

Cruise Report

Ship:	PS [Paddle Steamer] Murray Princess
Dates:	21 March 2008
Itinerary:	Mannum Round Trip – river cruise
Duration:	4 Days
Add-ons:	Overnight Stay in Adelaide pre-cruise

Introduction ..

About 10 days before Easter Robyn suggested that we should get away for the Easter break. Ever one to take up the challenge, I *googled* and *yahooped* and checked out all of my favourite travel search engines and found 2 things;

1. We weren't going to be going overseas because there simply weren't any flights to the major hubs in Asia. Not even to Bali – where I really didn't want to go.
2. There were limited vacancies on the Paddle Steamer Murray Princess and Linda [from Cruiseabout, Sydney] could secure berths.

Kismet ..

Some things are meant to be .. in this case I was well into the detail of flights and accommodation and transfers before it struck me that I was going to be in South Australia that week – business plans already enacted – ergo it was just a case of putting all the pieces together simultaneously;

- ❖ Book cruise with Linda
 - Book Robyn's flights
 - Change my return flight to match Robyn
 - Book Hotel

And this was one of those days when Mr Murphy [sh*t happens] was conspicuously absent and all plans snapped together like well oiled Lego blocks.

Adelaide ..

At 2pm on Thursday I was at the arrivals gate to meet Robyn. Her morning had gone according to plan and she'd flown in from Perth. I had flown down from Moomba, a remote village in the Cooper Basin gas field a couple of hours earlier and had spent my time camped in the Qantas Club catching up with my email.

The Holiday Inn, Adelaide is a perfectly acceptable 4 star property but it's claim to fame is a spectacular concierge service. So much so, that the little folder that the key card comes in has a picture of the Concierge on it. [You'd want to hope that he doesn't leave].

Example: We had transfers arranged however the pick up point was several hundred metres down the same street as the Holiday Inn. So I approached John the Concierge and asked him how he felt about pushing the baggage down on his trolley .. *visualise this* Robyn and I strolling down the road in our finery and sunnies [maybe even a chapeau ?] followed by the Concierge pushing the trolley, overladen with luggage, down a slight decline, arriving at the point where 50 other people have just watched us and our progress .. and he agreed. The alternative was a taxi which quite frankly was more likely to piss off the cabbie than anything else and it was a nice day so why not stroll?. However when the time came, we returned to the hotel to find that he had contact the coach line direct and had organised a pick up at our hotel. I was suitably impressed and he got the tip without the exercise.

It was Robyn's first time in Adelaide so we took a walk around the main shopping centre that afternoon and had a very nice dinner at a tapas and sangria restaurant in the evening, [a large table which sat about 20 people however couples sat alongside each other and then there was a space etc, it was good] before walking back to the hotel and retiring for the night.

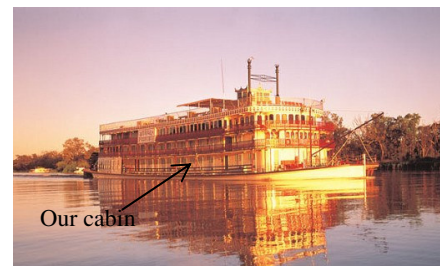
After breakfast we walked to the Torrens River, which flows through the city, and spent an hour on the 'Popeye 1' river cruiser. Nothing like a cruise before a cruise I always say.

Paddle Steamer Murray Princess ..

The coach transfer was accomplished in just over an hour. The driver was an annoying little fellow who thought we should be entertained with snappy anecdotes from his personal life. His sparkling repartee was so highly valued that he had been head hunted to the opposition coach line and this would be literally his final outing. *Hooray!* And then we were in Mannum, home of the Murray Princess.

Paddle steamers are built a little different from other cruise ships.

- Physically they are top heavy – there's only 1 metre below water on Murray Princess
- Access to cabins is from the outside decks, which is great in the morning, step out of the cabin directly into the fresh air !



First impressions: not bad at all. She is in very good physical condition. Paintwork, fixtures and fittings all in very good order [although I did find a couple of bar stools that wobbled, or was that me?] and the leather chairs in the lounges were completely fitting with the environment, rich luxurious and *olde worlde*.

At the stern there is a 2 deck lounge with a lovely circular staircase, and floor to ceiling windows overlooking the paddle. A particularly hypnotic experience, and I wondered if the sun flickers could cause a psychotic event ? Of course you'd probably have to be awake, so count me out. Put me in a good armchair with a book and start counting backwards from 100 .. 99 – 98 – 97 – zzzzz.

