



QUEEN VICTORIA COURTESY OF CUNARD LINE

The debutante and the dowager



QUEEN MARY

Two Queens trace the history of a storied cruise line



PHOTOS BY KATHY RODEGHIER/krodeghier@dailyherald.com
Queen Victoria offers the first fencing classes at sea, above, along with shuffleboard, below right, which has been around since Queen Mary's day.



The Royal Court Theatre, left, is the only theater on a ship with boxes, including a royal box where Prince Charles sat for opening ceremonies.

BY KATHY RODEGHIER
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When Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall and wife of Prince Charles, officially named Cunard Line's new ship on Dec. 10, she joined a long line of British royals who have smashed champagne bottles on the sides of Queens.

In Camilla's case, the bottle failed to break (much to the amusement of the British press), but a crew member quickly accomplished the task and launched Queen Victoria on her maiden voyage around the world. She's now cruising the South China Sea with a stop today in Hong Kong.

I stepped aboard the new ship in Mexico and cruised with her to California where I spent the night on Cunard's first Queen. The venerable Queen Mary, launched in 1934 after a champagne christening by her namesake, the wife of George V, retired in 1967 after crossing the Atlantic more than 1,000 times. She was sold to the city of Long Beach where she is permanently docked and operates as a hotel and tourist attraction housing several restaurants and shops.

Comparing the new and the old offered some perspective on how times — and Cunard's Queens — have changed. What has not changed is the mantle of history both ships proudly wear over their regalia of British tradition.

"Cunard is the oldest cruise line out there," says Palatine resident NanSea Pelletier, who's aboard the Queen Victoria for the world cruise. As host for the Ensemble Travel Group, she's leading its members on the 105-day maiden voyage with stops in 23 countries.

The Queen Victoria is "absolutely gorgeous," Pelletier says, ranking her the prettiest of more than 50 different ships she's cruised aboard. "This cruise line has been around for a long time, so they got it right."

Queen Victoria "has such elegance, yet it's not stuffy," says Pelletier, and the service is outstanding. Many of the crew members worked on Cunard's other Queens — the Queen Elizabeth 2 and Queen Mary 2 — and connect with past passengers. About

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70 percent of those on the maiden voyage cruised with Cunard before.

"They remember you," says Pelletier. "When I came on board, even though this is a brand new ship, I felt like I was home."

Class system

The Queen Victoria and the Queen Mary were each built for roughly 2,000 passengers with cabins in three classes.

Queen Mary's second-class and third-class staterooms have been turned into display areas and other spaces. The second-class smoking lounge, for example, is now a wedding chapel. But 365 first-class cabins have been converted to hotel rooms with updates such as a satellite TV, air conditioning, mini-fridge, coffeemaker and hair dryer.

Queen Victoria offers eight types of staterooms ranging from a 151-square-foot inside cabin to a 2,131-square-foot grand suite. Rather than first- and second-class categories, passengers in the largest staterooms are assigned to either the Queens Grill or Princess Grill with the services of a butler and concierge, and private elevator access to a separate lounge, sundeck, courtyard and dining rooms. Here the crystal is Waterford and the china Wedgwood.

The Queen Mary's hotel rooms range from windowless inside cabins to royal suites, including one once occupied by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. They brought 80 pieces of luggage aboard "with another 75 pieces in the cargo hold," says Queen Mary tour guide James Sanders.

In the Queen Mary's bathrooms, four knobs by the bathtubs could be opened for hot, cold, fresh and saltwater. "Many people in the 1930s considered saltwater baths to be therapeutic," says Sanders.

Only the largest staterooms on the Queen Victoria contain bathtubs. Most have the small showers standard on cruise ships today, and vacuum toilets that sometimes took several minutes to flush. While closet space seemed adequate for my needs, some world cruisers complained of too few drawers and hopped off in port to buy plastic bins at Wal-Mart. Cunard is

looking into both problems.

Spacious balconies in many of Queen Victoria's staterooms make them feel roomier. Here passengers drink their morning coffee or sip an evening cocktail as the ship glides past the Sydney Opera House or along the Amalfi Coast. In Queen Mary's day, the stateroom view was from portholes.

Art deco flourished in the 1930s and the Queen Mary embraced it in light fixtures, furniture and art work, such as the 50-foot frieze over what was once the ship's Austin Reed men's shop. When visitors step aboard, however, they often first notice the wood. Fifty-six varieties of wood panel stateroom walls, corridors and public rooms, and trim doorways and windows. Unfortunately, some has been scratched

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Queen Mary's Observation Bar has art deco touches in vogue at the time of her launch.



Queen Victoria's new public rooms, including the Britannia dining room, have art deco elements reminiscent of the golden age of ocean liners.

