



Cruise Report

Ship: NCL Norwegian Wind
Dates: 3 January 2002
Itinerary: Sydney, Australia to Auckland, New Zealand
Duration: 14 Days
Add-ons: Overnight stay in Sydney pre-cruise

Sydney Airport Pick-up

A mini-coach company was ‘contracted’ to pick us up at the airport on arrival and the driver was waiting when we arrived at luggage collection.

- In addition to ourselves two ladies were expected and when they didn’t identify themselves he was very abusive about them, in front of us.
- We had to walk a couple of hundred yards to the coach but there was no offer to assist with any luggage.
- On board the coach the driver had a ‘mate’ down from the country cruising around with him, whom he chatted with when he wasn’t explaining to us how he understood customer service – the main reason he was tipped so well.

All in all it was a very ordinary reception in Sydney and, no he wasn’t tipped well by me.

Westin Sydney

The hotel was very nice, the rooms were very well appointed, and we used the breakfast room to meet with old friends and relatives for a couple of hours before we went to board the cruise.

We recommend it to anyone who wants to stay in style.

NCL Norwegian Wind

Boarding – was actually the quickest we have encountered to date, from arrival to having our photos taken with the dancers, completed in one hour. But having said that it was an hour of queuing and filling out forms standing up, and this really does put people off side [bearing in mind that most passengers are elderly]. Perhaps cruise lines could learn from airlines.

Alcohol Policy – NCL do not allow any alcohol to be taken on board and they collected ‘cart loads’ of it from the guests as they boarded. 14 days later there were still people complaining about this policy, in addition to guests that went to extreme lengths to smuggle alcohol on board.

US Currency on Board – whereas I wasn't certain that US was the shipboard currency I suspected that it was. This came as a big surprise to a lot of the other Australian passengers – more gripes.

The Cabin – was very good, the largest that we have experienced and with a great window for watching the rolling waves. The room was serviced promptly, kept clean, and turned down each evening.

Food & Restaurants – were generally very good, with the notable exception of the Sports Bar [pseudonym for cafeteria], which was terrible. The food served in this area always looked over-cooked, floated in oil, picked over and decidedly unappetising.

The French theme restaurant 'Le Bistro' carried a US\$10 surcharge however it really was a very pleasant experience to dine there and noticeably up market from the other venues.

Freestyle Service – is advertised as dining when you want, where you want and there are some nice benefits to this – you get to meet a lot of people – you get to eat in various locations etc. On the other side you don't really get to develop friendships with dining companions and staff members. My advice to others, when you are asked to share a table [every time you enter a dining room] – have the strength to say **NO** from time to time and enjoy your own company, even if you have to wait.

Automatic Tipping – another very contentious issue, not only for the 350+Aussies that were choking on the cost [AU\$280 per person for the cruise] but also for the 900+ Americans 400+ Canadians on board. They invariably said that they ended up tipping a lot more than they normally would. Personally I think that the cruise lines are using automatic tipping as a form of wages subsidy.

The Staff – all of the f&b staff came from 'poor' countries, eg Romania, Philippines, Indonesia and there were no 1st World countries represented eg Italians, French, British, USA. All spoke some English but not always very well.

As there were no fixed sittings and no need to work for the end of cruise tip [cynical ?]- you had the feeling some days that the staff was a little less attentive than they would have been ordinarily. And there were occasions when tables just weren't being cleared and reset in a timely manner, almost a why bother attitude.

Entertainment – the showroom was large and could stage a decent production and I believe that most passengers enjoyed some if not all of the offerings. The cruise staff was energetic and involved in lots of activities although I suspect that they had never been down to NZ before as they endeavoured to provide topside activities [a'la tropics] that were almost blown off the decks.

Shopping – there was a good selection but the retailer was somewhat inflexible, for example 2 for \$20 did not equal 3 for \$30. It was 2 for \$20 and 1 at the original price. I thought shopping was generally expensive as were photographs @ US\$15 for a formal photo. Robyn thought the 'perfume diary' service was excellent.

Bar Prices – the American contingent often commented that they thought the bar and restaurant beverage prices were reasonable compared to [say] Carnival Line. I actually thought they would have been reasonable in AU\$ not in US\$. For example, the cost of a bottle of Rosemount Sauvignon Blanc [quaffable but not a special wine, AU\$ \$8 at the bottle shop] was US\$18.40 inc 15% tip and this was at the low end of wine costs.

Tours – we pretty much go on a tour in every location, in the belief that you see a bit more if you get on a bus and let a local show you round. The Boomrock Station Resort tour was exceptional, the jet boats were great and we did see a lot of interesting places [notwithstanding the perpetual rain]. Our own preference is to see a bit more ‘adventure’ in the tours but again the average is well over 50 so we understand the oftentimes sedentary style of tours. Our American cousins were very vocal that the tours were expensive.

The Wind – was in really good condition and the deck crew were out and about cleaning, scrubbing and painting at every opportunity.

Flying with Qantas

I have shares in Qantas and like a lot about the way they run the Company .. except flying with them. It’s impossible to use FF points and forget about any kind of special requests.

So How Was the Holiday ?

It was good, we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and came back relaxed and ready for another twelve months of hard labour.

Question ..

Have you ever wondered how so many Americans manage to retire so early and still be able to afford to go cruising ? Let me know if you work it out because I must be doing something wrong.