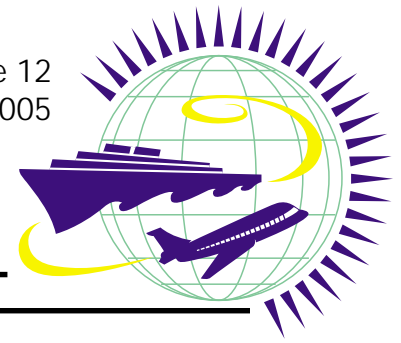


Routon's **ROUSING** Reports

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A Routon's Romantic Reservations Publication – not for resale

What a year so far! As I start this Report on the third of July, Helen has been home a mere four weeks so far this year and it's only been five weeks for me! We did get to Los Angeles in January as scheduled to spend a "too short" week catching up with only part of our friends there. (And my apologies to those we missed.) We did solve one of California's problems for that week. There had been flooding rains steadily coming down. We arrived and the clouds separated and stayed that way for the entire week. However, the locals undid our good deed within hours of our sailing on the QE 2.

It was a great week in LA except for one thing. With breakfast here, lunch there, and dinner somewhere else most every day, we started our cruise at the weight level we expected to have at the end of the cruise! Who ever heard of starting a cruise with a *diet*?

What were the highlights of this year's cruise? For me, it was snorkeling in the Red Sea (almost) and for Helen it was holding and feeding a tiger (a little one) in Thailand. Of course, there was our favorite city Hong Kong, the wonderful people of Japan, and friends on board and in Australia. The downer was the

change in the email system aboard the QE 2 that had us searching for an internet café in most ports. Although, that pursuit provided some interesting memories in itself. Just one word, avoid a computer keyboard in a French location – mostly the same except for about six critical keys (a, ., m, and s for example). I swear the French would screw up a bowling ball just so they could be different.

I almost tried my hand at parachute jumping in Auckland. Let me explain. When we arrived in Auckland, Aussie friends from Melbourne were waiting to join us on the QE 2. They suggested lunch in a wonderful, revolving restaurant near the top of a very tall television tower in Auckland. The tower also has controlled parachute jumping from the top, just above where we were having lunch. After lunch (with only one glass of wine), I was considering going back down via parachute until I found out they didn't pay *you* the two hundred New Zealand dollars to jump. No, you had to pay *them*! Not for me. I mean the elevator was free, but otherwise... (and if you believe this, well...)

For us, Sydney is synonymous with friends and opera. *Just* in the nick of time, Will and Heather (aka the ticket lady)

arrived from their home in Woollogong (yes, that is the name of a town) with the tickets for Tosca – third row, center in that superb opera house, magnificent as always. And after everybody had died (in Tosca, that is), we had our late supper at a sidewalk café overlooking the harbor and the city lights on a clear, shirt sleeve summer night. The next morning, a wiser head (me) cancelled the aquarium in favor of relaxed coffees before using the next set of stubs from the "ticket lady", this time for the Lion King. We finished with a great Italian dinner and **lots** of drinks and conversation. A wonderful visit as always because of our friends.

Sadly, an "era" ended when we arrived in Fremantle. The Aussie friends from Melbourne who had joined the ship in Auckland disembarked. Now, losing the company of two lovely people was sad, but to make it even worse, we lost access to their cabin. And what a **cabin**! They were on the Signal Deck – the top most deck, same deck as the prime suites and one deck above the captain! A massive cabin with the largest over-king sized bed I've ever seen, a bath with two large wash basins set in marble – in fact, the whole bath was in marble, a refrigerator with courtesy bottled water and everything but hard liquor (at that level one says courtesy, not free), and a veranda with a table and four chairs. All this with hor d'oeuvres every evening served by one of two stewards under the direction of Gordon, an honest to goodness, properly attired and very proper English butler. WOW! Our friends were great hosts and regularly invited us to wend our way through the "Grill Passengers Only" lounge (not referred to as a bar in those circles) to a little hidden elevator and up and away to find them 'high in the sky'. The stateroom easily handled the cocktail party they held for 16 of us, a party with a butler and two stewards all making sure no one's drink glass was empty. Now, *this* is the way to party! One of several memories is the sail-away from Adelaide

View of Marmaris, Turkey



with the four of us on the veranda raising our cold beers in salute to the two dozen plus boats seeing us off. It was great fun and we thank Bruce and Margaret for including us.

