

Heidi's Trip to Europe – 2011

Day 1 (Monday, 5th September):

I met Barb at Sydney airport. I arrived just after 5.30pm and Barb was already there. We checked in but didn't get to choose our seats as we were part of a group booking. We got aisle seats that we were happy with. My seat was 70H.

We had some dinner and then went through customs. We got to our gate (61) and waited for our flight. While we waited, we met some of the other tour group members (we all had name tags that are blue in colour with a blue Travelrite lanyard).

The A380 that that was our first flight on our way to Rome was spacious (I thought). We went from Sydney to Dubai. We had to change planes here so we had 3 hours to wait for our next flight to Rome. The flight was full but as the plane was spacious you didn't really feel crowded at all.

The food on the Sydney to Dubai flight was alright. For dinner I had the Chicken and for breakfast I had the Frittata.

Day 2 (Tuesday, 6th September):

The Flight from Dubai to Rome was also full. This time we had an A777. The A380 was definitely better than the A777. The seats were more crowded as well. Barb and I got exit row seats. I found that I did not like these seats. Good leg room but people would congregate around here. The flight was about 5.5 hours. My seat number was 22k. There was a mix up with our meals. Barb got a "Bland" Meal and I got a 'Fruit Platter'. We both ate it and Barb gave me her desert! We picked our luggage at baggage claim and headed to customs, where we walked straight through. By the time we all met outside the arrivals area about a half hour passed. The group of us headed to the 2 buses (around 100 of us on the 2UE Seven Wonders of the Ancient World escorted tour) and headed into Rome and our hotels. We would have been at the hotel a little bit after 4pm. Our hotel was the "Mediterraneo Hotel". About an hour or so later we were checked into our rooms. Barb and I had a quick shower with a change of clothes and we headed out to see Rome and have dinner.

Day 3 (Wednesday, 7th September):

After waking up at about 4am Rome time, we got ready for our first day in Rome. The buffet breakfast was excellent. After breakfast we had another quick walk around. Then at 8.45 we met the group for our morning tour of Rome. We saw the Coliseum, the Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, the Spanish Steps, and the Trevi Fountain. The crowds were the most I have ever seen as a tourist!

After the tour we went on a tour of the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel. This was AMAZING. If you can only do one thing in Rome, then a visit to the Vatican is a must. I was able to sneak a photo. Others were doing it even though there were signs saying no photography. We got back to our hotel about 6.20, so we changed and headed out to dinner with some of the group at 7pm. We had another early night.



Me at the Trevi Fountain
(it was so crowded)



The Coliseum



The Most famous artwork of all

Day 4 (Thursday, 8th September):

Day 1 of the cruise - Thursday we headed to our cruise Ship, Royal Caribbean Internationals' "Mariner of The Seas".

After a buffet breakfast, we finished packing so that we could leave our luggage outside our rooms for them to be picked up and take to the ship.

We had a few hours left to explore Rome. We walked a bit and as we were walking, we saw the "Basilica S. Maria Degli Angeli E. Dei Martiri", so we decided to go in and have a look. It was beautiful. We must have spent 45 or so minutes there.

We left for the ship at about 11.30am for our 1pm boarding. It took about 90 minutes to get from our hotel in Rome to the port of Civitavecchia, where the ship departed from.

Once we got on the ship, we dumped our stuff (our carry-on items) in our room. Our cabin number was 8578 and we were on Deck 8. It was like a maze trying to find it! We headed to the buffet at the "Windjammer Cafe" where we had lunch. There was so much food to choose from! After lunch we had another look around (will take days to explore the ship it's that large). Then we had the emergency drill where we had to go to our assigned emergency stations (the lifeboats) and we had our name and cabin number marked off. This took about 30 minutes at least. It was hot and I was sweating like there was no tomorrow. We finally were able to go back into the ship, so we headed back to our cabins to check if our luggage had arrived. One of mine had and within 10 minutes, Maria (our cabin attendant) delivered the rest.

We then had a quick shower and changed into fresh clothes for dinner. Our dining room was "Rhapsody in Blue".

