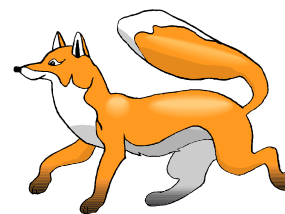


Cruise Report



Ship:	Yachts of Seabourn, Seabourn Legend
Dates:	21 st March 2011 to 3 rd April 2011
Itinerary:	Transatlantic Crossing – stop at Madeira [briefly]
Duration:	13 nights
Add-ons:	2 days [or so] in Ft Lauderdale pre cruise, 5 days in Alicante post cruise

Introduction ..

This was such a BIG holiday that I'm writing two cruise reports. The first for the Oasis of the Seas has already been drafted. This report covers the second cruise onboard the Seabourn Legend plus the pre and post cruise activities.

* I note that the new web site has dropped 'Yachts' and just goes by the name of Seabourn now. In which case we may never cruise on the Yachts of Seabourn again ?

Sit back and enjoy and I'll see if I can convey to you this wonderful experience.

Ft Lauderdale Second Time

We didn't plan to do very much on Day 1, having just disembarked from the Oasis. However, when we checked into our suite, one of the questions I had raised on our last stay was answered. What was behind that door ? **It was a washing machine / dryer.**

So Robyn did the thing that comes natural to her, grabbed the travel detergent, emptied the bags of laundry and set about washing everything that needed it. By the time room service delivered a couple of burgers [and beers] that evening we had washed / dried and ironed our way through all our clothes. Ready to start all over again.

* We got a phone call from Bobi, after some neat detective work on her part to track us down, and it was the first time that we'd actually spoken since 2005 when we were on the Infinity

Day 2 was the adventure. John the concierge had arranged a hire car for us – and not just a hire car – a Lincoln Town Car, complete with portable sat nav, and we were heading to Jupiter to see the Florida Marlins play the NY Mets at spring training. [Marlins won].

Now up front let me say that I wasn't keen on driving on the wrong side of the road, where it's ok sometimes to drive through a red light [explain that to me ?], in a car that's as long as a lifeboat but Robyn didn't seem to mind the idea. Ergo she drove – I navigated.

* Hot Tip .. Don't play with the buttons on the arm rest if you don't know what they do. I happened to turn on the seat heater and had a very hot bum until I reversed it. Thought it was a bit warm for the temperature.

Ship Transfer

We booked the transfer from the hotel again and much to our surprise we had the same driver who picked us up from the Oasis [which wasn't the shuttle]. So we had 2 almost identical trips at 2 distinctly different prices – mine is not to reason why, as they say. Just go with the flow.

We arrived at the Seabourn terminal and that was the last time the 2 cruises really had anything in common.

Boarding

We were met at the curb by a Seabourn representative who escorted us from the car to the security screening, assisting us at all stages. Having despatched our luggage in the hands of others we were guided to the waiting area where cold towels were delivered, to cool our fevered brows as we waited for boarding to begin.

At the advertised time boarding began in a very orderly and relaxed manner.

We didn't know who these staff were at the time, however it turned out to be the dining staff who you quickly get to know very well. They seem to shadow you everywhere you go; today they were assisting with hand luggage, making sure that you were comfortable whilst you waited for the onboard processing. Picture, sea pass, credit account etc. now to your suite.

Now this took a lot longer than it did on the Oasis the week before but as they were serving champagne and canapés nobody really seemed to mind.

* We heard one lady comment that if it took this long to board a Seabourn ship, just imagine how long it would take to board the Oasis – lady we could tell you but you wouldn't believe us.

The Legend

In trying to decide how to review the experience of being on board the Legend, I think that I might also recount a few stories to help me to convey the essence of the trip. Anyway, let's give it a go and see how we get along.

Seabourn Difference

You know that Seabourn is different long before you arrive on board. The document package arrives in its elegant shoe box, with your individually printed booklet, the leather luggage tags, pre printed for your suite. And you are asked to select the beverages for your in-suite bar set up. Naturally there will be Champagne upon arrival.

These are the tantalizing tit bits before you board and then it begins in earnest.

