



NAUTICAL *adventure*

On a cruise to New York, **Ed Finn** discovers the finer pleasures of transatlantic travel on-board the world's largest cruise liner the Cunard's Queen Mary 2.

As we arrive at the cruise terminal in Southampton we can't help but feel awestruck at the magnificent sight of the Queen Mary 2 (QM2), the flagship of the Cunard Line and the world's largest ocean liner.

We grab an excited glance together knowing that a week of culinary excellence and nautical luxury lies ahead.

Cunard celebrates its 175th anniversary this year. The cruise liner first changed the face of sea travel back in 1840, when its Britannia ship successfully set sail from Liverpool, arriving in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 14 days later. Our journey would take just eight days.

And after a very impressive, friendly and quick check-in, in the lounge we relax and settle in to our lush surroundings before embarkation.

ALL ABOARD

Before long several loud horns signal that we are departing Southampton and the excitement on-board is palpable. Small boats pass underneath waving us off on our first ever crossing.

One of the unspoken rules about travelling between England and America aboard the Queen Mary 2 is to never refer to your trip as a cruise. You are, in fact making a 'crossing'. Another unspoken rule is to refrain from referring to frequent travellers aboard the QM2 as regulars. They like to be called 'Cunardists' and this is usually spoken in a rather shrill Downtown Abbey-like accent.

A quick tour of our princess grill suite reveals an extremely spacious room and bathroom which would rival many 5-star hotels. The spacious balcony is sun drenched with wooden loungers, and a bottle of champagne sits chilling with fresh chocolate dipped strawberries waiting to be enjoyed.

With the balcony and suite cabins you don't have to worry about other guests peering into



Top: The Queen Mary 2

Above: The deck of the ship

There is the calming tranquillity of the surrounding sea and the hypnotic sound of the ocean

your room. There's no-one out at sea and the view of the majestic ocean never disappoints.

You dine in the beautiful Princess Grill restaurant where the hugely attentive, hand-gloved, white star silver service really comes into its own.

SWITCHING OFF

There's a big temptation during your first few days aboard the QM2, to scurry about frantically, trying to see everything. It takes a few days for the real pleasures of an Atlantic crossing to seep in.

Firstly, there is the calming tranquillity of the surrounding sea, and the hypnotic sound of the ocean is very therapeutic. I slept like a baby every night, the ship's movement rocking me gently to sleep.

You will find yourself devouring many books; of course you're wonderfully unplugged in the middle of the Atlantic, especially because the internet service on the QM2 is happily a tad expensive.

The cruise liner boasts the largest library on the seas and it does have a redolence of a mini Trinity College long room, a wonderful space to get lost in. You forget all about the world outside while aboard, the small newspaper the ship prints and distributes each morning, collated from wire service reports, is rather benign and rather upbeat.

THINGS TO DO

The ship itself is immense in size and is taller than the empire state building. There are four outdoor swimming pools and eight whirlpool spas - so no shortage here of men wearing speedos and gold chains and ladies bedecked in Gloria Swanson-esque turbans and finely printed floral sarongs.

The Queen Mary 2's size allows for a decent workout, walking or jogging around the deck to curb those inevitable excess pounds. There is a range of fitness classes such as yoga, spinning, boot camp and stretching which are typically assisted by a fitness instructor. I had a wonderful personal training session with Alex who whipped me into shape one afternoon while filming me on my iPhone!

On board the Queen Mary 2 you can really enjoy the ultimate in pampering and wellness at the exquisite Canyon Ranch Spa Club. You can indulge in traditional massages, facial



GETTING THERE AND BACK

Cunard sail regularly from Southampton to New York and also all over the world
www.cunard.co.uk

For great deals from Ireland also visit
www.clickandgo.com

American Airlines fly from New York to Dublin on American Airlines
www.aa.com

Staying there: The jewel of the Upper West Side, The Beacon Hotel, New York
www.beaconhotel.com

Sightseeing and information on New York City - www.nycgo.com
Dumbo food tour
www.bqetours.com

treatments or try the more exotic Ayurvedic or Thai treatments.

The question that I have been asked time and time again from people is what did you do all day?

QM2 also sets itself apart from other cruise companies with its self-improvement and speaker programme. Cunard Insights explores historical and contemporary issues presented by explorers, academics, former politicians, musicians, historians, filmmakers and the like. On one crossing, author Bill Bryson appeared as the resident 'celebrity'.

The QM2 boasts the only Planetarium on the seas and this is very impressive. Royal Astronomical Society presenters talk stars and solar systems; and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts graduate company presents specially edited versions of classic plays and novels, each lasting no more than one hour. There are also movies shown several times a day in the cinema.

