

Lessons Learned on a World Cruise

by Bruce and Lorraine Harris

HOME AT LAST!

by Chase Binder

Bruce and Lorraine Harris rolled back into Bow at the beginning of May, four months after embarking on their world cruise on Viking's just-launched Viking Sun (see the January 2018 Travel Talk at www.thebowtimes.com for their send-off).

How did they fare on the 120-day cruise from Los Angeles across the Pacific to ports in Oceania, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the Mediterranean and ending with Portugal and London? Read on! This month they detail some practical considerations of such an extensive cruise. Next month they'll take a look at excursions, security concerns and answer the big question: thumbs up or down on the experience? There will be lots of photos and a link to their extensive journal highlighting each of the destinations.



The Harris's boarded the Viking Sun in Los Angeles in January for the east-to-west 120-day World Cruise. They finished in London in early May.

PRACTICALITIES

January's Travel Talk detailed the thought process and planning approach behind our four-month, 25 country, 55 port world cruise. We're back and we can say that it certainly was the adventure that we hoped it would be – with a number of surprises along the way.

To catch you up, we started out by doing the math on separate land-based vacations to the destinations on *Viking Sun's* itinerary. We could do the whole cruise for what airfare alone would cost – add in Viking's booking incentives like free WiFi, laundry, gratuities and more and the cruise made solid financial sense.

Of course, four months is a long time. But not compared to spreading air/land trips out over 5 years or so. In fact, it's kind of like going to Florida for the winter.

At home, we had great neighbors to watch the house. Our daughter and her family live nearby and the Bow Police Department offers a vacation house check program. With free WiFi we never felt isolated or out of touch. We suspended our cable, phone and internet, turned off data in our phones and put our automobiles into "storage". We emptied our refrigerator and lowered the heat in the house. It worked!

THE SHIP

We didn't choose the *Viking Sun* by accident. We enjoyed a Viking River Cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest in 2015 and were extremely impressed with their ship, crew, cabin, meals and excursions. The *Viking Sun* is the fourth "ocean-going" ship of a planned expansion to 15 small ships of 500 to 1,500 passengers and 46,000 tons – less than half of the capacity and tonnage of the latest cruise ships. The smaller ship can access smaller ports and be configured for specific target audiences. For Viking, it is about the journey and the learning experience more than the "city afloat" model designed to appeal to a wider range of passengers.

As a new ship, it is state of the art in terms of design, propulsion systems, stabilizers, water production, cooking facilities and certainly, from the

inside, has all the features of a five-star resort. There are lots of dining options, including specialty restaurants, a spa/salon, two pools and the sport facilities run from table games, shuffleboard, and miniature golf to a fully-equipped gym and a ¼ mile walking track. It is so well designed that individuals or small groups could occupy places and simply enjoy solitude.



Cuisine on the Viking Sun was outstanding. Nothing like crepes!

FOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT

We learned early on that one really needs to pay attention to portion control when cruising. The menus and meals were beyond exceptional. In addition to a set menu of favorites, specialty items like lobster thermidor and chateaubriand were available as well as gluten free and other options. All baked goods were fresh daily, along with exotic sorbets and gelatos. Most interestingly, Viking would fly in different chefs along the journey – no food boredom!

While major cruise lines with large capacity ships offer major productions and a lot of physical entertainment (think climbing walls, water slides, etc.), Viking takes a different approach. Since the focus is on cultural appreciation, many of the entertainers reflected our specific location. We had local singers, dancers and musicians playing traditional music, dressed in native wear and representing local history and culture. Viking also rotated on and off the ship a wide assortment of entertainers, ranging from young performers who had won national and international talent contests to veterans of Broadway and London stages.

MEDICAL & PHYSICAL FITNESS

Not surprisingly, fellow passengers were primarily retirees with an average age in the low 70's. We had two doctors and three nurses onboard, a lab and pharmacy, but no scanning/x-ray equipment. Serious issues required evacuation. Indeed, there were two heart attacks, a stroke, several broken legs and ankles and more. This reinforces the absolute necessity for purchasing comprehensive travel insurance that addresses trip interruption, medical evacuation, and reimbursement for expenses. Don't forget to have dental work done before you embark.

In terms of physical fitness, the excursions and simply getting around a large ship require certain strength and balance. We were blessed with calm to moderate seas throughout the trip but even so we saw some passengers struggle.

The excursions are reviewed in detail for the level of physical activity required and are generally classified as easy, intermediate, or challenging. Excursion descriptions are subjective, though, and sometimes minimize the difficulties of negotiating steps, cobble stone roads or getting in and out of local transport. Add the high temperatures and humidity, and accidents can happen. It's really about individual responsibility to be in good physical and mental shape and be honest with a self-appraisal before committing to a long voyage.

The excursions can be stressful in terms of crowds, noise and in some cases the visual shock of living conditions. Consider these factors before booking.

(To be continued)