



Cruise Report

Ship: Pacific Princess
Dates: 18 December 2005
Itinerary: Sydney-Noumea-Mystery Island-Vila-Wala-Sydney
Duration: 10 Days
Add-ons: Pre-cruise overnight at Sydney Hilton

This was supposed to be the cruise you take when you're not having a holiday basically.

We were booked on the MV Funchal and after flying to Bali we were to sail back to Fremantle, stopping at Lombok, Broome and Exmouth. However the Funchal broke down in Egypt and they subsequently cancelled the cruise. So we booked on the Pacific Princess and went from cheap and cheerful 3 star to 5 star, and I need a couple of new outfits darling.

To begin ..

We were picked up at 04.30 and flew on the 05.55 out of Perth arriving in Sydney at 13.00 after adding on 3 hours for the time change. The car was waiting and we were delivered to the Sydney Hilton before 14.00. www.hiltonsydney.com.au

Now, for whatever reason, I was sent a Hilton Honors Gold Card last year which I wave when we check in and it works a charm, upgrades, invitations to the Executive Lounge for drinks etc. This was no exception and we were whisked up to the 35th floor into a very nice room.

Robyn had bookings at the spa but I had cancelled my bridge climb after a very nasty close-call earlier in the week when I pinched a nerve in my back. I spent a day in bed and had limited mobility but I wasn't bold enough to think that I was going to climb the Harbour Bridge. So off I went for a swim and a sauna and a read while Robyn went pampering.

Saturday evening we met Michael and Coral for dinner. I met Michael in 1969 when I first went to sea on the P&O Oronsay and manage to actually catch up with him about once every 5 years or so. <http://www.pnc.com.au/~byceme/oronsay/oronsay.htm>

At this point I should explain that we try to catch up with family and friends whenever we travel and when in Sydney we always call Sandra [Robyn's sister] to see if she's free. Sandra and Ken live [an hour or so] north of Sydney so it is a bit of a hike for them.

So, on Sunday morning we grabbed the biggest table in the restaurant for breakfast. Sandra, Ken and Rachelle [recently graduated, dancing daughter, if you know of any jobs give me a call] came down. I'd also been busy and had contacted Chris and Ling who joined us also. Again, I've known Chris for over 20 years and we catch up all over Australia, last time in Adelaide when we were both in town on business.

Coincidentally the only time this group had ever met previously was when we sailed on the Norwegian Wind and we similarly breakfasted at the Westin.

http://www.westin.com.au/s_index.html

Breakfast was actually very good [yes, I was surprised] and if you are ever in Sydney we recommend it. Although I confess that I couldn't manage the child proof safety top on the yoghurt and had to ask the incredibly young waitress to help me out.

Sunday afternoon we headed off to the ship ..

I tell everyone that is about to cruise for the first time that the worst experience they will ever have is on Day 1, and it is the boarding process. On this day, it took us 20 minutes from curb to cabin – how good was that ?



We're milling around the cabin, no baggage yet, when the room stewardess 'Mojca' introduces herself and says 'you must be Mr Fox the journalist'. Such a simple statement .. with oh so much hidden leverage.

** Background info .. I asked my travel agent to request some introductions on-board, from which I would draft my article / assignment. I was basically knocked back, but obviously my credentials made it on the passenger manifest.

What does it mean when you're a journalist on-board ? .. it means you get all sorts of goodies. Canapés every evening, fresh fruit, invitations to special disembarkation lounge, Captains cocktail party, the Cruise Director calling up to arrange an interview and a particularly motivated stateroom service.

** Consequence .. I have already contacted my travel agent in Florida asking for on-board introductions on the Grand Princess. This could be one of the best 'perks and lurks' I've come across in ages.

Back to the Cruise ..

The itinerary was a classic Pacific Cruise.. Sydney – 2 days at sea – Noumea, Mystery Island – Vila - Wala Island – 3 days at sea – Sydney.

Boy, was it a healthy cruise

- Sailing was delayed because we had to medivac a passenger off the ship.
- As we reached the Heads [entrance to Sydney harbour, 45 mins from quay] we were advised that we would turn around and re-enter the harbour to allow a second passenger to be medivac.
- Day 1 at sea, at about lunch time, the Captain announced that we would be changing direction and heading back to the northern NSW coast to allow a helicopter medivac.
- Day 9 we were advised that we would be arriving early into Sydney to facilitate a medivac.
- In addition there were numerous people that popped up during the cruise wearing casts and slings and propelling wheel chairs.
- One very unfortunate incident happened to a crew member and I'm trying to track down the girl involved, because we think it was our assistant waiter. She was burned badly when the flaming pudding was dropped on her.