One of several changes in our itinerary was Subic Bay, in lieu of Manila. If the name rings a bell, it is certainly because this was a major US naval base until the Philippine government wanted too much for a lease renewal in 1992 and the US Navy said, “no thank you”. Per some English friends who were there in those Navy days, the town was Navy and much more Navy, some support personnel, and a “red light” district. Our friends say it has not changed much – except for the disappearance of the “red light” district – and what changes have been made have not done much to improve the town. It is too bad as the Filipino people there, like most places, are wonderful – very, very warm and hospitable – they deserve better. We walked and enjoyed a couple of San Miguel beers in a seaside café, but the event of the day was our time on the internet. The internet location we finally found was inside a duty free store in a hotel – lots of booze all around. The shopkeeper had to go to the bank to make a deposit. But being a typically kind and considerate Filipino, rather than make us sit and wait, he agreed to leave us locked in the store. And there I was with all that booze but no ice or club soda – that sums up my stay in Subic Bay!!!

Our Japanese stops in Nagasaki and Osaki turned out well – but **cold**. It was

Miss Nagasaki and friends



Golden Pavilion in Kyoto

Drum Concert up close



warmer than New Hampshire but not by much and our heavy coats, of course, were in NH. However, the warmth of the people helped greatly to offset the cold.

It started with me being selected to represent the male passengers for the official greeting ceremonies in Nagasaki. My part was small – a little bowing and smiling and pictures with Miss Nagasaki. But the drum ceremony following the bowing, gifts, etc., was really something. There were multiple drums of varying sizes played by a drum “orchestra” of six. They were playing as if from a written

score, precisely orchestrated and drummed with absolute precision. I have heard drums from Africa to Rio to Gene Krupa and I have never, ever enjoyed drums before this time. They were really good and very different.

Our first order of business after the ceremonies was to find an internet connection in Nagasaki. While I was getting some Yen from the purser on board, Helen found a map and located a listing of internet access places. Kinko's was number one and I spotted a number one on the map. Great. From our prior visit, I

knew how to get there, and it was within walking distance (and close to the donut shop we found last time). So, off we went.

When we got to the area on the map, no Kinko's in sight – and no donut shop either, not a good omen. We inquired in a local convenience store using the Japanese printed on the Kinko's ad in the map listing. The young man locked up his cash register and led us outside. He made us understand that we should go down the street we were on to the major street and turn right. Unfortunately, his English was very weak (but stronger than our Japanese) and he meant the *major* street, not the next signal.

After turning right and heading down the wrong main street for some time, we went into an office and asked for help. Again, no English, but the man pointed on the map to where we could find our quest, and guess what? My number one on the map was a red number 1 and the Kinko's code was a blue number 1. Damn! This gentleman not only interrupted his meeting show us where we should go on



Heian Jingu (Shinto) Shrine in Kyoto

the map but came outside twice to make sure we were headed in the correct direction.

This got us to a big shopping center and there was a sign with an address that was the same as on the Kinko's ad (I thought).

In we went, but no Kinko's. So again, I asked. This time the clerk left the store and walked us outside the whole mall and pointed. Was success at hand? Well, not exactly.

Helen's Corner

The fruits of travel are memories – like the day in Moorea. Moorea, like nearby Tahiti, is a French Polynesian island. It is one of the most beautiful islands in the world with green, craggy mountain peaks. It is well known for its beaches and good snorkeling. There is no place for a cruise ship to dock at Moorea so we went by tender onto the island. We found a boatman there and arranged for a snorkeling trip, plus. The weather started out perfect, sunny and warm. Our two native guides and a dozen or so other QE2 passengers headed out to the reef. On the way our guide asked if we would like to stop first to play with the stingrays. Of course, YES! YES! YES!! (I remembered playing with the stingrays two years ago in Moorea in the shallow water off the beach, and it was great fun.)

By this time we were in deep water, but the guide assured us it would not be more than chest deep – well, that was

for *most* of us. We all jumped into the water as the guide casually mentioned that there might be a few sharks around, but not to worry because they were small and not dangerous. *Whoa!* I almost got back on the boat – I remember “Jaws” vividly. However, Jerry convinced me that these guides were not going to lead us into danger. I stayed close to the guides, since they had apparently survived many such excursions.