Queen Victoria and Queen Mary

GO: If you like ships with a sense of history

NO: If you prefer glitzy, fun-in-the-sun ships to elegant ocean liners

If you go

Getting there: The Queen Mary is docked at 1126 Queen Hwy. in Long Beach, Calif. The nearest airports are Long Beach Airport and Los Angeles International. Transportation to Queen Victoria cruises depends on points of embarkation.

Queen Victoria itinerary and rates: At the conclusion of her world cruise this spring, Queen Victoria will set off on several itineraries in the Mediterranean and Russia. Prices start at \$2,295 per person. The 2009 world cruise departs New York on Jan. 10 for 99 days and starts at \$20,955 per person for an inside cabin.

Queen Mary hotel rates: Prices range from \$119 per night for an inside stateroom to \$660 for a suite.

Queen Mary dining: Sir Winston's and Chelsea are the fanciest restaurants; reservations (526) 435-3511. Sunday brunch is held in the Grand Salon; reservations (562) 499-1606. The Promenade Cafe is casual and the ship also has a deli and ice-cream parlor.

Dress code: On the Queen Victoria, men will need a tux or dark suit for formal nights; women should pack evening dress or other formal attire. Semi-formal evenings call for a jacket and tie; cocktail dress or pant suit. Almost anything goes on elegant casual evenings, except jeans or shorts. Queen Mary has no dress code, but semi-formal wear is requested in Sir Winston's restaurant.

— Kathy Rodeghier

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Cunard Line, (800) 728-6273, www.cunard.com; The Queen Mary, (800) 437-2934, www.queenmary.com

Queens:

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and chipped over the years. To appreciate this aging monarch, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, visitors must turn a blind eye to her wrinkles and age spots.

The Queen Victoria, clean and new from its Italian shipyard, shows off the elegant decor of a classic ocean liner, with art deco and nouveau touches. Some of her wood, though, isn't real. Simulated materials make for easier maintenance and fire safety.

Royal innovations

Queen Victoria boasts some "firsts" at sea: the first two-story library, connected by spiral staircase and holding 6,000 books; a Winter Garden with retractable roof; and complimentary classes in fencing, a favorite pastime of Queen Victoria's consort, Prince Albert.

The ship's Royal Court Theatre, modeled after a London West End theater, is the only theater at sea with private boxes. For daytime lectures or films, box seating is first come, first served. For evening theatrical productions, passengers can reserve one of the 16 boxes for \$25 per person. After champagne and hors d'oeuvres in a private lounge, a red-uniformed steward leads them to their box where comfortable armchairs, more champagne and chocolates await. Should they need anything more, a tug on a tasseled rope summons a steward.

Queen Victoria also has the first museum at sea, Cunardiana. Current exhibits tell the history of Cunard's Queens, including the first Queen Elizabeth, launched in 1938 and destroyed by fire, and the QE2, now on her final voyage. She will be removed from service this fall and has been sold to investors in Dubai, where she will be operated as a hotel and attraction. Another Queen now under construction will be launched in 2010.

Several exhibits in the Cunardiana museum detail the Queen Elizabeth's and Queen Mary's service in World War II as troop carriers. Winston Churchill, whose cigar is on display, credited them with shortening the war by at least a year.

The Queen Mary carried up to 15,000 troops at a time and transported more than 12,000



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You can order a glass of bubbly in Queen Victoria's elegant champagne bar.

GI brides and children. Churchill took her to war conferences on three occasions and a suite and a restaurant named for him can be found on the ship today.

Exhibits on the Queen Mary devoted to her war service are seen on a self-guided tour, along with a look at the bridge, officers' quarters and wireless room. Guided tours also can be booked, including one devoted to the ghosts supposedly roaming on board. Several public spaces serve as meeting rooms, such as the two-story Queen's Salon where scenes from "The Poseidon Adventure" were filmed.

Two films were shot in the Queen Mary's elegant art deco Observation Bar: "Being John Malkovich" and "What Women Want." This semi-circular bar at the prow of the ship is crowned by an oversized mural, "The Royal Jubilee Week," depicting the celebration of George V's 25th year on the British throne.

Just outside the bar is a room that once served as the first-class passengers' children's playroom. Notice the proximity to the bar, says tour guide Sanders. "The parents would come, drop the kids off to play and then the parents, in turn, would go and play."

British traditions

The Queen Victoria also has facilities for children — a nursery staffed by a British nanny and an area for teens — but neither seemed much in use when I was aboard. World cruises don't draw many children.

The age of passengers on a world cruise also tends to be older than on shorter cruises. The oldest passenger aboard the maiden voyage is 103, according to Queen Victoria's social hostess Anja Eyvindsson, who guessed the average age at 60 to 65. My guess would be somewhere in the 70s.

Dances are held in the Queen's Room Ballroom, a two-deck room inspired by Queen Victoria's summerhouse on the Isle of Wight.

"That's a tradition with Cunard, good music and dancing," says Eyvindsson. "We have gentlemen hosts for the ladies who are traveling independently," she says. Ten serve as dance partners on the world cruise. "They are very much appreciated and busy every night."

