

# Routon's **ROUSING** Reports

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**Yes,** Our two week “free” cruise on the Seabourn Pride – one of the three “Yachts of Seabourn” – was luxurious as advertised and certainly the most posh of our cruises to date. If you recall, we earned our free cruise by sailing for more than 140 days on the Seabourn Sun. They were supposed to give us a cabin comparable to the one we had on the Sun, but they couldn't. None of the crew would give up their quarters!

So they gave us their smallest suite. A spacious living room, a king sized bedroom, walk-in closet, and a spacious and completely marble lined bath. And the décor! Tastefully draped and curtained, comfortable couches and chairs, a coffee table that adjusted to make a cozy table for two for in suite dining, the usual TV and VCR, and a bar stocked to meet my specific requests. (With open bars all over the ship, I couldn't figure why I needed to drink in my suite. Since I didn't want them to think I was ungrateful so, after due consideration, I decided to bring the booze home.)

And the food!!!! Simply put, on an overall and consistent basis, it was the best I've seen on land or sea. For breakfast, we had fruit – fresh raspberries, strawberries, boysenberries, mango, and most anything you could desire followed by “what would you like”? If you could think of it, they'd fix it for you. We deliberately tried to avoid lunch – but with little success. Things sounded and looked so good. So, maybe just a little wouldn't hurt??? And at tea time? Only a cup of coffee, right? Well but, the little sandwiches were inviting and look at the *real whipped cream* to go with the *hot chocolate fudge cake*. So... we'll skip the hor d'oeuvres at cocktail time, and that was easy. Well, except for the decanter of cashews. We'll make up for that by only having two courses for dinner – but the prawn or lobster cocktail (LARGE size) doesn't count. The only good news was that the desserts were weak – but having said that, there was one crème brulee that was a perfect 10



*Seabourn Pride in St. Petersburg*

on the Routon Olympic Grading Scale. And I cannot forget the deck parties when leaving port. Caviar in every way possible was not a problem as I cannot stand the stuff. But then out would come the serving bowls full of lobster and giant prawns with lots of cocktail sauce!! “Restraint” was my middle name! But, fortunately no one knew my middle name? The good news? I've just managed to lose the eleven pounds I gained – yes, eleven pounds in two weeks.

One great thing the small size made possible was a docking in and departure from inside London itself – the Pride tied up to HMS Belfast, directly across from the Tower of London. Access to the ship was by boat from the Tower dock to the Belfast and then walking the deck on the Belfast herself to the gangway. The most unusual docking I've ever seen. But what a location! We had a full audience when we sailed; both the tourists around the Tower and the people who had to stop when they raised the Tower Bridge so we could pass. With the flags and banners fluttering against a bright blue London sky, with history passing on both sides, with the crowd waving and the horn blowing, it was quite a send off – great fun.

We did spend a few days in London before embarking: three days of theatre, sightseeing, and visits with two old friends.

It was Helen's first visit to London so I'll let her tell you about it in “Helen's Corner”, but if you are headed for London, I can definitely recommend the “Big Bus” tour organization for overall sight seeing and the Marriott operated Renaissance Chancery Court Hotel. (Pricey, but very good — and a good way to use your Marriott points.)

**THE** port for this cruise for everyone on board was, of course, St. Petersburg. While most Baltic cruises give you a day and a half or maybe two, we had three days, not enough but we made the most of it. Since I knew our time would be limited, I had arranged for a private guide and driver. (Interestingly, less expensive than using the ship tours and much, much better.) We were met at the dock each morning and went til we dropped each day. We saw five palaces, two museums, four churches, and the ballet, plus touring the city and countryside as we went from place to place. And all that despite the fact that I injured my knee and had to quit early on day three!