- ✓ All the staff seem to know who we are and that's because we're posted on the notice board for all to see. The wait staff and bar staff in particular competes to see who knows the most names. The winner gets a day off in port, so it's a coveted prize.
 - The names are always Mt & Mrs Fox, unlike Windsurf which went one step further and used first names. I preferred this formality, but was still surprised when a staff member I didn't know said "Hello Mr Fox".
 - ✓ It is all inclusive which means to most that it includes tips and alcohol, and yes it does, but it means so much more. It means that you are one of a select group of people who can ask for anything and [most days] ye shall receive.
 - After a few days at sea I happened to ask if they ever served pizza – You want Pizza ? – 20 minutes later we had fresh pizza made to order.
 - Other special orders we heard about included steak tartare for lunch – caviar and vodka – steak Dianne
 - ✓ When is a buffet not a buffet – when you're on Seabourn. Although it's set up like a buffet you don't have to go and help yourself or carry plates around. The staff are happy to do all of this for you and to take orders for a'la minute items.
 - Yvonne and Mike [drinking and dancing buddies] spent many a happy breakfast ordering fried bread – just so thick – just so brown – with the eggs on top.
 - You take a seat Mrs Fox and someone will bring your soup over !
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- ✓ It was nice that people didn't over indulge to excess when it came to alcohol. 'Free' or 'no charge' usually sets the crowd on a frenzy but not this crowd. Mostly, they drank what and when they wanted and I don't recall seeing anyone falling down drunk in the 2 weeks.
 - I only drink white wine with meals and I prefer Sauvignon Blanc. If perchance I was served something I didn't care for it was immediately replaced. Generally I was only offered SV.
 - Contrary to this there was one Scottish couple who seemed to think they became incredibly entertaining when they had consumed a few. Thankfully they never emerged much before lunch time and always dined together,
 - ✓ On the first night we were invited to dine with Sam the Assistant Cruise Director [table of 10] which we graciously accepted and in doing so met more people than we had in the whole of the previous week
 - We subsequently dined with Joe the magician and Bronwyn his wife, Austin the band leader and Joanna the lead singer, the Bridge teacher and his wife, Charl the future cruise consultant and Anton the Hotel Manager. All of which was very pleasant.
 - Those passengers travelling as singles received nightly invitations and they must have felt very special.
 - ✓ Simply arriving at the dining room was an experience, especially for the Ladies, because they were escorted to the table on the arm of one of the [hand picked for their looks ?] Waiters.
 - Occasionally we men struck lucky but sadly there were less girls in the dining room to escort us.
 - ✓ Sitting around on deck also held some pleasant surprises; a choice of sun tan lotions if you were looking a bit pinkish, how about a 10 minute massage, a chilled fruit kebab or champagne sorbet ?
 - We would retire to the Sky bar after breakfast and read / watch the world go by. The first couple of days I was asked if I would like anything and took a black coffee, thereafter I automatically received the coffee every day.
 - I also tried a Newcastle Brown Ale one day and had to countermand the order to keep bringing them. I don't understand how it became so fashionable ?
 - ✓ I don't know how many galley tours I've been on in my life [excluding when I worked on ships] but this was the first time that the Chef offered everyone a glass of champagne and a caviar canapé as an accompaniment.
 - The Market Lunch [which seems to be a lot of work just to serve lunch] featured bottles of Aquavit and Vodka in gargantuan ice blocks [frozen in buckets presumably] to be served as shots as you waited to enter the galley. No time to be bored here.
 - ✓ It's great to get unpacked and to get everything into it's new home and the walk in robe in the cabin was fantastic but what about the suitcases ?
 - Normally I'm just like you, lift the bed and push them under. This time Tammy told us she'd look after them – so we left them to her and they disappeared underneath. On the day we had to repack she pulled them out for us, without being asked.
 - ✓ They are a loyal bunch of cruisers when it comes to Seabourn
 - 75% were previous cruisers with Seabourn and some of them had crossed the Atlantic 12-14 times already
 - 66% either booked their next cruise or left an open deposit before they got off [me included]
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- ✓ I like a dance at night and I thought it was nice to see the cruise director and his assistants dancing with the guests
 - I'm not convinced that the 'electric slide' has any place on board a cruise ship dance floor, in a rolling sea, even if I do look good [or not].

The Ship

This is not a new ship and it shows in the design features; steps at doorways, lack of bar fridge space, use of obscure storage areas on deck [bring out extra chairs every day for trivia and then put them away], really small elevators [supposedly fit 4 or 6 / read 2 or 3]. Having said that the ship is old, she is in immaculate condition in most areas.

