

1994 EUROPE CRUISE

My daughter, Scotti Zekman kept a journal, which I have used, heavily in the following account.

Can you imagine how flattered I was when Jim Smith, Scotti's significant other, invited me to join them on a British Isles, France and Lisbon cruise.

September 7-8, 1994. Flew to London where I was met by Royal Cruise Lines to be transferred to the ship at Tilbury. It was too early to go to the ship, which wasn't ready for us, so they took us instead to Hever Castle the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, wife of Henry V111. Here we had lunch and were allowed to explore the castle and grounds over a leisurely 2 hours. I loved the castle. It was the sort of homey castle you could live in. The gardens were also magnificent. Having seen all I cared for, I climbed back on the bus and tried to sleep off the jet lag.

The Crown Odyssey is a lovely ship. Up on the top deck there is a circular lounge observation room that looks like a crown. The ship is only a year or two old and is not too big as some of the other cruise ships are. Scotti and Jim are already in London so I awaited their arrival with eagerness. At last they arrived and we sat up in the Crown Room to watch us go down the Thames.

September 9. A day at sea. The North Sea was giving us a hard ride but I did get to play a little bridge. That night was the Captain's welcome party but many were too seasick to enjoy it.

September 10. Holyhead, Wales. We took a bus into town to visit the St. Gybi Church and castle walls. Had a lovely leek soup for lunch at a Welsh pub where the waitresses were all dressed in traditional clothes.

In the afternoon we took a bus tour to Caernafon Castle on the mainland. En route we crossed two bridges over the Strait of Menos that overlooked a small island with a church and another island with a very isolated home. This castle is where Prince Charles was invested as Prince of Wales twenty-five years ago. It was pointed out he has only been back two or three times since! We stopped at the town with the longest name in the world, Llanfairpwllgwyngllgogerychwyndrobwilllantysiliogogogogh. There we visited a woolen mill where everyone shopped. They say that there are 12,000,000 odd inhabitants of Wales and that eight million are people and the other four million are sheep.

September 11. Greenock, Scotland. It is rainy and chilly but we took a bus tour to Edinburgh via Glasgow. It's about a two-hour drive. We stopped for tea and cookie at Hewes Hawk Inn on the Firth of Forth where Robert Louis Stevenson wrote 'Kidnapped'. We drove the Royal Mile from the castle to the palace but could only view the palace from Carlton Hill. This also provided an overview of Edinburgh with the Firth of Forth in the distance. They showed us the 'Greyfriar's Bobby' pub and the statue of the dog that lived on his master's grave for nine years. Disney did a movie about this dog. The dog would come to the pub at a certain time, where the pub keeper would feed it. Then he would return to the grave.

We had a wonderful salmon lunch at the Caledonia Hotel with a painted garden room. I found a lovely cashmere sweater with a sailboat on it for Scotti. Then we headed for the castle.

Edinburgh Castle is magnificent, although some on the Tour were disappointed because there was no shopping. It was raining but we saw the tiny room where James 1 of England (James V1 of Scotland). Then we walked around the large courtyard in the middle of the castle, while Jim climbed to the parapets.

Scotti wasn't feeling well and went to see the ship's doctor when we got back to the ship.

September 12. Dublin. I had toured Ireland in 1979, so felt no need to tour Dublin. My best friend, Pete Toland and her husband had retired to County Mayo and she took the train to Dublin to see me. There had been a bombing at the train station. We had lunch on board the ship and

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then went into Dublin to do some shopping. It is wonderful to have a friend where you feel like you have just seen her yesterday. We are as congenial as we were in high school. I was only sorry that she did not get to meet Scotti and Jim who were off on a tour."

After dinner there was a variety show with Irish songs and stories.

September 13. Cobv, Ireland. Our morning tour took us through the countryside to Cork where we drove streets that were once canals so that trade ships could sail directly to the stores to unload their wares. The organ has its pipes in the floor to avoid covering the stained-glass windows. The ceiling was beautifully painted. Over 14,000 people are buried in the yard, many buried surreptitiously at night for to be buried there meant you would go to heaven. The organist was present and demonstrated his magnificent instrument for us.

