were expected to pay for everything as we went along.

We left the ship, collected our baggage and approached the customs lady. For reasons only known to herself and the Barbados Bureaucracy [an empire legacy] she hand wrote an A4 carbon copy list of our suitcases and hand luggage and gave it to us. We subsequently gave this to our taxi driver, who handed this to the port gate keeper. An interesting process that would seem to achieve little.

- There must have been 40 taxis in line when we got there and it took 25 minutes to get one and to get away. They were arguing about the ‘rotation’ – official taxis in a queue. The rogue taxis all waited outside the gate.
- Meanwhile the gate keeper kept everyone in a strict queue and proceeded at a snails pace.

We had hoped to be collected by Sandy Lane but this didn’t work out because most people arrive by air, I didn’t have email access, and we hadn’t managed to convey our arrival details to the hotel.

For those of you who haven’t heard of the place, Oprah goes there, Tiger got married there, 3 golf course including the Old Nine, a gated resort – except the beach which by law in Barbados is public property.

So when we did arrive, the SL gatekeeper bowed and welcomed us – things were looking up.

## Sandy Lane ..

As we reached the main building the concierge team greeted us, by name. I had taken the taxi knowing I had no local or US currency and asked where I could exchange some money. “Don’t worry Mr Fox, we’ll take care of it for you”, was the response. And they did and it wasn’t charged to us. Making amends for not picking us up – good recovery. And I bet the local cabbie who had quoted an excessive fee only received the local value – serves you right.



We were met by an Assistant Manger who provided us with our induction to the hotel, a cold fruit punch and a fresh towel. After the induction you are escorted to your room where they show you the amenities, explain the electronic touch pads to control everything, show you how to work the multi media plasma, demo the espresso machine, and then complete registration. There is no reception desk as such in the arrival lobby only a desk for assistance and a couple of discreet areas for dealing with financial matters and checkouts.

A special note about the beach lounges. You have your own for the duration of your stay. If you want anything you plant the yellow flag into the ground and someone trots over to see what they can do for you. Very cool service standard.

Following our arrival we had lunch in the buffet. The Sunday Buffet is a big deal for locals, confirmed by the presence of none other than Cliff Richard, who has a house on the island, and sat on the adjoining table.

Cliff Richard: ageing British *crooner*, hit the news several years ago when, during rain stopped play at Wimbledon, he stood in the stands and knocked out a few songs for the fans. Seems to be a nice bloke and handled the fans very graciously. Famous for being celibate apparently ?

That evening, after cocktails at the beach bar and watching the sun set, we dined at L’Acajou which is SL fine dining venue. The pianist played softly in the background, the torches and candles provided soft lighting, the service was excellent and the food to match.

We decided to check out the Country Club [golf] before we left and hit the pro shop to buy a few SL souvenirs, including my Green Monkey straw hat – only available to Hotel guests in residence. The view is spectacular and our shuttle driver gave us the guided tour on the way there [and back].

When we checked out, standard checkout at 1pm - late check out – no problem, seated discreetly and accepting the offer of a farewell glass of champagne it was with some regret that we hadn't opted to stay longer however we had places to go and people to see.



We finally got our lift to the airport, in the SL Bentley, a thing of beauty. It took 75 minutes to travel 24 km but who cares, we were in the SL Bentley.

In conclusion, everybody should go to SL at least once in their lifetime it is/was sensational.

### **Barbados to Gatwick to London ..**

We flew BA WT+ and it was a good flight with the extra space, only 8 hours overnight, so we mostly slept.

At 06.30 at Gatwick the Intercontinental driver collected us. It was dark, foggy and decidedly colder than Barbados. Bottled water, newspapers and magazines to hand, we set off and were checked into our room in Park Lane by 9am.

We showered and changed and went for breakfast and with perfect timing as we rounded the reception we bumped into Val & Jim who were going to spend the next 24 hours with us.

### **London Tourists ..**

I don't catch up with my sister very often but it's really nice when we do and we really appreciated the fact that they came to visit and we had a good time together.