St. Petersburg was founded in 1704 by Tsar Peter the Great. Old Pete took the marshy land from the Finns to get a good warm water port and decided to build a capital to rival those of Western Europe. Over the next 150 years, the Tsars did just that. The palaces inside and outside

the city are magnificent, reminiscent of Versailles in France. The canals needed to drain the city caused St. Petersburg to be called the "Venice of the North". St. Petersburg became the cultural and political capital of Tsarist Russia. This is also where the communist revolution started in 1917 and the city's decline began as much of the culture was lost and the political capital was moved to Moscow. The low point of St. Petersburg history was reached when the Germans in World War II surrounded the city and held it under siege for 900 days. Millions died, mostly due to starvation and exposure. With one exception, the summer palaces outside the city were captured, misused, and then almost destroyed by fire. Most interesting to me, after World War II, the communists started the very, very costly restoration of these palaces and the glory of the very Tsars they proclaimed to hate and had overthrown! Strange, but I'm glad they did. They are magnificent even though there is still much to be restored.



*Catherine's Palace — right half only*

My favorite is Catherine's Palace, which is one among many in Tsarskoye Selo, the "Tsar's Village". Originally started in 1717 and finished a hundred years later, it is massive; you have to turn your head from one side clear to the other to see the whole expanse of blue and white Russian baroque architecture – 330 yards wide, more than the length of three American football fields! The ground floor was for the servants and work areas. The upper floor flows from the grand ballroom – and it is grand – through room after

room, each with a theme or name. The Chinese dining room décor features walls covered with embroidered silk, the green dining room walls are also silk and all in green, the amber room features walls covered in sheets of amber, and all rooms are in the Russian baroque style with gold leaf on every column and frame.

A similar palace on the other side of the city is the Great Palace of Peterhof. The palace is about the same size as Catherine's but is even more impressive for its gardens. Acres and acres of gardens stretch out above and below the Palace itself. From the Palace there is a great cascade and canal that flows all the way to the Baltic some three quarters of a mile away. All counted, there are 185 fountains constantly flowing during the daylight hours. Fountains that are magnificent and fountains for fun like the Fountain of Ducks with "duckikins" (they can't be manikins) circling the center fountain as they spew water from their bills. And there is the "Tree Fountain"

made for children (of all ages). When you try to run under the tree, it suddenly sprays water and maybe you get wet. (We didn't try it but others did – and were mostly wet!) Even the stables had their manicured gardens and fountains. The gardens of Peterhof are worth a day by themselves.

The only palace not destroyed in the World War II siege is the Chinese Palace which was inside the siege lines. This palace, called "Chinese" because of the oriental motif, is large and beautifully

appointed, but it is not massive and its gardens are mostly natural, not manicured. I found it interesting for two reasons. First, it demonstrates the obscene wealth of royalty in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The palace was built and maintained only for day use. It was a place where Catherine would bring no more than 16 friends for a "day out"; a whole palace for a picnic site so to speak. The second thing that makes the Chinese Palace unique is that everything is original, no extensive restoration has been done. The walls are still covered with the 18<sup>th</sup> century lush, padded, embroidered silk, the furniture including a billiard table were made to match the theme, and even the floors of inlaid hardwoods are works of art. Small by Tsarist standards but every bit a palace.

Moving from palaces to cathedrals and churches, due to 70 years of misuse and abuse by the communists, the number "worth seeing" is small. But there is one that is a fully restored gem, not just "ABC" (English) or "ADC" (American), but one not to be missed. (Note: "ABC" for the widely traveled English means "another bloody cathedral" – you can figure out the American "ADC" from that.) This gem is The Church of the Resurrection, better known by the name, "Church of the Spilled Blood". The blood that was spilled was of Alexander II, the Tsar who freed the serfs (in effect slaves). The church was built by Tsar Alexander III on the very spot where his father was assassinated in 1881.

