

Cruise Report

Ship: MV Funchal [previously SS Funchal]
Dates: 30 December 2007
Itinerary: Fremantle Round Trip - cruise to nowhere
Duration: 4 Days
Add-ons: Nil

Home Pick-Up

We started, as always, with a collection at home by Hughes Limousines. They have modern vehicles, nice polite presentable drivers, and they're always on time. It takes an hour to get from where we live to the Victoria Quay Cruise Terminal in Fremantle, so we sat back and enjoyed the trip. <http://www.fremantleports.com.au/>

Boarding

Robyn was the second person to board, closely followed by yours truly. The steward / guide found our room, declaring "Oh! You got a nice one", when he opened the door to Cabin 20.

Actually, it wasn't a bad suite, especially as suites on this ship went [not to be compared with anything built in the last 10 years];

- In the sitting room was a lounge / sofa bed, coffee table, desk, fridge [empty], TV [that didn't receive anything], and 15 assorted drawers.
- The bedroom had a double bed [after we requested the singles be connected] and a couple of robes. There was more than enough storage for a 4 day cruise and the hangers were plentiful and nice, wooden not plastic. And another 11 drawers.
- The bathroom had a bath [it seemed narrow and high] but we only used the shower over. The WC, unlike modern vacuum systems, was a plumbed flush which [had we been staying longer] we may have gotten used to. Needless to say it was a novelty and a challenge at times.

Ship Statistics:

- 9563 tonnes
- Portuguese flag
- Registered Madeira
- Max speed 16 knots
- Built 1961
- 254 Cabins / 608 beds
- Claim to fame, served as Presidential Yacht

We heard numerous people talking about being in quad shares, waiting for the shower, juggling around the available space, so we know we had chosen well. And of course we asked naive questions like "Couldn't one of you have used the bath whilst the other was in the shower?"

Cruising

We positioned ourselves around the pool next to the bar, mid afternoon, and we were scheduled to sail at 7pm. At about 6.30 they had the sail away party, complete with dancing

on deck and Vangelis booming from the speakers, reminiscent of Lisbon and the Wind Surf, except it was daylight.

Note: Robyn bought me the CD yesterday – the best of Vangelis – trust me it could have been a single.

They started early because the meal times were 7pm and 9pm, we opted for the latter, so we stayed for the whole ‘leaving harbour’ experience.

As we hit the open seas the ship started to pitch and roll with a vengeance – and stopped 7 hours later when we anchored at Geographe Bay, south of Perth. We stayed in the bay until Tuesday evening when we set off on the return journey.

At first I felt a little cheated because we weren’t actually moving, but the scenery was very pleasant, the ocean was flat, the weather was lovely and from time to time the locals sailed out to have a look and went home, which just made it feel a little exotic. I was waiting for the canoes with batik wares for sale.

The Ship

Okay she was small and old, but you could see that in her day she would have been a very handsome little vessel.

She was still maintained very well and we’d check out the very industrious deck crew each morning as we took our walk around the decks.

The Staff

Sadly, this was the most disappointing aspect of the trip because the staff was either sullen to the point of being rude or apparently brand new and inexperienced.



Having said that the bars were severely under manned and if you visualise the scene at the pool bar:

- One barman facing a long line of thirsty Aussies
- The average drink order containing at least a couple of exotic cocktails plus a few real drinks
- A temporary draught beer system that needs continuous attention
- No assistance in sight
- Running out of glasses
- And of course it’s hot outside

I did / do have some sympathy with / for the bar staff and wonder what CTC were thinking when they decided that they had adequate numbers of staff. It’s just a shame that I don’t happen to like standing in line to get a drink when I go cruising, I have this strange belief that someone will serve me.

It did become a bit of a joke that it wasn’t possible to get drunk onboard, because you couldn’t get served often enough, or quick enough.

The Food

I emailed Reuben Goossens <http://www.e-cruise-world.com> regarding some comments he made in his review of the ship, and these were .. "Superb service & fine cuisine" .. which you may have gathered I don't necessarily agree with. In his response he contended that everything was 'contextual' i.e. for this ship the service was superb and the food was excellent, because it sells itself as value for money and 'budget' cruises.

In my view it wasn't particularly good and I'll leave it at that.

Entertainment

The singers were either very, very, good or they were miming ? .. And I suspect that it was a bit of each because of the elaborate background sound track. The dance troupe were French and utterly stunning [when in costume. I didn't see them during the day *or* they had fabulous make up at night and I didn't recognize them].

The whole thing was a real dichotomy – nothing else on board was above a 2 star experience, except these folks, who I'd have happily watched anywhere.

The **New Years Eve** show finished around 11.30 and the lounge band took over for welcoming 2008. We got the whole 9 yards – streamers, hats, noise makers, auld Lang sine and complimentary champagne.

It was a hoot, and the noisiest New Year that we've had for many a year.

Conclusion

Social Club **not** Country Club.

BUT Reuben was right, in a way, cruising is about knowing what you're buying when you book. The MV Funchal is not a flash young thing and perhaps we shouldn't expect too much.

It was still very nice to get away with Robyn, read a book or two in the open air, experience the sea breeze in your hair, and have people of a similar persuasion around you.

Wouldn't go again .. but don't regret going this time.

Funniest Bit

A group of 30+ 'cockies' i.e. country folks, were on board as part of a company outing. One morning one of the 'larikins' i.e. lad known as bit of a joker, climbed into the wooden locker where they kept the clean towels. As guests came along and lifted the lid he handed one to them – an arm shooting straight into the air with a blue towel in it.

Needless to say, the reactions were absolutely priceless and had the crowd of conspirators looking on, in gales of laughter. Now I've never seen that on a bigger or better ship.