

## A Cruise in the Queen Victoria

The *Queen Victoria* joined the Cunard fleet in December 2007 and is the latest of the “*Queen’s*” - until October this year when the new *Queen Elizabeth* joins the fleet.



Within 1½ hours of being picked up by our friendly taxi driver, *Alex*, on 3 May, Beryl and I were on our stateroom (cabin) balcony overlooking Southampton having a glass of complimentary champagne from Cunard. This is a far better way to travel than all the hassle that one gets at the airports these days.

After emergency drills we sailed under the Blue Ensign, as the Master, Captain *Chris Wells*, is a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Naval Reserve. We went to dinner and met our waiters from India, *Kishop* and *Ritesh*, and our wine steward, *Unni*, also from India. We also met the two couples with whom we were to share our evening meals for the next 11 nights – *Angela & Chris* from Bushey in Hertfordshire and *Lyn & Paul* from Telford in Shropshire with whom we got on very well.

Our stewardess, *Nataliya* came from Odessa in the Ukraine, and looked after our cabin very efficiently.

There were 1,927 passengers, including 83 single ladies and 9 single men! (1,667 from the UK, 103 from Germany, 63 from America, with 22 other nationalities being represented) and 968 crew (530 from the Philippines, 83 from India, 80 from the UK, with 47 other nationalities) – as the Captain said, his ship’s company is a United Nations from 50 countries.

The cruise took us to Vigo, Lisbon, Tenerife, Gran Canaria, La Palma and Madeira. The weather was warm and pleasant in the Canaries and in Madeira. We had three formal evenings for the ladies to wear their gowns which coincided with a

Black & White Ball, a Masquerade Ball and a Victoriana Ball; and attended two cocktail parties meeting the Captain and his officers.



The entertainment was very good and varied, including an excellent comedian, *John Evans*. The Royal Court Theatre is based on a Victorian music hall theatre and includes 16 boxes. We had an interesting tour backstage and saw how little space the 12 *Royal Cunard Singers & Dancers* have for changing and make-up – before they perform any show in the ship’s theatre they spend 6 weeks in London learning their routines followed by another 6 weeks perfecting it onboard – only then do they perform to the passengers. My favourite was their performance of a superb “*River Dance*” during a “*Celtic Heartbeat*” show.

Afternoon tea was taken with background music from a harpist, pianist and a string quartet.

There is always plenty to do onboard. All tastes are catered for and you can never be bored. If you want to relax you can do so and just watch the sea go by.

The *Queen Victoria* is highly manoeuvrable and does not require tugs when berthing alongside in port. She has twin pods (electric motors) that are attached to the propellers, three bow thrusters and two stabilising fins. The propellers pull the ship through the water rather than the conventional pushing.

When in port we went ashore and explored the local town. In Madeira, we took a taxi and the driver, *Pascoal*, took us to the market in Funchal with its splendid display of flowers, fruit and fish,

and then drove us along the coast to a small fishing village, Câmara De Lobos, where there was a very pretty fisherman's chapel. This village inspired the late Sir Winston Churchill to paint its lovely surroundings. *Pascoal* also told us about the devastating floods the island had experienced in February – most of the capital Funchal had remained impassable for 5-days.

We celebrated Ascension Day on 13 May with an Interdenominational Service and Holy Communion. A Minister on the cruise had asked the Captain if it could be celebrated but only 23 passengers attended in the theatre which can seat around a thousand people – a sign of the times?

We didn't entirely miss the general election on the 6<sup>th</sup> as the ship received BBC and Sky so we could view the results on the TV in our cabin if we so desired.

On the last day of the cruise, we completed the usual questionnaire and to our surprise our name was drawn out of the hat, the prize being for Cunard to pay for our wine and bar bills during the voyage – had we known we would have had champagne every day!

The cruise was over all too quickly and we were soon alongside in Southampton on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Disembarking was just as efficient as embarking and *Alex* was there waiting to speed us back home again with no hassle.

This is our third cruise in a Cunard "*Queen*" and each ship has been superb with a 5-star service. One more "*Queen*" to sail in, the new *Queen Elizabeth*, and then its retirement!

***Colin Carter***