The church is in traditional Russian Orthodox style. The outside is much like the famous St. Basil's in Moscow's Red Square with onion domes that soar high overhead in gold leaf or bright colors. A grand sight, another "ooh and ah". But wait for the inside!! The restoration of the interior, underway when I was last in St. Petersburg in 1996, is done and is magnificent. Columns to the sky, walls, domes, vaulted ceilings all completely, totally covered with icons and religious scenes in minute detail. You are surrounded. Wonderful oil paintings? **NO!** Every icon, every scene is done in mosaic, tiny pieces of ceramic tile carefully placed to make a precise picture – millions of little bits and pieces to accomplish every detail. And there you stand – inside, in the very middle of a massive work of art.

Of course, the art of the Hermitage, a



*Church of the Spilled Blood in St. Petersburg*

public museum since 1852, is world famous. And we did visit the Hermitage, a second visit for me. With a reported 2.7 million items ranging from the Scythian culture of 7<sup>th</sup> century BC through the European masters, the Hermitage is not a place where you can see it all. We did visit all four of the palaces that make up the Hermitage but concentrated on the paintings and the architecture. Frankly, the architecture is interesting but less impressive after visiting the restored palaces, the crowds of people are distracting, and the massive size of the collections forces the visitor with only a little time to flit as best he can. The net result is you can say you've been there. But did you really see? If seeing the Hermitage is your goal, plan and do your research ahead and then expect to spend days there.

On the other hand, the Russian Museum can be seen in a half a day or so. Rated second in all Russia only to the Hermitage, this museum is one of my favorites. It houses only Russian art; in fact, almost all of the Russian artists' works that were in the Hermitage are now in the Russian Museum. While the museum is known for its icons from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, my favorites are the large paintings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A bit of history: until Peter the Great in the early 1700s, Russian painters were not allowed to paint anything but religious icons. Once released from this decree, they first painted portraits primarily – after all, that's where the money was. Gradually they spread their wings, but in even the very large paintings, this portraiture background shows with the detail in the faces – you can feel the

anguish, the glee, the fear, the joy, and the pathos. It makes the painting live. If – when – you go to St. Petersburg, don't miss it.

Unfortunately, my injured knee (cause unknown) forced us to cut short our outings in the middle of our third day. As a result, we didn't get to the big, Russian style shopping center, Gostiny Dvor. I'm sure all of you know how not shopping saddened me. Actually, I did want to show Helen the place; everything from hardware and food to furs in a conglomeration of shops and stalls. Very different.

After less than a day to rest my knee, we were in Stockholm. This was my first trip arriving by ship and it was a surprise. Hours before we were due in port, we started weaving our way through seemingly thousands of islands ranging in size from rock outcroppings to wooded "villages" of summer homes. I was particularly taken by one little island that had one house only but where the garden was enclosed by a pole fence. Why a fence? The shoreline was only feet away. (Must be a wife somewhere in this picture.)

In Stockholm we were greeted by our friend, Kerstin Johansson, a truly delightful lady and a friend for over 20 years since we met on my first trip to Europe. Since it was Helen's first visit, three items were on our agenda: a visit to the Wasa in its museum, shopping (the knee was a little better) in "Old Stockholm", and some time to visit with Kerstin and daughter Birgitta. (Birgitta, as a student, was a summer visitor who stayed with our family in 1979.)

What is the Wasa (pronounced Vasa)? A ship that the Swedes stored on the bottom of the harbor for 333 years. It seems that in the 1620s Sweden was at war with Poland and the king ordered the building of more warships including a new, two gun deck style. And the Wasa was built with two gun decks and with more decoration than a Christmas tree. There were carvings and 700 sculptures and bright paintings on the upper hull – everything to try and impress the enemy and to bring the fear of the might of the Swedish king into his heart. It must have been magnificent. But there were a few problems in 1628 before and during the maiden voyage. The ship failed the stability test of 30 men running back and forth to see how she would heel. But the admiral

didn't want to anger the king with a delay so off she went. And she went about 200 yards before she caught a gust of wind, heeled, capsized, and sank. History records that the king with his troops in Poland was not pleased when he heard, "Funny thing happened in the harbor, Gustavus, ol' buddy..." So, they held a big inquiry. Like most government inquiries they finally decided no one person could be held responsible even though the king was looking for someone to hang. And so the Wasa sat on the bottom for 333 years until she was finally raised, no small feat, and the work to purge the timber of salt and acids began. A fascinating story and a first rate museum.

