

## REMINISCING ON A WORLD CRUISE



### NEW ZEALAND/AUSTRALIA/BORNEO

During our lengthy periods at sea between some destinations we found ourselves descending into sad zombie like creatures, babbling incoherently as the ability to think for ourselves or do anything constructive was being gradually eroded. We would spend our days at sea yawning and virtually crawling about on all fours, bursting into life whenever we reached a port. It's amazing how tiring doing nothing can be!

One of the advantages of having our own balcony was the time we could spend just sitting together, binoculars in hand, literally watching the world go by; passing vessels of all sizes and descriptions simply fascinated us, affording us a brief glimpse into the lives of others. We would see ships in the distance on the horizon or perhaps lights twinkling on a coastline; we could stargaze or enjoy our own private sunsets. Magical moments captured forever in our minds' eye (and on the camcorder!).

At about this time, John's colour scheme began to even out, with the majority of red dots now forming a whole. However, despite great efforts and exaggerated contortions of body whilst sunbathing he was unable to achieve any resemblance of a tan underneath where his arms naturally fall, and consequently he looked as though he was wearing a very tight fitting red T shirt with a white 5" stripe down each side. His face became very colourful too, so much so that he glowed in the dark and I referred to him affectionately as "my night light".

On arrival in Auckland, we had to bid a fond farewell to the three couples who had shared our dining table since Southampton. They were replaced by the Executive Purser and his wife, the Font of All Knowledge (yawn, yawn) and his wife, as well as a very interesting, fun couple from Devon. At Hong Kong, to our great relief, the Purser and his wife were replaced by a couple who live in Hong Kong and were cruising to Southampton, so our current dining companions remained for the rest of the trip. We were also sad to say goodbye to Betty and Dick, an elderly Sydney couple we met in the Cyb@study one day and with whom we used to have cosy chats whenever we met around the ship. It's amazing how quickly one can become attached. They have very kindly invited us to stay with them if we ever decide to return to Australia. In view of my "thing" about flying, sadly it's not very likely but we do keep in touch via e-mail.

John celebrated his birthday on 10<sup>th</sup> February and at dinner balloons were arranged above our dining table. The waiters all gathered round clapping and singing happy birthday and then they burst all the balloons. Great fun!

Unlike the water flush system on land, the toilet system on the ship works as a vacuum, sucking waste away. There is an interesting note attached which requests that people do not flush while seated. In view of the fact that the operating button is positioned on the wall behind the raised up lid, this task would appear to be physically impossible. But not absolutely impossible apparently, as one lady is reported to have managed it and was next sighted three days later off the coast of Madeira wearing nothing but a smile, her red shoes still in place on the bathroom floor.

## AUCKLAND



We had hoped to meet up with my friend Marilyn in New Zealand (who happened to be visiting her daughter) but unfortunately transport and logistical problems prevented our doing so. Instead we spent the day 150 miles south of Auckland at the Whakarewarewa Thermal Reserve in the Maori town of Rotorua where the most energetic thermal activity in New Zealand can be found. The most dramatic concentration of Rotorua's thermal wonders lies within this very special reserve – boiling, bubbling mud pools, gushing geysers and gurgling hot springs provide a spectacular sight. Later, during a delicious lunch at a local hotel we were entertained with a most enjoyable Maori concert.

Our next stop was at an Agrodome, a huge indoor area, hot, packed and smelly, with various breeds of sheep arranged on podiums ready to perform with dogs. We were unhappy to see animals used in this way, thought it absolutely dreadful and made a speedy exit. On the return journey we stopped at a winery in the beautiful lush green countryside. The three hour drive to Rotorua took us through pleasant green countryside, dotted with perfect single storey detached homes with manicured lawns and picket fences. There are vast open spaces, beautiful countryside and the population sparse. Everything seemed very clean and perfect and yet interestingly New Zealand has the highest suicide rate among young men in the World.