For a 'pre-dinner' drink I had a "Baileys Shiver."

Dinner was at 6.30pm and we finished about 8pm, and headed for the Welcome show in the Savoy Theatre, which finished at about an hour later. We then went back to our cabin and went to bed.

Day 5 (Friday, 9th September):

Day 2 of the cruise - This morning we walked on the jogging track on deck 12, had a great buffet breakfast (way better than the hotel in Rome). The buffet breakfast each day was in the Windjammer Café. We also had our buffet lunch in this diner. We then left the ship at our first port of call, which was Messina, Sicily where we went to the town of Taormina. Taormina overlooks Mt Ena. If we had arrived here yesterday, we would have been covered in volcanic Ash! The sky was clear and in the distance we could see Mt Ena spew smoke. I got some great photos. We also saw the Greek theatre as well as the Terrace Piazza IX April and the Torre dell'orologio. We had free time here to eat, shop or whatever we wanted to do that was there. Barb and I looked around, bought a few things and had a cool drink in a cafe. It was VERY hot so we really didn't feel like anything to eat – just drink.

We arrived back at the ship at about 4.45pm and quickly got ready for our 2UE “Welcome Cocktail Party” that was held in the Lotus Lounge at 5.30. My pre-dinner drink this time was a “Bellini.” After the cocktail party, we headed to our dinner seating. And after this was the nightly show at 9pm. It was ok, I wasn't too impressed. It was the ship's Full time Entertainment crew, “The Royal Caribbean Singers and Dancers”. That went for an hour and we went back to our cabin, to pick up the netbook so we could access a wifi hotspot on the ship on deck 6. The internet here is SLOW and the wifi is only in certain areas of the ship. Apparently next year when the ship gets upgraded, wifi will be in all rooms.

After we finished checking emails (15 minutes at \$8.00), we went back to our cabin. And we updated our travel diaries and headed to bed.



Mt Ena in the distance



The view from Taormina

Day 6 (Saturday, 10th September):

Day 3 of the cruise - Today was a day at sea. We were up by 6am and saw a lovely sunrise from our balcony. Barb and I did a walk around the jogging track for 30 minutes, then we hopped into the pool for about 10 minutes before going back to our cabin for a shower and to get ready for the day. Another buffet breakfast and then a lazy day. We checked out the shops in the Promenade and after we shopped we headed to another buffet lunch. After lunch we headed to the library for about 30 minutes for reading and craft time. We also went to one of the travel talks – this one on Athens our next days' port of call. The Crew person who gave the talk was quite entertaining! His English wasn't very good either. And it went on and on. Basically it was a travel talk with ads. He kept telling us where we could go to get the good bargains when shopping in Athens! It was supposed to go for 45 minutes. An hour later he was still talking and that's when we left.

Next on the agenda was Trivia with the 2 Murrays before going back to our cabin to get ready for Formal night. Pre-dinner drinks with the 2 Murrays and then we headed to dinner at 6.30pm. Tonight's show was Tracey Fields – a Celine Dion impersonator. She was quite good. For my pre-dinner drink I had a “Frozen Mudslide”.

Day 7 (Sunday, 11th September):

Day 4 of the cruise - Yesterday, after our usual shower and buffet breakfast, we left the ship for our tour of Athens. As we would be doing lots of walking, we decided that we wouldn't do our walk around the jogging track first thing that morning.

The Temperature was HOT – 32 degrees. We saw the Acropolis, the changing of the Guard and we also saw a train station that had relics in glass cases on display. We visited the newly built Acropolis Museum and Plaka (shopping area). We got back to the ship at about 4pm. Pre dinner drinks at 5.30pm with dinner at 6.30. Today's pre-dinner drink was a "Baileys Chocolate Café". The show was a juggler. His name was Mark Angelo. He was quite good! And funny.



Me in Athens

I was very surprised that there was no mention of the September 11 Anniversary on the ship. I thought there would have been some sort of service or even a minute of silence. But nothing at all.

Day 8 (Monday, 12th September):

Day 5 of the cruise - Today we arrived in Kusadasi (Turkey). We visited Mary's House and the Ancient City. We spent a few hours here. Today's weather was another hot one with 34 degree temps.