We arrived home from this trip about midnight on a Saturday, picked up Helen's grandson at the airport Sunday morning, had him with us Monday, spent Tuesday sightseeing in Boston, and left for Akron and Arkansas early Friday morning. Masochists? No, but probably not too bright. However, we had to be in Arkansas for the family brunch that kicked off David (#2 son) and Paula's week long wedding party.



*Ted Allen introduces Helen to a real country pub*

David has never been conventional and it seems he has met his match – and a very lovely match she is. Anyway, they

decided rather than a conventional wedding and reception, they wanted to have 25 – 30 close friends and family members (maybe some were both?) to gather, to party, to get to know each other, and to celebrate. The brunch was in their new home town of Rogers, but on the following day everyone migrated south to a very, very big lake near Hot Springs, Arkansas, where they had reserved a large houseboat, one that could sleep 14 people. The houseboat was moored to an island away from the world.

People came and went as their schedules required,

some slept on board and others ashore, but the days were spent visiting, eating, drinking, and going down the slide from the top deck, kersplash, into the lovely, warm water of the lake. Oh yes, everyone did get out of the water long enough to come ashore for the wedding ceremony on Wednesday. It was hectic but fun, and we did get to know Paula's family and vice versa much better than we could have in a conventional setting.

As we go to press, Paula and David not only have a new marriage but are working hard on their next adventure: a new, from the ground up, business. Paula has a degree and extensive experience in graphic design. With this as a base, they are opening a design center combined with a copy/printing facility. They will be able to design and print from the ordinary to 3D designed "mock ups" and will also deal in promotional products using Paula's own graphic designs. Peter (#3 son) has decided to join Paula and David in the business and in Arkansas as a jack of all trades. He'll keep the computers working, aid Paula with some of the graphic design, and join everyone in running machines, manning the counter, sweeping up, etc., etc. It's an exciting time for the whole Routon family, and it brings all three sons within a 6 hour drive of each other. Hopefully, I'll now be able to see more



*Paula thinks David's joke hilarious — but MY granddaughter is not impressed*

## *Helen's Corner*

Three days in London before our cruise for a quick view of the city and a brief rest. Looking back, I can tell you that rest was the last thing we had; instead, it was a whirlwind of activity.

We took a "Big Bus" tour (a double-decker) that was delightful. The buses stopped at all the landmarks. We got off to look and then boarded the next bus and moved on. We saw the Tower of London, a castle begun in the 11<sup>th</sup> century – impressive. It has multiple defensive walls surrounding the central "Keep" with its four towers reaching into the sky. (The Tower was an excellent place to get your head cut off in ages past, as I recall my history.) We did not go inside as we were pressed for time, but at the gate I posed for a picture with a Beefeater, beard, colorful regalia, and big! I felt like a dwarf! The Beefeaters are retired British military who live in the Tower. We also stopped at the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, very impressive and very well maintained. We were too early to go into Parliament (by a month) and five minutes too late for the Abbey. Next time!

As part of this tour we had a boat ride on the Thames. We saw the Tower Bridge, a beautiful bit of architecture, and a new London Bridge that is definitely not falling down now or anytime soon. One interesting site on the banks of the Thames is the "Eye of London". It is a giant Ferris wheel with cars that hold 25 people. It makes a full rotation every 30 minutes and you no doubt can get a great hawk-eyed view of the entire city when you reach the top. It was built to commemorate the new millenium. Again, next time.