## SYDNEY



**Sailing into Sydney Harbour**

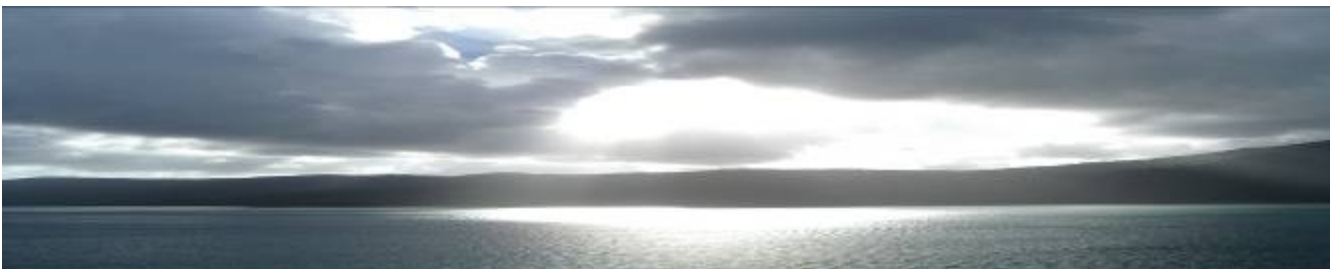
Sailing in to the world's loveliest natural harbour with its countless golden beaches on Valentine's Day was simply breathtaking. We were up at 5.30 a.m. to witness our arrival through "the heads", and on into the harbour itself, eventually berthing up almost adjacent to the famous Opera House and Harbour Bridge. We were quite overwhelmed by the intense thrill of such an experience. In the morning we took a two-hour cruise around this vast harbour, taking in the many wonderful sights before heading off into Sydney itself for some retail therapy and exploration. In the evening we dined al fresco on Lobster at Doyles, the famous fish restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf, before strolling over to the Opera House itself, which is a magnificent sight to behold at close quarters. The entire frontage of Sydney Harbour is lined with busy bars and restaurants and there is a vibrancy and energy about the city which we thoroughly enjoyed. We were on our balcony at midnight as we sailed away, watching the ferries still criss-crossing the harbour. Magnificent!

## BRISBANE



On this beautiful hot and sunny day we took a trip to Paradise Beach, situated on the Gold Coast, where the tallest residential building in the world is under construction (81 floors). The vast white sandy beach is many miles in length and is perfect for surfers of which there were many today. We spent a most enjoyable and relaxing day.

## WHITSUNDAY ISLANDS



Early morning sunrise

Such a magnificent sight awaited us on rising this morning, as the ship drifted tranquilly among the 74 mainly uninhabited tropical islands situated in the Coral Sea between the Queensland Coast of Australia and the Great Barrier Reef. The ship was anchored at the Fitzhalen Passage and we took a thrilling high-speed catamaran trip to the tiny World Heritage Listed Bali Hai Island Marine Reserve (remember South Pacific?). This island is unique and uninhabited and offered spectacular fringing coral reef viewing by means of a trip on a glass submarine where we saw a fascinating abundance of coral and marine life. The day was hot and sunny and perfect for such activities as this.



Later we caught another catamaran to Hamilton Island, one of the twelve inhabited islands, where we enjoyed a relaxing stroll and a little retail therapy.

There was a particularly stunning sunset tonight which we viewed from our balcony – breathtaking!

We then spent the next five days sailing the Coral, Arafara, Banda, Molucca, Celebes and Sulu Seas before reaching Kota Kinabalu on the world's third largest island, Borneo. During this period we saw many craft, including tiny one-man fishing canoes, but the most interesting were several tiny rafts containing what looked like B&Q garden sheds, and a dingy in tow. We understand this to be a funeral ritual with the shed housing the body. The entire raft will then be set alight while adrift at sea, the attendant reaching shore by means of the dingy. Although we could view them quite clearly through binoculars, they were unfortunately not close enough to capture on our camera.

### **KOTA KINABALU, Borneo**

Kota Kinabalu lies on the west coast of Sabah, one of the two states of East Malaysia. Situated across from where our ship berthed, there was a small island fringed with wooden shack-like dwellings on stilts rising from the sea and which house a people known as the water gypsies. We watched from our balcony as groups of them were transported to the mainland in small vessels, presumably on route to work. The heat was incredibly intense today, as though a naked flame was being held against our flesh. As we stepped ashore we were each presented with a pretty necklace by a group of very delightful young ladies who were there to greet us. During a sightseeing trip in the morning, we saw from our coach the most appalling poverty one could ever imagine. Row upon row upon row of unbelievably squalid and filthy shacks, again on stilts, the alleyways piled high with



**Roasting aboard the Last Train**



**Shrine on balcony above train track**

rubbish and waste. It was impossible not to gasp “oh my God!” over and over at the sight of such conditions. We were so shocked by what we saw having never before journeyed away from the ‘western world’ but it turned out to be just a taste of what was yet to come on our cruise! Those who live in the comparative luxury of Britain and still moan should come and see this! In stark contrast we then visited beautiful Berringis beach where we were treated to colourful displays of some of the dances of north Borneo. The

highlight of the day, however, was a never to be forgotten journey on “the last train in Borneo”, built around 1876, which hurtled (ha, ha!) through the countryside at an astonishing five miles an hour, rattling and jerking so noisily one had almost to yell to be heard, and occasionally and without warning being plunged into pitch darkness when a tunnel was entered. It was an hour of intense, almost unbearably stifling heat, taking us through mangrove swamps, paddy fields, verdant farmland and villages where children jumped up and waved to us while water buffalo lounged by the track. We loved every minute of this journey. It was such an exciting experience and all captured on camcorder! Such a perfect end to an utterly fascinating and truly memorable day.

We awoke the following morning absolutely thrilled to be sailing the South China Sea, a long-standing ambition, en route to Hong Kong where the temperature was to plummet dramatically!

**Maria Dillon**