

# CARIBBEAN CRUISE ON QUEEN MARY 2

by Ted Cookson



In December 2007 I enjoyed a ten-day Caribbean cruise on Cunard's RMS (royal mail ship) *Queen Mary 2 (QM2)* round trip from Brooklyn, NY. The ports of call were: Tortola in the British Virgin Islands; Basseterre, St. Kitts; Bridgetown, Barbados; Castries, St. Lucia; and Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas in the U. S. Virgin Islands.

Due to the sheer size of the vessel, it took me a couple of days just to orient myself on board! But, as I began to explore the ship, I discovered the unique Maritime Quest, which Cunard bills as the first permanent exhibition on board an ocean liner. Many of the corridor walls and stairwells on *QM2* are covered with panels

displaying the history of Cunard Line from Samuel Cunard's first transatlantic commercial mail venture in 1840 to the construction of *QM2*. I was interested to learn that over 200 vessels have borne the name of Samuel Cunard!

Maritime Quest includes ten sections on everything from "Life Below Deck" (memories of Cunard employees) and "Cunard at War" (even Churchill sailed on *Queen Mary*) to "Stars Aboard" (Hollywood luminaries and royals sailed on Cunard ships). An audio handset presentation covers fifty of the display panels. In addition, two interactive stations allow passengers to browse through photo albums and video clips.

On one of the four sea days I determined to

view every panel of the exhibition. During the course of my exploration and trip down memory lane that day I encountered a typical panel in the "Crossing is Half the Fun" section which read, "From the late 19th century luggage bedecked with shipping line labels became the status symbol of the seasoned traveller. Passengers liked to advertise that they travelled Cunard. From ticket and passenger list covers to commemorative postcards, Cunard took every opportunity of spreading its name throughout the globe. Proud of the Cunard connection, many countries have celebrated on postage stamps the ships that have called at their ports. The world's loneliest island, Tristan da Cunha, famous

for producing some of the world's most collectable stamps, chose to feature the *QE2*, and France has recently honoured the *QM2*." That panel included giant images of the stamps with ships issued by Tristan da Cunha, St. Kitts, the Falklands and other countries.

With 2,620 passengers (and a maximum capacity of 3,056 passengers if every single bed were filled) and a crew of 1,253, *QM2*, at 148,000 gross tons, it was the largest passenger ship ever built when it was christened in January 2004 by Queen Elizabeth II. Since then several Royal Caribbean International cruise ships have surpassed *QM2*'s 148,000 gross tons in size, beginning with the 154,000-gross-ton *Freedom of the Seas* in 2006. However, *QM2* can still boast of being the largest ocean liner (as opposed to a cruise ship) ever built. Furthermore, *QM2*'s length of 345 meters (1,132 feet) and beam of 41 metres (135 feet) at the water line are still unrivaled by any other passenger ship.



Hallway



Princess Grill junior suite



QM2 at St. Kitts



QM2 off Tortola



Tender

*QM2* is truly a story of superlatives. Incredibly, the length of *QM2* is more than twice the height of the Washington Monument and 14.5 metres (47 feet) longer than the height of the Eiffel Tower. Although *QM2* is 36 metres (117 feet) less than the height of the Empire State Building, its length is equal to 41 London double-decker buses and is more than three times the height of St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

The first *Queen Mary*, also a Cunard vessel, was in service on the Atlantic for over three decades, from 1936 to 1967. Cunard's *Queen Elizabeth 2* in turn sailed the transatlantic route from 1969 to 2004. *QM2*, the current Cunard flagship, was specially constructed with an extra-thick steel hull for strength and stability on transatlantic crossings. However, the ship is also used for Caribbean cruises in the winter, for Mediterranean cruises in the summer, and even for world cruises.

Costing some US\$800 million to construct, Cunard bills *QM2* as "the defining luxury ocean liner for the

twenty-first century." The plethora of facilities on *QM2* includes not only ten restaurants and five pubs but also five swimming pools (including one under a retractable dome), a theatre, two casinos and the only full-scale planetarium at sea. Uniquely, *QM2* also offers animal kennels on all crossings between New York and Southampton.