Of course, London is noted for its theater district which surrounds the old Covent Gardens. This is a busy place with crowds of locals and tourists all day long and late into the night. The streets are narrow, cobblestone walkways with stalls, small shops, and sidewalk cafes everywhere. You could spend a whole day here just people-watching as it is so-o-o-interesting. People wait in line starting early in the day for scarce theater tickets. We were able to see *The Mikado* and *Les Miserables*, both wonderful performances and excellent seats. *The Mikado* was in

the Savoy Theater, built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for Gilbert & Sullivan performances. There was a fire about ten years ago, but the theater has been restored just as it was except using fire retardant materials. They even restored the "candle holder" footlights to maintain the 19<sup>th</sup> century image. The theater where we saw *Les Miserables* is over 100 years old and has no air conditioning. During intermission they opened all the windows to let some air circulate! I was comfortable though.

The Mandarin Oriental Hotel where we checked in for the cruise is just up the street from Harrods, and Jerry wanted to show me his favorite spot there. As we entered I saw all the colorful and beautiful, high-style, expensive merchandise but could not linger as Jerry dragged me right past to show me the "food court" of all things. What a sight! This is a super-duper gourmet super market like I have not seen before. It's massive. The displays were beautiful – works of art – with everything from candies and pastries to meats, cheeses, fish and poultry (like a Guinea fowl with feathers hanging from an overhead wire rack), and all kinds of fresh from the garden fruits and vegetables. There were specialty foods

from all over the world, and the clerks (pardon, I mean servers) wore formal uniforms like the stewards on the ship. I thought we had a fine gourmet market, West Point market, in Ohio – people come from 50 miles away, but that market would fit into a small alcove at Harrods. We did not have time to explore the rest of the huge department store, but I suspect even the bargain basement (if there is one) would be high-style compared with anything we have in Stratham.

We did find time to visit with my good friend Gwen who was an English war bride and lived in the United States back in the fifties and sixties. We were best of friends, but she moved back to England about 40 years ago. It was wonderful to see her again. We also visited with Ted Allen who I met on our honeymoon world cruise in 2000. He took us to a real English, country pub, a small and quaint little place with flower boxes outside and wooden floor and tables and chairs where the locals gather to have an ale, read the paper, and talk about the events of the day. I loved it; it was so "homey". The English are very kind and hospitable. I liked being there, loved London, and *next time!*



*As the cruise starts under Tower Bridge*

of all of them AND my granddaughter.

So what is in our future? After two full months of just being home – and it has felt very good – we will have to get away before the neighbors go into shock and the bill collectors find us. Helen will be off mid-November to help a friend from Akron with her annual migration to Florida. She'll help drive and then grab a few days with son Mark in Ft. Lauderdale. While she's off, I'll either make a visit to Arkansas and Tyler to see Elizabeth Grace (the *smartest and cutest* of all grandchildren) or head for California depending on when Peter schedules his move to Arkansas. Christmas time will see us in Texas with an intermediate stop in Atlanta.

With the family visits out of the way, guess what? This year, 2002, we were on the farewell cruise for the *ship*, the Seabourn Sun. In 2003 we will make the farewell world cruise for *us*. Yes, ONE (I swear just one) more world cruise. With the Seabourn Sun no more, we'll be back on the QE 2. We'll be rejoining not just the ship but many old cruising friends. It will be a wonderful way to start the year – the usual dining, dancing, partying, and seeing old friends on board and in some of the ports. We are looking forward to it very much and will plan to give you a report next year.

Again this year as the holiday grows close, Helen and I would like to take this opportunity to wish each and everyone of you a wonderful and spiritually renewing holiday season to be followed by a year abounding with good health, happiness, and joy. Our world is beset with serious problems. May a quiet but firm faith support each of us. And 'til next time, my usual and sincere prayer, may a kind and loving God walk with us and with each of you.

*Amen.*



*Painting in Russian Museum — Sign on stone says “All who pass here shall perish”*



*Helen meets a real Beefeater*