Then we headed to Blarney Castle to kiss the Blarney Stone. 102 narrow stairs lead up to the roof and we waited in line to lie on our back and kiss the stone. It is quite a feat for you must lie on your back and hang outside the walls. I don't know why I did it since I kissed the stone before!

The view from the roof is spectacular and you can see why Ireland is called the 'Emerald Isle.' We walked through the Rock Close, gardens and forest, where there was a 'witch's oven', low cut tunnels leading through boulders. We did a little shopping in the nearby shops.

The show after dinner was a comedian hypnotist who pulled about a dozen people out of the audience. He hypnotized them so that they did a variety of things including reacting to various types of music. One man thought he was a ballerina, another tap-danced! A pair of glasses made all the women in the audience appear to be nude. One man became a drill sergeant and walked through the audience telling people they needed a haircut! One woman thought the man next to her was Harrison Ford and fondled him on the stage, running her hands through his hair. He loved it! We all laughed hysterically. No one remembered anything when the hypnotist woke them up.

September 14. Southampton. It's finally a little sunny. Scotti and Jim are part of a church group and the group had a tour to Salisbury and Stonehenge. I took a tour to Winchester and enjoyed seeing the magnificent cathedral and town.

Tonight was 'pastel' night and many of the men wore pink coats and ties. The entertainment was a Broadway Review.

September 15. Le Havre, France. The ship docked before 6:00 AM so about 400 people could take a tour to Paris for the day. Scotti, Jim and I headed to the town of Rouen for a half-day tour. Jim almost missed the bus because he was sending a FAX. We left with umbrellas in hand on a cold day. Our guide, Sylvie, was excellent. She was a little pixie of a woman, but very knowledgeable and detail-oriented. She even described the different license tags; each department has a two-digit number.

Rouen is a medieval town dominated by a beautiful cathedral. It was extensively bombed during World War 11, but has been extensively rebuilt. It has high gothic arches, flying buttresses and a few stain glass windows.

We walked the cobblestone streets and stood outside the government house decorated with gargoyles, which are actually waterspouts. Sylvie pointed out the 12th and 13th century houses, which are half-timbered. One is now a McDonalds! We walked under the clock archway, where the clock only has one hand to tell 'approximate' time. The moon and the sun change each day at noon and are designated by mythological creatures. Mercury is Wednesday and so forth.

We then visited the Joan of Arc Church, built in the 1970s for the original church was destroyed during World War 11. Fortunately they had removed the stained glass windows and stored them

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in caves in southern France. There is controversy over the new church since it is quite modern. The interior looks like the inside of a ship and the stained glass windows have been worked into a wall of glass. Symbolically, the shape looks like a wave, with scales representing fish! There is a large cross in the courtyard at the place where Joan of Arc was burned, as well as a serene sculpture of her.

A market adjoins the cathedral and we bought spicy olives for a snack. Our trip back to the ship took us down the Seine River through quaint towns and there were chalk cliffs where rooms and garages had been carved out of the hillside.

We were dropped off in town and managed to fight the cold wind to the Centre de Ville, and past the parks to Le Grand Large Restaurant where Scotti and Jim had been the previous year. We ordered the fruits de mer for three and they brought out an enormous platter of succulent delicacies. We couldn't eat it all but we had a lot of fun trying. There were cockles by the dozen, crab, baby shrimp, oysters and so forth. A puppy played at our feet while we ate.

On the beach we picked up some smooth stone shingles. Monet had his start here, painting singles and selling them in the local shops! We browsed in the shops and finally were so exhausted and cold we persuaded Jim to help us catch a cab back to the ship.

September 16. A day at sea. There was finally some sunshine! We went to a lecture on creativity and listened or dozed through a talk by the cruise director on next year's cruises. I played bridge and won again! We found escargot on the dinner menu. After supper there was a juggler and a singer.

September 17. Bordeaux, France. We docked early in Pauillac, which is part way up the river to Bordeaux. I had rented a car in Bordeaux for the day and our first problem was how to get there! It was about an hour away. We got lucky when they found a car for us in Pauillac. We followed one of the tour buses out of town and with our trusty driver, Jim; we traveled to Bordeaux admiring the chateaux along the way. There was field after field of luscious grapes just waiting to be picked!