The stingrays appeared as expected and were great fun. They are about 3 or 4 feet wide with a central body and broad extensions on each side that function like flippers. They have black eyes looking out from a body that is velvety soft. They glide through the water smoothly and quickly merely by moving their ‘flippers’. They sometimes sneak up from behind and brush against your back. Other times they come right at you with their mouths open and then veer off suddenly. The surprise element can make it scary at first. Petting them on their velvety body was fun, and they seemed

to like the attention, but don't touch their eyes or poisonous tail. While I was playing with the stingrays, suddenly some of the passengers pointed out the SHARKS!! They were smaller than I am so I figured they couldn't eat me whole, and they were not coming too close, thankfully. However, I noticed the guides were throwing out chunks of raw meat! Were they trying to attract the stingrays or making sure the sharks had something to eat beside *me*? Horrors! I found out it was to make the sharks come closer! The guides were laughing at me as I hid behind them. Jerry kept telling me they were not man-eaters or woman-eaters either. Fortunately, the sharks kept their distance, but the stingrays continued hovering around us playfully.

Then the rains came so we got back into the boat. Soon it started to pour and we never did go snorkeling, but it was indeed a wonderful day. But I guess nobody will really believe me if I casually mention that “I swam with the sharks on Moorea.”

We went into another section of the mall and still no Kinko's to be found. But we did find the new location of the donut shop – good news if not a good omen. Once more I showed the Kinko's ad to some store clerks. After much bowing, one young lady motioned for us to follow her. Across the mall, through a super-market, and out the backdoor – at least 150 yards – and voila, there was Kinko's. And once our email was out, what did we do? Yep, donuts and coffee.

The Buddhist temple that yet another man helped us find by leading us for 3 blocks out of his way and the Confucian Shrine with its delightful museum were fine, but the people made the memories. Their kindness, their caring, their willingness to do all they could to help strangers was more than touching. It made our day in Nagasaki and made memories for a lifetime.



It keeps the feet from getting dirty at the Sriracha Tiger Zoo in Thailand

Osaka was another story. Oh, I'm sure the people were just as kind, but we were on a tour and didn't get lost once – although I almost lost Helen once. The tour was to the ancient capital of Kyoto, about 1½ hours away. The tour started with a Buddhist temple and gardens, then lunch in a very nice hotel, a stop at a Shinto Shrine and gardens, and finished off with a Japanese tea ceremony. The Golden Pavilion, a building sheathed in gold leaf, at the first stop was brilliant and the Shinto Shrine even more interesting. However, we were about 6 weeks too early for the gardens.

We could see what they would be, but winter is winter in Japan like other places. However, Helen did successfully survive the challenge at the Shrine to walk across one of the ponds on the cement stones – and without falling in. (We understand six people on an earlier trip had been less successful!) The luncheon was Japanese cuisine. I had anticipated this and had a full breakfast. The shrimp tempura was fine, the sticky rice filling, and the beer delicious. All in all, much better than the tea ceremony to follow. There, we were each given a Japanese sweet – rather like a strangely flavored, tough as rubber jello. As a guest, I dutifully swallowed the sweet. And then came the ceremonially brewed green tea, an elaborate brewing process that must be done just so. The tea was made using powdered tea and was rather thick, about the consistency

of a cream soup. It smelled exactly like wet alfalfa. Unfortunately, it also tasted like wet alfalfa. A guest can only be asked to swallow *so much!*

We had a great time in Hong Kong as always. This time we made the trip to the Stanley Market not once but twice to eat at Toby Inn, the finest Chinese food in the world per me. Again, Helen and I were the only non-locals in the place – both days. The Yang Chow fried rice was to die for. Rice just right, full of pork, egg, shrimp, and even cabbage. And the sweet and sour pork, *mmm* good. Then there

was some shopping – shirts for me and scarves for Helen plus a couple gifts. We “trammed” (double-decker trams) again to Shaukeiwan to see the sights and the Chinese market, and we stopped for crème brulee at LaCite – all our favorite things. One new highlight was my haircut. I usually get my hair cut in Hong Kong and I have a particular shop I use. But this time, I read the price list and found that for five HK dollars more (about 65 cents US) I could also have a shampoo. I had never had a shampoo in a shop, and this was a bargain, so go for it I did. The shampoo I could skip, but the massage that came with it was wonderful.

Our visit to Hong Kong ended with the greatest sail-away ever, ever, ever! We were due to leave at 6PM but were late. About seven we started to move. We were docked with the bow pointed to the east but were leaving in a westerly direction. So, the tugs had to turn the QE 2 around. First, this succeeded in blocking the entire channel, and, second, it gave us a completely magnificent view of Hong Kong Island just as all the lights came on. WOW – without doubt this is the most magnificent skyline in the world, even better than Sydney and so much better than New York that there is no real comparison. It was absolutely stunning. With the channel completely blocked, all the traffic – and there was lots of it – had to circle and wait. I noticed one small tugboat towing an immense barge making a tricky 360 degree loop. I couldn't see him, but I could almost hear the captain saying, “\$#*^\$!@*#^\$&!^\$!*#*&!*&@%&#*” or words to that effect while shaking his fist at us.