ENTERTAINMENT

In the evening you are spoilt for entertainment - The Queens Room is the largest ballroom on any passenger ship, and it also features the largest dance floor afloat. This space is used regularly for Captain's cocktail parties, afternoon teas and ballroom dancing to a live orchestra in the evenings.

Quite unobtrusive is the ship's two-level disco, G32. The bar can get very busy (no

doubt because passengers heading west on crossings enjoy an extra hour of sleep five evenings in a row). I whiled away some fun filled evenings here with musicians from the British Philharmonic Orchestra who were guests on-board for our crossing.

In addition to regular bars, such as the Golden Lion Pub and the Chart Room, Queen Mary 2 features the first-ever Verve Clicquot Champagne Bar at sea.

The best place to enjoy the horizon and sunset is in the very chic Commodore Club on Deck 9, which offers piano entertainment during the evening. The adjoining Churchill's Cigar Bar provides a haven for stogie smokers.

Live music lovers will find plenty of opportunities to groove. Music starts in the Golden Lion (which also hosts karaoke most nights) and at the Pavilion Pool shortly after noon, and keeps going until the wee hours. QM2 is also a dream for dancers and if you don't have a partner don't worry, QM2 has a Gentleman Hosts programme, so single passengers (or those with left-footed partners) can have a twirl on the floor.

AWESOME ARRIVAL

Sailing into the world's most exciting city is undoubtedly the highlight of your transatlantic crossing. We sailed under the illuminated Verrazano Bridge, on past Ellis Island and the iconic statue of liberty until the sleepy dawn-lit Manhattan skyline reached out to greet us.

As every crossing starts or ends in New York, it makes sense to extend your holiday to get a real sense of this exhilarating city. I extended my stay with an exciting three nights in the iconic Beacon Hotel, the jewel of the upper west side.

BIG APPLE

While in NYC, I took in the incredible Natural History Museum, the One World Observatory, the Top of the Rock and the Empire State building. I had a wonderful 'sex and the city' lunch with the girls in Greenwich Village and went jogging in sunny central park.

One of the highlights of my trip in NYC was the fabulous DUMBO (down under Manhattan bridge overpass) food and culture tour of Manhattan - a must do for anyone who wants to experience the life and soul of this amazing city. The big apple retains its crunch and is the perfect way to end a nautical adventure.

A transatlantic crossing on the QM2 is all

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about the journey and not the destination. I once crossed the Atlantic from Paris to New York breaking the sound barrier on Concorde in three hours and 45 minutes. Spending a relaxing eight days on-board the QM2 may not seem like progress to many, but it was an unforgettably thrilling experience on what seemed to be an almost perfect and beautiful machine. ■



A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

If a river cruise is more your thing, why not explore Europe's cities and rivers aboard a Uniworld Boutique River Cruise.

Few can argue with the appeal of a leisurely sail down some of world's most iconic rivers; in fact river cruise ships have an average capacity of 130 guests, providing a more personal and intimate experience than one might find on a large ocean liner. While cruising with Uniworld Boutique River Cruises you will experience a spectacular hassle-free way of travelling, one that allows you the freedom to simply let the sites come to you. Glide over calm waters on your river cruise ship and cruise straight into the heart of Europe's best-loved towns. A gallery of the world's most beautiful scenery lies just outside each window, making the journey every bit as captivating as the destination. Uniworld's six-star experience delivers the highest standards of excellence in luxury river cruising. Plush surroundings, stylish staterooms with marble-clad bathrooms, included daily shore excursions, onboard entertainment, award-winning cuisine and hospitality have earned Uniworld many awards. They have been voted the 'the world's best river cruises', by Conde Nast Travellers. Unlike ocean cruises, river cruises offer value-added packages including so much, giving you excellent value for money - a Uniworld river cruise is virtually all inclusive. Transfers on arrival and departure, complimentary beer, wine and soft drinks at lunch and dinner, world-class gourmet cuisine (breakfast, lunch and dinner), bottled water in your luxury riverview stateroom, and speciality coffees are all included.

And most importantly, daily shore excursions hosted by English speaking local experts are an important part of the inclusions in any river cruise price - so there are very few out-of-pocket expenses required while onboard Uniworld's river cruise ships. What's more, Uniworld provides onboard local entertainment, signature lectures, internet and free Wi-Fi.

For more details or to book a Uniworld river cruise contact your local travel agent, log on to www.uniworld.ie or call 01 775 3803.