It was too cold for the open top bus so we settled for taking cabs to strategic locations and walking from here to there. The weather was fine but with an occasional wind chill.

- We started at Trafalgar square
- Checked out Leicester square
- Moved from Piccadilly Circus into Regent Street
- Stopped at Hamleys toy store – visited every floor
- Traversed Oxford street into Park Lane
- Attended the red carpet opening of the Golden Compass [at least we could see it from the pub where we were having a tapas dinner
- Went to see Boeing Boeing at the Comedy Theatre – an excellent remake of a sixties romp involving 3 air hostesses and a Frenchman with an amorous appetite for the fairer sex
- Finished off with a drink in Soho at Waxy's Little Sister [Waxy's of course being a bigger bar across the road].

Being indefatigable [good word or what?], we headed out for a gentle stroll again the next morning and;

- Walked from Hyde Park corner to the Palace
- Caught the changing of the guard
- Laughed at the 'Horse Crossing' signs – instead of the green man it's a horse - with the push button about 6 foot up the pole
- Leaned over Westminster Bridge whilst we listened to Big Ben pealing at the Houses of Parliament



And before long it was time for them to head off. Until the next time. Your turn to visit me in Perth I think.

But London wasn't finished yet .. not by a long way .. we had plans to meet John and Terri for what is traditionally becoming a 'Big Night Out' .. and this was no exception.

We started with drinks [3 bottles of champagne] at the Goring Hotel, one of the old family establishments around the corner from the Palace. [www.goringhotel.co.uk/](http://www.goringhotel.co.uk/)

Then we went to see Monty Pythons Spamalot, which was great [especially if you grew up with Monty Python as I did] and polished off another bottle of Champers at interval <http://www.montypythonsspamalot.com> .

The evening concluded with dinner at the Ivy <http://www.the-ivy.co.uk/> which again is one of the old establishments and ordinary folks can expect to wait for many months for a booking. Not so for Lord John, greeted like a long lost celebrity with his glamorous escort wherever we went. 2 more champagnes, a very nice white and an exceptional [John tells me] bottle of red rounded off the meal.

Time spent with John & Terri is wonderful.

## **Homeward Bound ..**

Eventually it all comes to an end .. late check out of the Hotel .. car to Heathrow .. fast track check-in and customs .. then into the Terminal 4 BA Lounge.

This isn't a bad lounge but it's always scruffy, litter everywhere, dirty tables and rubbish, and staff that move in slow motion. They should take lessons from Terminal 1.

For tonites flight in BA WT+ we had odd seats, against a bulkhead – lots of space for the legs, but in the middle of the front row. Nevertheless we both slept fairly well and landed in Singapore early evening.

Qantas lounge in Singapore is always a welcome because [sorry, I'm parochial] it's like an Australian one .. well managed, clean and tidy and a good place to grab a shower and to change sox, jocks and shirts.

Out of Singapore I had been chasing an upgrade but it didn't come to fruition, maybe because it was a Friday night and the flight was busy. However when we got on the plane, we had a row of 4 seats and Robyn settled in for a nanny nap.

Arriving in Perth at 1.50 am we got caught up in the new arrivals process that requires luggage to be x-rayed, but emerged to find George the Limo driver waiting for us. We hadn't seen George for 12 months however he remembered his last outing with Robyn and some of her work friends [which was by all accounts somewhat lively] and commented that we still had all the spare cars, as he pulled into the drive. Nice chap George.

## **Closure ..**

God it was hard to come home and go back to work [and not getting much easier yet].

*I'm destined to lead the life of the idle rich. I've mastered idle and I'm working on rich.*

It was a wonderful adventure. We danced, dined and drank our way across the planet and had a wonderful time doing so.

The older I get the longer these cruise reports get – or maybe it's the fact we were away for 5 weeks and did so much – in any event I suspect this is the longest report to date. [don't worry I'm not that anal that I'm going to check].

In conclusion, I hope that you can enjoy, and perchance, relate to my recollections and ramblings.

Until our next adventure .. ciao !