We got back to the ship at about 2pm. We had a late lunch. The show for this night was an Aussie – Bernard Walz. He was good. He was advertised on the ship as "Australia's Award Winning Entertainer" but I had never heard of him. The others in our group hadn't either.

The drink of the day was "Summer Breeze" (and we got to keep the glass). It was a fantastic drink!

Day 9 (Tuesday, 13th September):

Day 6 of the cruise - Today we arrived in Rhodes, Greece. I really liked Rhodes. We went on a walking tour of the Old City. Saw the streets of the Knights of the Order of St John and the Palace of the Knights. We supported the Greek economy in a big way with retail therapy. I don't think I have seen so many jewellery shops in one place.

Weather was a beautiful 29 degrees. Sunny skies too.

Tonight's show was a show called "Ice Under the Big Top" and it was held in the Ice Rink. The guest star was a skater names "Emmanuelle Balmori". The show was fantastic and looking back to my trip I have to say it was the best show on the ship.

Tonight's pre-diner drink was a "B52."

Day 10 (Wednesday, 14th September):

Day 7 of the cruise - Today was a Day at Sea. Before Breakfast Barb did 10 laps of the deck walking and I did 30 minutes. After this we cooled off in the pool. Then we went back to our cabin, showered and changed ready for breakfast and the day ahead.

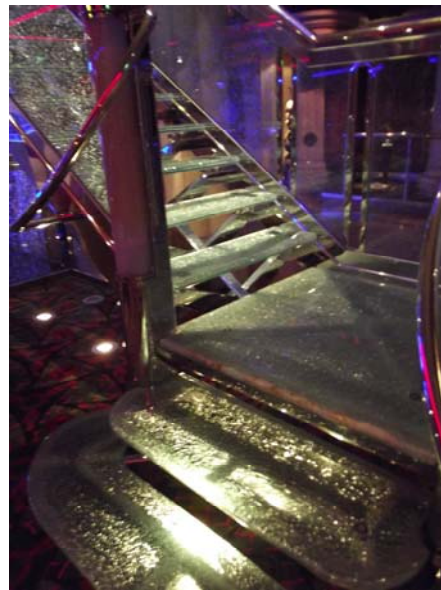
I had a spa treatment called "Ionthermie" in the morning. I would loose between 1 and 8 inches! I was measured before and after the treatment. I supposedly "lost" 16 cms in total from 4 areas around my stomach. Then they tried to sell me US\$450 worth of products to use as well as make appointments for further treatments. If I knew that I would stick to the treatment I may have purchased it, but I have spent dollars before and I don't stick to it. Then the money is wasted.

We played 2UE bingo with the 2 Murrays in the afternoon. We did not win! We also watched the 'Sexiest Man' contest on the pool deck on deck 11. The rest of the day was spent reading, snoozing and eating.

It was our second formal night. We had our group photo taken on the stairs in the Main dining room.

The show this time was a lady named "Judy Kolba". She was so funny. I would love to see her again! I am sure she is on You Tube! I just haven't gotten around to looking for her!

After the show, we went back to our cabin for a rest (and toilet stop) then we headed to the Abba music Hour in the Dragon's Lair. This is one of the night clubs/discos on board the Mariner. It had a glass staircase – looks excellent – if I ever had a two story house, this is the staircase I would love to have!



Glass staircase in the Dragon's Lair

Day 11 (Thursday, 15th September):

Day 8 of the cruise - Thursday was our first day in Istanbul and we arrived in port at 6.30am. We left the ship at 7am for our trip to Gallipoli. It was a 5 hour bus ride there. We spent 3 hours at Anzac Cove, Lone Pine and the New Zealand memorial. It was very moving. We had a minutes silence after Murray Olds said a few words before introducing Brian Stannard who recited the Ode. (which I did not know there even was!)

