

Bucket Cruise To The UK

By Dan Ehrlich



It's a no-brainer. Taking the boat between New York and the UK is possibly the best deal in travel.

When traveling from New York to London and back it could be a choice between seven hours of near agony in an economy airline seat or seven days of first class luxury on Cunard's Queen Mary 2 at less cost than the cheapest airplane seat.

For people with time to kill, even if that may seem like an absurdity to seniors, traveling on some cruise ships such as Cunard's 1,100-foot-long Queen Mary 2 during the peak summer months now offer first class service to all passengers at less than economy class air fares. And what you get is vacation resort experience.

Yet, the ship's master is more realistic about the weeklong voyage. "Most people will always choose the

speed of air travel," QM2's Captain Christopher Wells admits. "But for those who don't like flying, you can't get a better deal than what Cunard is offering on the Queen Mary 2."

Why seven or eight days when past liners have made the voyage in four? "Cost overheads," Captain Wells says is a main reason in explaining the faster the QM2 sails, the more fuel she burns. "But most passengers are here to experience the QM2... and the diversity of passengers is what I love the most about this crossing." The lion's share of diversity is among seniors who normally account for the majority of passengers.

What's just as important, if not more so, a round-trip peak summer economy flight from New York to the UK costs between \$850 to \$1,150. Yet, you can travel to or from the Big Apple by Cunard liner on a luxurious week-long holiday voyage for an advertised all inclusive saver fare price, no airport taxes or baggage fees, of \$750 per person for a basic inside cabin.

Some special deals actually include return air tickets. The key is to shop around with the best fares at the beginning and end of the cruising season normally from May to January.

What many passengers do is arrange for a few days in London or New York. One British couple said they spent three days in New York and their total bill for the voyage came to \$2,000, a bit more than the price two return economy air tickets to London.

The fare increases by the size of cabin or stateroom you choose. Yet there are many variances from the lowest listed price. It may depend on

from whom and when you buy your ticket. Some passengers wait until the last minute to get reduced space available rates.

But is it all that inclusive? There are some catches. First, and foremost, as with most holidays, the fare is based on two sharing. A single person may have to pay nearly double a couple's individual fare. Considering the core clientele for many cruise lines is the senior population, people who have lost their partners may feel they can't afford the voyage.



However, fierce competition within the industry is forcing more and more cruise firms to offer single berth cabins. According to Captain Wells, the Queen Mary 2 will be offering such cabins.

Another catch is when buying your ticket, it isn't made clear to you that in addition you will be asked to help finance the Cunard wonderful service staff to the tune of from \$11.50 to \$13.50 per day or \$92 to \$108 dollars for the trip. But it will be made clear on your credit card statement.

It's one thing giving your personal cabin steward and waiters parting gratuities. But the Cunard charge isn't going to them personally. It's supposed to help finance the entire staff. In effect, guests are asked to assist Cunard in paying its hard working personnel a decent wage. If you are informed about and object to this charge, you can opt out by signing a waiver.

Finally, there's the shore to ship and ship to shore transfers to consider. Unlike major airports such as New York's JFK or London's Heathrow, there's no direct public transit to Cunard's ports in Southampton or Brooklyn. But the company does offer a limited coach service from central London and New York. The cost is around \$40.

As for the cruise itself, an amazing experience. That's because of the extraordinary quality and quantity of food, the high standard of accommodation and the amount of professional entertainment booked for each sailing offered to guests free of charge.

Your basic ticket entitles you to a cabin of various sizes and prices, all meals and snacks including beverages such as coffee, tea, milk and juices, use of most ship facilities and all activities. Not free are soft drinks, bottled water, alcoholic beverages and Internet access. And buying time on the Internet is one of the most costly services on the ship.

The old class structure of ocean liner travel has been abolished over most of the ship. There are no more first, second and steerage classes. But, those passengers who book into deluxe staterooms are given special dining rooms, such as the Queen's Grill, and lounges, exclusive to them. So, in a sense there still is a first class.

For most passengers, there's the elegant evening meal, included in the basic fare, at the two-story Britannia Restaurant, which alone for a week would easily be worth half the cruise fare price when compared with a swish Midtown Manhattan or Central London restaurant. More informally there's King's Court endless buffet dining for breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner.

If you don't have loads of money and aren't in a hurry, taking a liner such as the QM2 to or from America is a fun and elegant way to get to where you're going. See: www.cunard.com.

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