We stopped in Bordeaux to pick up a map and visited the Theater, which was formerly the Opera House. It has a spectacular painted ceiling and boxes, and a lovely white marble sweeping staircase.

We had tea on the mall and then headed for St. Emilion. I had been here with Ev about 30 years ago and remembered it as a picturesque walled town. It is a medieval town with narrow winding cobblestone streets, wine shops with lot of wine to taste, and fresh macaroons (my favorite). We had a lovely lunch jut off the main square next to the underground cathedral carved out of the limestone cliff. We toured the cathedral with a French-speaking guide, which was a challenge, and visited the catacombs and the chamber, which St. Emilion carved about 800 AD. The church hasn't been used since 1990 when they had to erect large caissons in the nave of the church to hold up the spire.

We had only one minor wrong turn on the way back to the ship. Tonight was Greek night. Our waiter stuffed us with Greek delicacies until we waddled out of the dining room. The crew show was lots of fun with Greek dancing and singing. The Captain even sang for us, and then we got up and danced around the lounge,

September 18. Another day at sea. I played some bridge and then everyone got dressed up for the Captain's party. It was nice to see people in formal dress. The menu was caviar, lobster and the traditional baked Alaska parade by the waiters.

September 19. Jim's birthday. We arrived at Lisbon, sailing up the spectacular channel of the Tagus River. We went under a suspension bridge and tied up next to the Belem Tower. Under

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the bridge it sounded like a swarm of bees from the cars going over the bridge. Lisbon was bright and sunny, with red-tiled roof buildings. It is very Mediterranean looking! I have finally made it back! In 1954, with my grandmother, we came to Europe by ship. We were in Lisbon's harbor for some hours but they wouldn't let us off the ship. My grandmother was furious!

We had a champagne lunch to celebrate Jim's birthday and then took a bus tour out into the countryside to Sintra where we toured the Paco de Ville or Royal Palace. There were beautiful tile rooms, painted ceilings and Portuguese furniture. The Moorish influence is everywhere with the painted tiles. The palace has two enormous chimneys over the kitchens. We then drove out to the Cabo de Roca, the westernmost part of Europe and looked over the steep cliffs. We stopped for tea before driving past many old forts, beaches and villas.

Back on the ship, we packed and quickly headed back out. Our taxi took us to a seafood restaurant along the shore where we feasted on bouillabaisse washed down with a Portuguese wine.

Back on board there was a Portuguese folkloric show.

September 20. We disembarked and went to my hotel. I am taking a post-cruise package, while Scotti and Jim are heading out tonight by train to Madrid.

We hired a taxi for the morning and enjoyed seeing the narrow streets (barely wide enough for the taxi to pass). We went to the castle overlooking the city, which has been converted into a lovely park. There is an old cathedral on top of the old section of Lisbon where we climbed part way up the tower to see their museum of relics and vestments of the priests. We bought some of the lovely Portuguese pottery and visited the old Cathedral on the waterfront with its lovely cloisters. We had to climb the Belem tower and then wearily went back to my hotel for a rest.

Then we headed out on foot, this time exploring shops. We found a funicular, which took us to the top of one of the hills, then walked all the way down again to the shopping district where we had a coke and rested our feet. A local street caricaturist did an awful cartoon of me as Miss Lisbon 1944. Then we took the 'elevator' back up one of the hills to see a cathedral, which collapsed in the 1755 earthquake but was never rebuilt.

Thoroughly worn out, we caught a cab back to the hotel. We went out for dinner and found a small restaurant with a large fish tank in the window. In the window was one of the largest langouste lobsters I have ever seen. We were going to order it until we found it would cost \$200! We split two smaller ones, which were delicious.

September 21. I had a lovely tour, which took me to another castle, high above Sintra where we were led down narrow little hallways. Then they took us to Obidos, a marvelous walled city an hour or so north of Lisbon.

September 22. And then it was time to go home.