

## DAY 11 – Boarding the Ship

Our shuttle to the ship was at noon so we used the morning to stock up on booze for the cruise. Now, we all know that cruise lines do not allow you to bring alcohol on board as they want you to spend your money on their overpriced hooch, so this has to be a covert operation!

We picked up two bottles of scotch and 2 bottles of rum at a liquor store downtown Sydney (4 x 750 bottles with discount was \$120.00 EGAD!! But still way cheaper than the ship will charge per tot). We then also picked up a few bottles of sprite and coke, dumped 90% out and poured the liquor in. Now in an x-ray it just looks as if we are bringing some sodas on board.

While at the liquor store we met a couple from Hawaii who were also going on the cruise. At dinner that evening we were surprised to see they were allocated the same table! What a coincidence with more than 2000 passengers.

It's an old Bruce and Wendy trick and worked yet again as our contraband went undetected and was delivered to our cabin in the suitcase!! YAY!



The line to check in to the ship was dreadfully long so we stopped at a local bar for a couple beers first and some fish and chips. The harbor is right downtown and the ship was moored directly opposite the Sydney opera house.

Once on board we went exploring this Royal Caribbean Ship,

“Radiance of the Seas”.

So for those regular cruisers out there (and you know who you are) you might find this part of the travelogue a little boring as I describe the ship.

It is the largest ship we have been on and is 1000 feet long with over 2000 passengers and more than 900 crew members. We are on the 9<sup>th</sup> deck with a balcony cabin. The ship has a lot of entertainment areas including a casino, full size movie theater seating 200 people, and stage theater seating over 1000 people. There are 7 restaurants in addition to the main dining room, several snack bars including a hot dog stand and countless bars to drink at.

Three pools, 2 outdoor and 1 indoor and loads of hot tubs. Mini-golf course and rock climbing wall as well as soccer and basketball fields, a jogging track and full gym.



Our cabin looking out to the balcony



Looking in from the balcony.



Outside pool with 220 feet wide TV screen



Mini golf course on very top floor of ship



Rock climbing wall and pool slide



Indoor pool in a tropical African theme

## DAY 12 and 13 – At Sea

Days at sea for us are very relaxed. We sleep in, go to breakfast, take a long walk on the ship, play some scrabble in the games room, read books and watch movies. We are trying to eat healthy as the average person puts over 10 lbs on any given cruise and we are on this ship for 14 days.

More than half the passengers on board are Australian (over 1100 of them), there are about 300 Americans on board, and the rest are Brits and Europeans (they read out the nationalities and numbers on the first night at the welcome party).

Last night was formal night and we dressed up totally forgetting to take pictures - its not often you see me in a suit! The food is excellent and while some people don't like the formality of the main dining room and eat from the buffet instead, we like the formal dining experience – 3 courses of fine cuisine. You are seat at tables of 10, but 2 couples at our table never showed so there are just 6 of us. They allocate the tables based on nationality (all couples at our table are American), age (all couples at table in 40s and 50s) room type (all couples have balcony rooms) and families keeping just couples together and families with kids separate. Smart, this way people with similar lifestyles are seated together.

Prices are not overly outrageous; beers run \$5.50 and a bottle of wine starts at \$25.00. Internet is up there at 65 cents a minute, but we bought a 500 minute package which dropped the price to 30 cents a minute, so we got about ½ hour a day for the 2 weeks for \$150.00 total. Cigarettes on board are \$6.00.

However they do try to sell you everything they can. For instance they water down the juice at breakfast and then have a guy selling fresh squeezed orange juice for \$4.40! Sodas are pricey at \$2.50 but you can buy unlimited soda card for \$110 for the 2 weeks. We don't – if we need mixers for our drinks in the room they do have free lemonade. Coffee and tea is free.

4 of the fancy restaurants require a dining fee if you want to eat there, ranging from \$3 at the Mexican restaurant to \$30/person at the fancy steakhouse. To me it seems pointless eating there because the food in the free restaurants is fabulous already.

There are planned activities on board, but many of them are sales pitches. We attended a weight loss seminar which started off interesting but turned out to be a sales pitch for their weight loss product which costs \$100/month. Wendy wanted to go to the spa but their prices are so high she just couldn't see herself paying almost \$200 for a massage.

The shows in the main theatre are excellent, but very different to "American" cruises I have done before. On Caribbean cruises we have been on the shows tend to be extravaganzas like Vegas type shows with show girls, laser light shows and big sound, over the top stuff, very impressive.

The Australian shows are more demure – last night was a very talented musician and singer with a full band, but no dancing girls or fancy lighting. Tonight is a hypnotist! That is just SOOOOOOOOOOOOOO eighties!

Someone did tell me they felt Australia was behind the USA by 20 years, this does seem to bear it out. Another example is that all hotels in Australia charge for internet – we were paying \$25/day! In the US they stopped charging for internet 10-15 years ago.

Just for the guys - some other interesting things I noticed about Aussie women – there are more blonds per square mile in Sydney than I have seen anywhere else. Aussie girls also wear the shortest shirts and mini-dresses I have EVER seen, but are more conservative with their tops – not a lot of boobs exposed!

Chatting with some Aussies about the high prices in Sydney, they explained that it was not expensive to them – dollar for dollar, they earn WAY more than Americans do. Shop assistants make \$22/hour and a school teacher's starting salary is \$60,000. So they can afford those prices, it is because the AUS\$ is very strong against US\$ and Euro right now. Once upon a time a few years ago it was 2 to 1 which would have made Australia seem very reasonably priced to us unlike now that the two currencies have almost exactly the same value.

I have been quite surprised as to how chilly it has been, given the fact that is it is the middle of summer here. Both in Sydney as well as our two days on board the highs have been in the 60s, a little chilly for swimming in the outside pool, so the inside one has been packed, so we have avoided it. I really thought Sydney would be warmer than that in summer.

Enough for now, tomorrow we arrive in New Zealand and are cruising up the sounds starting with Milford Sound and Doubtful Sound, so we should have loads more pictures.