Exceptions;

- ✓ Marble coffee tables in the cabin, ours was cracked and marked and we heard similar comments from others.
- ✓ The telephone system – didn't matter who you called, you got reception. Which was okay because they handled all requests anyway, but a little odd.
- ✓ Plumbing, we had a problem and we heard of others but that's not uncommon. I was impressed when an actual plumber turned up at 10 pm to rectify the problem

The Suite

A nice big room, plenty of space for the queen sized bed, a sitting area [sofa and 2 armchairs], a coffee table which becomes a dining table, a walk in wardrobe with 3 separate rails for his and her clothes, and a bathroom complete with full sized bath.

Dinner anyone ?

Throughout the ship the dining was very good. We never made it to Restaurant 2 [which is the buffet reinvented for evening service] but we did share our patronage between the buffet and the restaurant, breakfast, lunch and dinner. And of course we attended the deck extravaganzas – dining under the stars, and crepes at night. Whilst the weather could have been kinder there was no lack of effort on behalf of the crew and they were spectacular food showings.

Food was served 'american style' by the way, don't forget that Charlie Palmer is the celebrity chef for Seabourn, and tended to be smallish servings. Of course you can order as much as you want, as often as you want.

* It's a bit of a mystery where my additional 5-6 kgs came from really.

Cruising is full of rituals, one of my favourites being the pre-dinner dinks and on Seabourn you are offered individual canapé plates with your choice of drink. To stave off the hunger before you dine.

Madeira Sail Away

Stopping only once limits the number of *sail-aways* you can have, however the departure from Madeira was spectacular.

Imagine 5 serving points – Caviar – Sushi – Smoked Salmon – Palma Ham – and of course Champagne. The band Sea Breeze performing live and they were very good.

The weather played it's part and was kind to us – blue skies, sunshine and calm seas.

Other Guests

Generally a very nice bunch of people from all around the world, complete with odds and sods and eccentrics. We were the only Aussies which made us somewhat unique and a magnet for the South African waiters who continually kept me up to date with World Cup Cricket scores and the demise of Ricky Pontin [with glee].

The Staff

Interestingly the dining and bar staff on board is mostly first world [Europeans] and only work for 4 months on and 2 months off, which seems significantly better than the industry average. Officers do slightly better and manage 10 weeks on and 10 weeks off.

The real exception is the very good Philippine band who worked 9 months on followed by a break of a couple of months. I reckon that's a long time to stay healthy and to perform every day.

Viva Espana ..

The day finally comes when you have to get off the ship and head off somewhere. In our case we had a couple of flights ahead of us. Malaga to Madrid followed by Madrid to Alicante, where we were to meet up with Val & Jim [sister and husband] and Verd & Jill [brother in law and fiancé].

The Iberian flights were both short, both late, pretty uncomfortable and it was a bit of a 'flat day' .. of course I always get post cruise blues so it was probably a healthy dose of that too.

We struggled with the mobile phone connections .. using an Australian phone we dialled the UK to get someone on holiday in Spain .. but it worked and we were collected soon after from the airport and whisked to Villa Aston.

The next 5 days were great. Spent with people you like but don't see very often and whose company you enjoy, we cruised around the Costa Blanco like a bunch of tourists.

We also met some lovely people, friends of Verd & Gill who we broke bread with [dahl bread at least] and Tracey who sent me a recipe for dumplings [long story], thanks.

Leaving on a Jet Plane

And yes, before you know it, it is time to head on home. We had been travelling for a little over 4 weeks but now the mind was beginning to return to more mundane things, like earning a living and it was time to go.

The day before we were to fly we received notice that the water would be turned off for repairs from midnight to two pm, accordingly we left home at 7.30 am – minus a shower.

The Iberian flight was late again but we had plenty of time, and the man behind the desk successfully checked our luggage all the way to Perth. Muchos Gracios.

* When we arrived in Madrid we booked into a private flight lounge and had a shower, it was the least I could do for anybody that was going to be seated next to me for the next day or so.

The Emirates flights were a bit of a disappointment, given their standing in the top 3 airlines of the world and the seats seemed to be very narrow. I could forgive them for initially seating Robyn and I in separate rows, rectified by the lady next to Robyn swapping with me.

The entertainment system was better than Singapore Airlines however.

Conclusions and Thoughts

The best cruise we have ever taken and hopefully not the last cruise we take with Seabourn. I left a deposit after all so my intent is there.

I'm thinking that it will be interesting to sample the larger ships, the same luxurious service in an even more luxurious setting, but before that you have to get over the dilemma ..

Do I love Seabourn in total or do I just love the smaller sisters ?