For' ward there was a lounge bar from where you had a panoramic view of the oncoming world [and the aforementioned stools]. And on the top sun deck they had the gymnasium and some deck chairs, mostly under shade to ensure nobody gets too much sun.

The cabin however was 'compact' .. open the door, step up and in, a single bed either side reminiscent of a Pullman carriage, and at the back of the room another step up to the bathroom. The steps of course are functional not form. The crew live below and with such a shallow draft they need to create a bit of space, and then the bathroom is elevated for the

plumbing to have somewhere to go. Additionally, the bathroom had a barn door which was very useful if the front door opened whilst you were busy !

Note: Bathroom came complete with shiny paper. I stole a roll of soft paper from the public loo. There are limits to my tolerance.

Meals: were served in the dining room which was multi functional. If there was a day time event it was held in the dining room eg the Murray River Food & Wine Tasting and of course after dinner it was dead convenient because you didn't actually have to leave your table for the nights entertainment, whether it be the crew show [yes, we had a crew show on a 3 day cruise], the Adelaide Cup [a horse racing event with dice] or music and dancing [our waltz whisk to sashay just fitted the length of the dance floor].

I came to enjoy the 'reading of the menu' by the Cruise Director enormously. As our fellow guests *oooh'd* and *aaah'd* as each dish was described. This could catch on with some of the bigger ships I am sure. And it's environmentally sound – no wasted paper !



The Voyage: as it's a relatively small river you naturally go in one direction, turn around and come back! Well we did this twice. On the first day we went down river, berthed for the night and then in the morning [see pictures, this is morning] went a bit further down to Murray



Bridge, where we stopped for 3 hours to explore the town, and then headed back up river. About 24 hours after we left Mannum we passed through heading back upstream. We subsequently berthed at Craig Nook and River View Lodge both locations being literally in the middle of nowhere. At night they turned on floodlights along both sides which made for quite a picturesque setting.

The River: was alive with all manner of activities, jet boats [obviously drug trafficking or people smuggling], water skiers, boogie boarders, canoeists, fishermen, house boats, campers and people who seem to live there. All this whilst the water level is about 1 metre below the norm - I think I would like to go back and see what it looks like when it's in full flow. [South Australia is the driest state in Australia and the Government is currently looking at a rescue plan for the river system.]

The Staff: whilst at overnight berth the deck hands become bar staff, and during meal times the cabin stewardesses become waitresses. Hell, even the cruise director took food orders and served meals, real multi-tasking. All in all they were keen and eager to please.

Fellow Cruisers: were a bit of a mixed bunch, as you come to expect. We had the youngsters [sub 30's] travelling with Gran, who it turns out were cousins, which explains why they didn't spend much time together. Then there was the BIG man with the ditsy wife. He had a limited wardrobe with him and she seemed to eat half of everything and feed the rest to him. The Kiwis, [Ron, Pat and Patsy] who were nice folks and had travelled a bit. And the group of OAP's from Western Australia, who we went to great lengths to disassociate ourselves from – wouldn't want anyone to think I was that old.

BUT on the question of age; I have been trying to work out how old I look to the outside world. I look at men and think 'is he older than me or younger than me?' 'Do I look older than him or younger than him?' It's a conundrum: On one hand I accept that I am getting older but I'm not actually old, old, am I? I'm still fit and active, outwardly virile and obviously attractive to 20 something young ladies [in my dreams].

And so it ends ..

The trip home went according to plan .. coach transfer minus chatter [with a stop at a wooden toy factory for reasons unbeknownst to all].. airport lounge .. flight to Perth [in the row with the extra leg room] .. and home early evening ..

The Experience ..

Unlike cruise ships there is no motion on a paddle steamer, no rocking from side to side or pitching up and down – you simply and silently glide past the outside world. It is a very relaxing sensation and one that I wouldn't mind repeating in the future. Perhaps a trip on an American Paddle Boat on the Mississippi, or Christmas on one of the long boats in Europe, visiting the traditional markets ?

It was a nice way to spend Easter. [did you hear the one about the guy who walked into a hotel on Good Friday, dropped 4 nails on reception and said '*can you put me up*'?]

Disclaimer: Allan Fox was not a guest of Captain Cook Cruises and paid for all of his own drinks. In fact I'm reliably told that he had the largest bar bill for the cruise. The opinions espoused in this article do not reflect this.