Passengers on *QM2* are separated into the various restaurants based on cabin price and quality. Each stateroom is associated with a reserved restaurant table. The Queens Grill Restaurant is reserved for those occupying deluxe suites, the ultimate in accommodation aboard the ship. The Princess Grill Restaurant is for those in luxurious junior suites. Britannia Club, a club-like private salon, caters to passengers in superior staterooms; and the grand three-deck-high Britannia Restaurant is reserved for all other guests. But don't feel sorry for Britannia Restaurant passengers as even the smallest guest rooms on *QM2* are similar

to deluxe accommodation on some other cruise ships. The tiniest inside cabin is 14.6 square metres (155 square feet). All staterooms include 24-hour room service, refrigerator, interactive

television and safe. Also, some 75% of staterooms have a private balcony. While the separation of passengers divides the ship into several different classes in terms of restaurants,

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Pool and jacuzzi



Grand Lobby



Royal Court Theatre



Library



Britannia Restaurant



Casino slots

almost all of the public areas may be frequented by any passenger.

Some aspects of ship design are worth a mention. The smokestack of *QM2* had to be redesigned in order for the ship to pass under New York's Verrazano Narrows Bridge. The shortened stack allows a three-metre (9.75-foot) clearance. But *QM2* was purposely designed to be too wide to transit the Panama Canal. Consequently the vessel must circumnavigate South America in order to travel between the Atlantic and the Pacific. By not limiting *QM2* to Panama's size, however, the ship is able to carry additional passengers and to offer more room to its passengers. One lap of the promenade deck is equal to one-third of a mile. Also, with 14,164 square

metres (3.5 acres) of exterior deck space, screens were necessary to protect guests against wind gusts while *QM2* cruises at 28.5 knots. Because *QM2* is too large to dock in the majority of the world's ports, passengers are often transported ashore in tenders. *QM2* is powered by an environmentally-friendly 157,000 horsepower combined gas turbine and diesel electric plant. Propulsion is achieved through four Rolls Royce Mermaid pods of 21.5 megawatts each, two of which are fixed and two of which can be rotated through 360 degrees, alleviating the need for a rudder. *QM2* was the first passenger ship constructed with four screws since the *SS France* in 1961.

Unusually for an ocean liner, *QM2*'s major public rooms - including the 41-

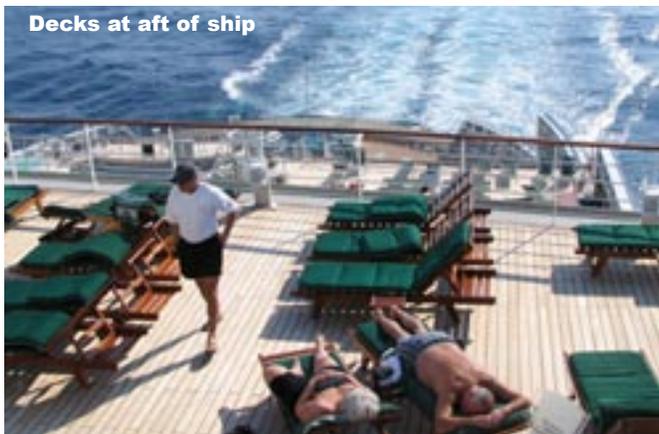
metre-wide (134-foot-wide) and two-story-high Queens Room, the largest ballroom at sea -- are situated on the lowest passenger decks. Such an arrangement allows for the largest rooms to be set within the stronger hull, as *QM2* was constructed with 40% more steel than a standard cruise ship. This arrangement also allowed for the construction of more staterooms with private balconies.

*QM2*'s many public rooms enhance the passenger experience. The three-deck-high Grand Lobby, with its bronze relief and two sweeping grand staircases, often features a harpist, a pianist, or a string quartet. The Mayfair Shops offer everything from cruise souvenirs to jewellery and the latest fashions. An art gallery features originals and lithographs by great twentieth-century masters as well as by well-known contemporary artists. With 21 computers, the computer centre offers an extensive selection of classes. In addition, there are 14 wi-fi hotspots in a variety of the ship's public rooms. The image gallery is an entirely-digital photo shop. With over 8,000 volumes, *QM2*'s library is the largest at sea.

The bookstore specializes in nautical literature and memorabilia. The Royal Court Theatre is a two-level venue seating over 1,100 guests. The Empire Casino features 13 gaming tables, more than 120 slot machines and video poker. The Canyon Ranch Spa-Club is a 1,893-square-metre (20,000-square-foot) health club. G32 is a two-level disco named after the vessel's shipyard hull number. The disco features a disc jockey and a live dance band. Golf simulators, a putting green, ping pong, basketball and shuffleboard are all found on the two sports decks. The ship also features various children's programmes for those from age three on into the teens.

A number of world-famous people have been guests or passengers on *QM2*. These include Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac, George H. W. Bush, Donald Trump, Rod Stewart, John Cleese, and Richard Dreyfuss.

It has been said that crossing is half the fun. This is especially true in the case of *QM2* where enjoying the ship is an experience in itself.



Decks at aft of ship