After the glorious sail-away we had from Hong Kong, we were scheduled for three rather special ports – two days in Thailand, one in Singapore, and then sailing overnight to have one day in Port Kelang (port for Kuala Lumpur), Malaysia. All was well until we arose for an early tour into Kuala Lumpur only to find we were still securely docked in Singapore. “Technical problems”, they said. I think the captain who left us in Singapore to go home to England forgot and took the ignition keys, and they had to figure out how to hot wire the engines. Fortunately, the QE 2 is still the fastest commercial ship in the world, so the extra day in Singapore turned out to be a bonus, not a problem.

Singapore was fine – clean, ultra-modern, and streets bustling with people as always. We had a free tour on our scheduled day. We enjoyed the orchid gardens, and Helen really enjoyed two Singapore Slings (hers and mine) to finish the tour at the famous Raffles Hotel.

The highlight of the highlights of the trio of ports, however, was Helen getting to feed and pet a three month old tiger at the Sriracha Tiger Zoo near Laem Chabang in Thailand. This is a super place and we had been looking forward to the visit for months. It did not disappoint. In addition to a lot of tigers, they have elephants, crocodiles, and other animals including pigs for pig racing. (The pigs race each other, not against the crocodiles.) If pig racing isn't your thing, the elephant show is lots of fun. But the piece de resistance is the tiger show. For 25 minutes the trainers put nine big cats through their paces – rolling over across the arena, walking on a tight rope, jumping through rings of fire, riding a horse, and one **big** cat dancing with a trainer with her paws over his shoulders around his neck! Better him than me!

Food was also a highlight of this trio of ports, four luncheons ashore in five days. We enjoy nice dining in the excellent hotels of the Orient. The Royal Cliff Beach Hotel in Pattaya is a good example. Our leisurely lunch on the hotel's outside terrace high above the ocean and overlooking the pool complex was delightful – and the spring rolls were superb. However, the best was the Carcosa Restaurant in Kuala Lumpur. Mary and Pete Zimmerman took me there in 1997 and I remembered

*We've had our bath in the river,
now for lunch at the Elephant Orphanage in Sri Lanka*



The Lady and the Tiger

it well. The building was the official residence of the last British Governor-General when Malaysia was part of the Empire. It is set in lush gardens and now is an elegant boutique hotel (14 suites) and magnificent restaurant from the French chefs to the flawless service staff. The food, the wine, the service are all impeccable. With the rattan furniture on the porches and the pictures of the royal family on the walls, the place echoes the glory of the "Empire" (and it is where Queen Elizabeth stays when she is in town, most recently in 1998).

Overall, we were rather impressed with our short visit to Kuala Lumpur – or KL as it is known locally. The area appears

to be quite prosperous, not Singapore status but developing. In 1997, just before the Asian financial crisis, they were building everywhere. We noticed some residue of this overbuilding, but they seem to be back at building again. The Malays seem to have a desire to have the "biggest". They have the world's largest bird aviary, are building the biggest courthouse in the world, and, of course, have the world famous twin towers, the tallest buildings in the world. And did you know that the towers are sheathed in pewter? Why? (1) pewter will not soil or rust and (2) tin mining and pewter manufacture are major industries in Malaysia. KL definitely looks like a revisit – just way too much to see in one short day.

For the first time in years, we made the Arabian ports on our way to and through the Suez Canal. Dubai was the first and we had a great time as always – and another internet adventure. I needed a machine with a floppy disk drive. They had a free internet service center in the terminal but no drives. When the gentleman in charge of the tourism office understood my plight, no problem. He took us into his private office and said, "Use my machine". Again, nice people are everywhere.

As in Hong Kong, we did our favorite Dubai things. We chartered an abra (small boat) on the "Creek" as they call the river to take us to the Sheraton where we had a wonderful lunch on the patio overlooking the Creek, the boats, and the city. We followed this large lunch with a walk along the Creek and watched them loading the dhows – all by hand, similar to the way

The merchandise gets dusty but never trampled!



they have been loading them for centuries. The loading of one dhow was just finishing. The last several cargo net loads pulled up by the ancient, creaking crane were plastic goods – some shrink wrapped and some not. These were dumped on top of boxes that were at best randomly stacked. Then the crew pulled their plain board gangplank (no OSHA rules here) and their “basic” wooden ladder gangplank aboard. The whole load looked a bit like a messy pile of cardboard boxes with trash on top, no containers in sight. It was on its way to Mogidishu, Somalia – and the load looked appropriate.