The Queen Mary also drew passengers to the dance floor

as she crisscrossed the Atlantic, and afternoon tea in the British tradition was a must.

On the Queen Victoria, white-gloved waiters carry trays of scones, clotted cream, finger sandwiches and petit fours for the daily tea service.

For those whose tastes lean toward the bubbly, Queen Victoria has the Veuve Clicquot Champagne Bar. Those craving a cognac and a good cigar head for Churchill's Cigar Lounge. Whiskey tastings are held in the Chart Room, where ladies take advantage of good light during the day for needlecraft. The Golden Lion pub serves Guinness and other brews along with pub fare, such as fish and chips and shepherd's pie.

Upscale dining comes with an extra charge (\$20 lunch, \$30 dinner) at the Todd English Restaurant where the

celebrity chef's nouveau Mediterranean cuisine is featured.

All meals come from Queen Victoria's galley, where 153 chefs labor under the tutelage of French-born chef Jean-Marie Zimmermann. Meals are "still very much from the days of Escoffier, the very traditional cuisine," says Zimmermann, who creates innovative dishes along with Cunard signature entrees, such as lobster thermidor, duck a l'orange and chateaubriand, that date back to the days of Queen Mary.

On a world cruise, care is taken to offer plenty of variety and to keep portions under control. Passengers "are here for a long time. It isn't like a restaurant where you go once in a while," says Zimmermann. "Portions are not too large, where people are afraid to go to the dining room." If they want more food, they can always request a second portion, or go to the 24-hour Lido dining room, which has a buffet, deli and pizzeria.

The main dining room, Britannia, serves nearly 900 passengers in each of two seatings for dinner. Its art deco design was inspired by Britain's luxury Golden Arrow train. On formal nights, Capt. Paul Wright dines with guests at the captain's table below a 10-foot illuminated world globe in the two-deck atrium.

A full agenda

During the day, Britannia becomes the venue for watercolor classes, one of a long list of activities available to passengers.

A Card Room is set aside for bridge players, with lessons in the morning. Passengers can take computer classes, dance

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classes and check out an audio player for a tour of the ship's \$2 million art collection. Among the highlights are etchings made by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and an oversized marquetry piece in the triple-deck Grand Lobby.

Queen Victoria's casino is smaller and quieter than that on many cruise ships, and if you don't want to spend your money there, the Royal Arcade of shops, including merchandise from Harrods, is just up a flight of stairs.

Shopping, swimming and shuffleboard were popular pastimes on the Queen Mary, just as they are on the Queen Victoria.

Passengers who don't get their exercise in Queen Victoria's two pools can hit the equipment in the fitness center or join a Pilates or aerobics class — unheard of in Queen Mary's day. The spa and salon offer a full range of body and beauty treatments.

And, of course, excursions are offered in every port.

"Not every cruise line fits every person, but this is all-encompassing," says NanSea Pelletier.

She's heard travelers say they don't want to take a cruise because they are afraid they will feel trapped on board with nothing to do. "If someone thinks they are going to be bored, that just can't happen," she says. "If you don't have a good time on this cruise, you're not looking to have a good time."

• Information for this article was gathered on a research trip sponsored by the Cunard Line and the Queen Mary.



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A wood marquetry artwork is the focal point of the three-deck Grand Lobby on Queen Victoria.

Tauck to launch small ship for European river cruises

Associated Press

NORWALK, Conn. — The Tauck World Discovery tour company is offering a series of European river cruises this year aboard a new small luxury ship, the Swiss Sapphire, which launches later this month in the Netherlands.

The 361-foot ship will accommodate 118 guests. It features two hot tubs, a bar and lounge, restaurant and wellness center. Rooms include 14 luxury suites with marble tubs, and 45 outside-facing cabins and mini-suites.

The Sapphire will sail six different itineraries, alternating with a sister ship, the Swiss Emerald, which launched in 2006.

Itineraries include the Grand European Cruise, 24 days, from \$8,090 per person plus air, which begins in Amsterdam and ends in Romania in the Black Sea, and Holland and Belgium in Spring, 10 days, from \$3,290 per person, plus air.

Details at www.tauck.com or call (800) 468-2825.

How will economy affect vacations?

NEW YORK — The uncertain economy might lead some Americans to cut back on vacations, according to a survey.

Fifty-five percent of those polled said they would "cut back on discretionary expenses like eating out and vacations," according to the GfK Roper Reports' random telephone survey of 1,005 adults conducted in February.

The survey also found that consumer confidence is extremely low right now, with only 10 percent saying it's a "good time to buy" the things they want and need, while 44 percent said it's a good time to wait. This is the lowest level of confidence recorded in this periodic survey since September 2001.

An earlier survey from GfK Roper Reports on 2007 vacation trends found that longer vacations increased slightly in popularity last year.

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