After the helicopter things got a bit quieter and we settled down to some serious enjoyment of the good things in life. Special mention here to our table companions and drinking buddies and occasional dance partners. Ginny and Rabbit, Roy1 and Anne and Roy2 and Gwyn. Robyn believes that we are blessed when it comes to meeting people because we meet such nice folk when we travel and we certainly did this time.

For those of you that have never cruised the Pacific [excluding New Zealand here] the islands are very simple.

Noumea: is a remnant of the French Colony, and whilst there were some very nice shops and sights, the overall appearance is tired and worn.

Activity: we booked 2 tours in Noumea and one was cancelled. We did however spend an hour on a jet ski. Exhilarating, heart pumping, frightening, to say the least and something I really want to do again. It's not a race Robyn screamed into my ear at one stage [she screamed into my ear a lot actually] – If that's the case, why am I coming second says I ?



Mystery Island: is uninhabited. It's not the real name but the other name isn't anywhere near as romantic so we'll stick with Mystery. The locals paddle across from the 'big' island and set up the market, do some singing, and take people on a sail etc. An enormous amount of work has been done here to make the island interesting and safe [pathways etc.] and as basic as it was [NO bar] I liked it.

Vila: is the capital of Vanuatu. It's greatest claim to fame is probably that it has very good duty free. The people are friendly. The streets are crowded and noisy. They use the smallest cars in the world as taxis. And it was hot, hot, hot. Ginny and Rabbit went 'cultural' and enjoyed it enormously, apart from some of the wallies that go along on these things.

Activity: we booked a jet boat tour which was cancelled. Went ashore and found the jet boat man but because the ship had cancelled the tour he had stripped down his motor. Not my day.

Wala: is similar to Mystery Island but it is inhabited and it is more commercial. But again the Island works hard at making the whole experience interesting for the tourists. Commerce operates on the principle of 'donations'. Watch the band – make a donation. Hear the children sing – make a donation. Visit the house and see how they live – make a donation. Look at the turtles in a bucket – make a donation. See the pig tied up – make a donation, but no one did. Some things you just don't want to pay to see.

Eat, Drink and be Merry ..

Of course there were plenty of the aforementioned activities. In cohorts with Ginny and the Rabbit we saw off 8 bottles of bubbly on Christmas Day, leading me to conclude that it was either non-alcoholic, or we were simply pacing ourselves very well.

We certainly slept very well that night.



The Ship

The ship is very nice and the word 'elegant' is particularly fitting [see Pacific Princess: Tale of 2 Ships] however it struck me one day that nobody was ever on deck performing maintenance, polishing, cleaning, painting. And you get used to seeing this when you're having your morning constitution, or lying around, and I wondered how long she was going to look nice if nobody looked after her. Time will tell.

And before you know it you're home again ..

The return journey was painless .. because we'd arrived so early at the quay we were disembarking by 08.15 and of course made it to the airport with a couple of hours 'reading time' in hand.

Fact Sheets, Christmas Cruise 2005

Fact Sheet 1, Passenger breakdown;

Australians	85%	554
New Zealand	8%	55
United kingdom	5%	38
American		6
Canadian		2
Belgium		1
Lebanon		1
Total		657

Fact Sheet 2, Crew breakdown;

Phillipines	40%	143
India incl Adaman	10%	37
Great Britain	7.5%	27
Romania	6.5%	24
Thailand	5.5%	20
Italy	3.5%	14
Canada	3.5%	14
Australia	3.5%	13
Bulgaria	3.5%	12
South Africa	3.5%	10
Others – 17 Nationalities	13%	45
Total – 27 Nationlities	100.00%	359

Fact Sheet 3, Itinerary;

Sydney	18 December 2005
@ sea	
@ sea	
Noumea	21 December 2005
Mystery Island, Vanuatu	22 December 2005
Pot Vila, Vanuatu	23 December 2005
Wala, Vanuatu	24 December 2005
@ sea	
@ sea	
@ sea	
Sydney	28 December 2005

Fact Sheet 4, Distance Summary;

Sydney to Noumea	1045 nautical miles
Noumea to Mystery island	198 nautical miles
Mystery Island to Port Vila	172 nautical miles
Port Vila to Wala	132 nautical miles
Wala to Sydney	1444 nautical miles

Fact Sheet 5, Ship Statistics;

Pacific Princess	Operated by P&O princess Cruises
Cruising speed	20 knots
Gross Tonnage	30277 tonnes
Length	180.45 metres
Width (at wings)	28.3 metres
Bow thrusters	2 x 750 kw each
Propellers	2 x 4 blades
Rudders	2 x 19.4m ² each
Stabilisers	2 x 9.9m ² each

Fact Sheet 6, C.R.U.I.S.E.;

Princess service credo .. Courtesy, Respect, Unfailing In Service Excellence