En route to Salalah in Oman, all the clergy on board the QE 2 agreed strongly that Job of the old testament never existed. But while in Salalah I found out that Job did live, was eleven feet tall, had shoulders four feet across, and is buried in a tomb outside Salalah. How do I know? Our taxi driver told us so and showed us the tomb. (No charge but you had to buy a little frankincense to burn, right? See how you get the real truth in RRR?)

I'd been to Aqaba in Jordan twice before and to the lost city of Petra both times, so this time I decided to realize a long held dream – snorkeling in the fabulous Red Sea. Well, I did go snorkeling and it was great, but it really was in the Gulf of Aqaba, an extension of the Red Sea proper. (Look at your map. The right fork of the “Y” north from the Red Sea is the Gulf of Aqaba.) The fish were small but very colorful and the coral was the second best I have ever seen – live and beautiful. There was one coral valley – like looking down from the head of a mountain valley full of autumn foliage – that was full of bright red fish with bright blue, yes blue, eyes. Snorkeling in the Red Sea proper still eludes me, but the Gulf is near the top of my list. It was also my first experience with a wet suit. For 72f degree water, the \$3 fee was a bargain. We had a lovely day. Helen lounged on the beach with a bar waiter at her beck and call while I got cold water down my back each time I raised up to check on my position, but it was totally worth it.

In Sri Lanka, I finally got my pictures of the elephants on their way to lunch as they trundled by in a cloud of dust just inches away from the souvenir shops. We loved Marmaris on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey – and I'd love to show

you my pictures, but those and most of those of Pompeii were lost by the photo shop. However, Helen can show you her new Turkish leather jacket. Turkey is a great place to shop, friendly bartering and good prices. From the warmth, people and climate of Marmaris we headed to Southampton via Naples, Barcelona, and Malaga in Spain – all somewhat less friendly and a *lot more expensive!* Ouch. Helen did get her first visit to Pompeii (my second), together we made ‘first visits’ to the Isle of Capri, and we revisited the magnificent, Moorish Alhambra in Grenada, Spain.

For the trans-Atlantic crossing, we had to move to the Queen Mary 2, the new behemoth of the seas. Several of you have been asking for an evaluation. First, I must give you a bit of background. A couple days before Southampton and our transfer to the QM 2, I packed two large bags and sent them to the baggage master to be held until New York City. And in the bags I carefully packed all the cold medicines I had carried round the world – unneeded for a change. Eight hours later, I needed them! And the shop on the QE 2 had nothing but bare shelves. Southampton was seasonably cold and raw, but I made the transfer and a planned lunch with friends and then ended up in bed for two days on the QM 2. The good news is that the QM 2 has the best beds at sea by far.

Unfortunately, I was not able to give the QM 2 a full inspection – except for the beds – but it was interesting. She appears to be a quite nice resort hotel that's very seaworthy and has lovely rooms. However, the impression which has lasted is “frenetic”. **Lots and lots** going on all the time with people rushing to and fro, lots of bars, a very busy casino – lots of action and noise. Also, service that is very impersonal – not bad necessarily, but you feel like just a number. Now for a short cruise and for the younger set,

this may be okay, but I prefer the QE 2, somewhat more staid and laid back and with friendly service that always makes me feel sad to leave. We may have to try the QM 2 again to get a fairer evaluation, however.

So what's planned, you may ask. Brace yourselves, sit down – no, not plans for another world cruise. Ready? We are going *to be home*. Yes, home! Well, until Thanksgiving time in November, anyway. So, this is your chance to come and visit us. Do be sure to book. We have some friends from LA due in September and the “ticket lady” (see Sydney above) will be here in October, but there are still openings. Next winter? Well, I have just sent a check pre-buying fuel oil, but we may be out and about part of the winter, maybe even coming your way (fair warning).

In the meantime, we do look at our emails and post box looking for a note from you with your news. We are always interested, so do write or call when you can. And now, ‘til next time, my traditional and sincere prayer, *may a kind and loving God walk with us and with each of you.*

Amen.



My favorite orchid bloom