Then a 5 hour trip back to the ship. You should have seen the traffic. 16 lanes in one direction merging into 4 lanes after we had gotten through tollgates. You would think Sydney is a dream compared to this! We didn't get back to the ship till 9.15pm. We played Trivia on the bus on the way back and we finally won something on the last game! (Woo hoo!). By the time we got back to the ship, we headed straight to the Windjammer Café for a late dinner, then we went to our cabin. We were buggered!



Murray Olds (L), Me (Mid) and Murray Wilton (R)

Above is a picture of me with the 2 Murrays. Murray Olds is a New Zealander and he is holding up the New Zealand flag. Murray Wilton is an Australian and he is holding up the Aussie flag!

Day 12 (Friday, 16th September):

Day 9 of the cruise - Friday was our second day in Istanbul as we were in port overnight. We visited St Sophia, Topkapi Palace, The Blue Mosque and only had an hour at The Grand Bazaar. We left Istanbul at 7pm. As we were in the dining room and our table was near a window, we could see our ship sail off into the sunset! It was very nice! Today's pre-dinner drink was a "Vanilla White Russian." We didn't go to the show this time – instead we went to the Country Music Hour in the Dragon's Lair. I had my second drink of the night, which was a "B52"

Day 13 (Saturday, 17th September):

Day 10 of the cruise - We had another day at sea. Barb walked 15 laps of the deck before breakfast, where as I thought 'Stuff this' I'm on holiday! And didn't walk! We watched the Belly flop Contest and Ice Carving demonstration. We did an hour or so of craft work (me – Cross stitch and Barb, quilting).

It was our 3rd formal night. My pre-dinner drink was the daily special called "Blue Hawaiian". Another really nice cocktail, which I hope to make in the future. I got my 2nd glass so I have a set! Tonight I splurged and had a second cocktail – another "Frozen Mudslide".

The show this time was "Centerstage" with The Royal Caribbean Singers and Dancers. This time it was better than the Welcome show!

Day 14 (Sunday, 18th September):

Day 11 of the cruise - Today was my birthday. I got cards from Barb and the girls (including the Spa treatment I had had on Wednesday) and a card from the 2 Murrays. I also had 'Happy Birthday' sung to me twice - once by the travelrite group and again by the waiters at dinner with a candle in my dessert. I had a great birthday – it's getting a habit to be away from home on my birthday!

Today was supposed to be a Sea day but when we boarded, our itinerary had changed – so we didn't get to Pompeii (Naples) on the 19th, we would stop at Malta instead.

We docked in the afternoon. Did a 4 hour tour (we visited the Grand Masters Palace and St Johns Cathedral) then sailed at around 9pm. As we ate dinner we watched all the lights come on and then we went to deck 12 to see us sailing off into the night. It was a spectacular night sailing. The weather was fantastic. Very much reminded me of Sydney, being warm and humid, where as our other ports were warm but not at all humid. The shops in Malta were mostly closed (being a Sunday) but there were fabulous shops open at the port. We must have browsed for at least an hour and I could have spent a lot more money! I got some gorgeous Christmas decorations.

The cocktails today were 2 "Blue Hawaiians" and a "Frozen Mudslide". It was my birthday! Today's show was a group called "Emperors of Soul". They sang Motown. They were ok but I have definitely seen better groups do Motown. The Aussie group Human Nature for one! They are that good that they have been on in Las Vegas for the last 3 years!

Day 15 (Monday, 19th September):

Day 12 of the cruise - It's our last sea day. Again another lazy day reading, eating and generally having a last look around the ship. In the afternoon, our group met in one of the conference rooms on Deck 2 for the 2 Murrays to talk about their life in the media. After the talk we went back to our cabin to start packing and to get ready for our final pre-dinner drinks and dinner.

My drink this time was another "Baileys Chocolate Café".

We missed the show that was scheduled. We did some last minute shopping on the Royal Promenade and finished packing our bags (Our bags had to be out in front of our cabin between 7 and 11 this night.)

Day 16 (Tuesday, 20th September):

Today was the day we left the ship. We disembarked as a group around 9am. It went very smoothly and we were headed to Orvieto, Umbria on 2 buses less than an hour later. We visited a winery – Decugnano Dei Barbi. This area is famous for its white wines. We had some taste testing and a lovely 3 course lunch.



