

Silver Whisper – cruising in the lap of luxury



The elegant Silver Whisper docked at Leith while on a round Britain cruise. Picture by Nigel Duncan Media

The No 11 bus inched its way down Leith Walk from Edinburgh's bustling city centre which was packed with tourists enjoying the summer sunshine.

It turned into Pilrig Street and the frustrating journey was prolonged by heavy traffic.

One passenger on the tea-time bus persisted in talking on her mobile phone. We learned about her new boyfriend and how her mum was giving her a hard time. Too much information.

Eventually, we turned right and saw the sea. The pace quickened as we passed Newhaven Harbour and then, on our left, was the Silver Whisper.

She sat serenely at the Cruise Liner Terminal, her hull sparkling white against the blue sky.

Shore formalities over, we strolled towards the 16-year-old ship which has recently completed a re-fit.

For one week earlier this year, a swarm of workmen boarded this elegant vessel for an extensive make-over and work is continuing.

One workmen was noted with a roller painting the bow to ensure that this 28,258-tonne ship remained pristine after sailing from North America to exotic destinations like Hawaii then to Australia and China and India, through the Suez Canal and along the Mediterranean since starting its voyage in January.

We were greeted warmly and escorted up the gangplank and into another world.

Here, there are 382 guests pampered by 302 crew, nearly one-to-one, and this was an oasis of calm.

My fraught bus journey was quickly forgotten as we walked over the thick pile carpet towards the bar.

There was no queue at reception. The elegant corridors were empty apart from one or two guests who nodded.

Each member of the crew said hello and we were escorted to a seat overlooking the sea and with a vista towards Fife which was bathed in late-evening sun.

Drinks were ordered and within seconds arrived. They were followed by canapés.

An extensive tour followed. That feeling of calm continued. The first port of call was the observation deck at the top of the ship.

One woman was seated reading with a view towards The Royal Yacht Britannia.

Another was taking in the skyline of Edinburgh with Arthur's Seat, Calton Hill and Edinburgh Castle prominent.

We then visited the spa, walked past the shop and were told about the retail offering which includes items from top designers.

We walked down stairs and along a corridor past the internet cafe, the card and conference room to a Terrace Suite (27 meters square), described by the guide as a quiet sanctuary where large picture windows frame panoramic ocean views.

One was struck by the size. The marbled bathroom has a full-sized tub and separate shower with bags of space.

Then there is a walk-in wardrobe with plush robes and slippers.

Standing out was a queen-sized bed with a premium mattress covered with Pratesi fine bed linen and down duvet.

Towards the window was a large writing desk with personalised stationery and, opposite, a relaxing sofa. The relaxing feel was continued with the subtle colour scheme.

The cabin is serviced by a tailor-coated butler and tucked away in the corner was a table which allows guests to enjoy private dining with exactly the same menu and service as provided in the dining rooms.

The room mini-bar is stocked with your personal preferences at no extra charge. This is, indeed, luxury.

Food is a key component of cruising, particularly on a ship like the Silver Whisper.

We strolled towards the pool bar. On large ships with over 3,000 passengers this area is crammed – yes, beach towel booking of sunchairs is the norm – but not here.

Guests were dotted around enjoying the weather and shielded from the wind.

Light lunches are followed by dinner. Here you can grill your own seafood and prime cuts of meat to suit.

Inside, Le Champagne, a French restaurant and, in fact, the only Relais and Chateaux restaurant at sea, featuring seasonally inspired dishes prepared from the finest locally-sourced ingredients, is a possibility.

Then there is La Terrazza, featuring authentic Italian recipes and the freshest, sustainable ingredients. There was live entertainment.

We moved on and dined in The Restaurant. The low ceiling, crystal lights and beautiful wood floor oozed sophisticated elegance and grabbed the eye on arrival.

Ladies in our party were escorted to the table individually by

waiting staff and the menu presented.

Napkins were produced and, although busy, it was easy to talk. There was no irritating music.

You could chill and enjoy the food and fine wine. There is even a connoisseur selection for an extra charge.

The food choice was either Continental or regional specials unique to the voyage destination.

For example, roasted Chilean sea bass while cruising the Chilean fjords and Indian chicken korma on route to Mumbai.

You are free to dine when, where and with whom you please, there are no assigned tables.

The Oakwood-smoked duck and crispy greens was one I had to taste as I was intrigued by the citrus and passion fruit emulsion.

It was a picture on a plate, the minute portions of the different elements having been painstakingly put in place. And the flavour? Memorable with the fusion of fruit and meat one that I will try to replicate at home. The precision will not match this creation.

We are in Scotland where lentil soup is a staple. So I had to try South East Asian lentil soup version which contained carrots, leeks, celery, fennel, Asian spices coriander, Thai basil and coconut oil. It had a distinctive flavour.

We by-passed salads and pasta and I was tempted by the sea bass with lemon butter sauce, oven-roasted fennel, grated lime zest and roasted red onion mash potatoes.

However, the waiter suggested a chef's special featuring local meats of tender minute steak, lamb chop, veal sausage, braised beef rillettes, extra virgin olive oil, caramelised garlic and red onion crushed potatoes. It was perfectly cooked.

Oh yes, there was a mouth-watering dessert option. My lactose intolerance was not a problem. The waiter promptly returned with a sensational fruit dish with a hint of liqueur.

Sadly, we had to leave as the ship was due to leave for Inverness, Skye and then on to Ireland and Cornwall before docking in Southampton.

I walked towards the bus terminal and jumped on a No 34. The peace was shattered. Drink had been taken off-shore and it showed.

There was an altercation at a bus stop before I reached central Edinburgh so I opted to leave my fellow bus passengers and make for the tram.

This summer's cruise on a 3,000-passenger plus Norwegian Cruise Line will not be the same as I'll not forget the three hours of exclusive pampering on the Silver Whisper, a floating boutique hotel.

You can find out more about booking your cruise [here](#).