Barb pointing at her name sake – Decugnano Dei Barbi.

Later that afternoon we were headed to Rome Airport and our flight home.

Our Rome-Dubai flight was at 10pm and flight time was approx. 5 and a half hours. Before we checked in, Barb repacked some of her bags as she was worried that she would be overweight. I had a portable luggage scale and I got it out. We were weighing out bags and then a few in the group also weight their bags with it! We finally checked in. My 2 bags weighed 31 kilos. We had a maximum of 30 kilos (Emirates is very generous with their luggage rules). When I left Australia, I checked 1 bag in and it weighed approximately 19 kilos. I originally used my small purple wheelie suitcase as carry-on. This time my seat was 27G.

It was another full crowded flight.

Day 17 (Wednesday, 21st September):

We arrived at Dubai Airport approximately 6am Dubai time. We waited 4 hours or so and we were off on our next flight home. Of course the flight was full again! This time my seat was 78F. I am always hoping that I will have a seat or 2 to myself but not this time. Breakfast and lunch was served on this flight and I had the herb omelette for brekky and the mutton kadhahi for lunch.

Day 18 (Thursday, 22nd September):

We arrived in Sydney at 6am. Got our bags ok and I kissed Barb goodbye and headed to the station to get a train home. I was tired but got back to Rooty Hill fine. I rang Mike to meet me at the station so he could help me with my bags. It was easier then I expected.

Overall I loved my holiday with Barb. I was ready to come home by about day 10. I think it was too much togetherness - Not with Barb but the rest of the group. I hate meeting new people as it is and whenever we walked anywhere, we saw someone in the group and then we stopped to chat! I also started getting 'tired' of seeing all that historical stuff. I was thinking "Another museum?" I don't know if I will ever go back. If the opportunity to go came up again at a good price, I would go again.

Over the 12 days on the ship, we saw a number of ships in the ports we visited – Celebrity Solstice, Grandeur of the Seas, Mein Schiff 1, Adventure of the Seas, Pullmantur, Costa Atlantica and The Sovereign. We also saw one of the Queens – the Queen Victoria.

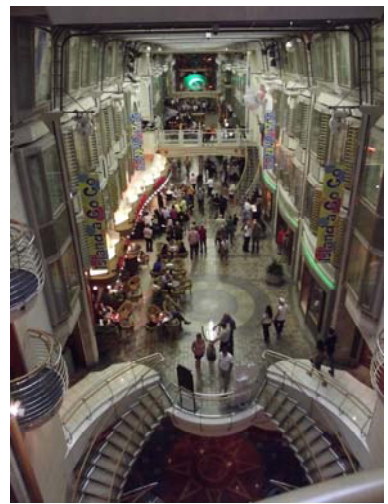
Royal Caribbean's The Mariner of the Seas was fantastic. I wouldn't hesitate going on another cruise. I knew I would love that part. I had been on a cruise something like 20 years ago when I was on the Fairstar which was a P&O ship. I went by myself and loved it then. For years I have been keeping my 'eye' on cruises just waiting for the opportunity to go on another one. I'm glad I said yes to Barb!



Chandelier in the dining room



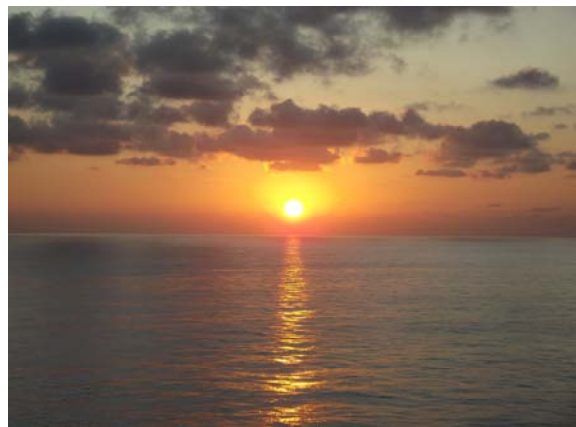
Our Cabin



The Royal Promenade



Our Balcony



A sunset from our balcony