

The First Few Days

Our journey to the Caribbean really starts when we close our front door at 5.30am on 26th October. It is cold and wet at home and we are looking forward to joining our cruise ship - the Braemar this afternoon. The journey south to Dover takes us 6 hours, with 2 short stops, and we are pleased to see the traffic on the motorway system is running smoothly. Even the notorious M25 is relatively quiet today.

As we drive down the hill into Dover we can see the Braemar in dock, and another of Fred Olsen's ships - the Balmoral - is berthed alongside. After returning our hire car, a friendly member of their staff runs us and our cases to the dockside. A

We are pleasantly surprised to see our roomy, comfortable cabin which has a large picture window. Looking out we can see the steely grey waves of the English Channel crashing onto the breakwaters - looks like we will be doing some Rocking and Rolling tonight! There is some delay as the heightened security measures in the port create a backlog of passengers waiting to board ship, and a further delay as the Braemar lets the Balmoral sail out first for safety reasons.



Along with other Guest Speakers, we have a meeting tonight with the Cruise Director, where we are introduced to each other, and to the stage managers who will be helping us set up our equipment on stage. We are told that we will be "presented" to the passengers tonight before each of the evening live shows. This means that we will be introduced on stage, and then handed a mike to say a few sentences to the passengers about the subjects we will be covering.

The Guest Speakers on this cruise are a happy group of people, and they will be talking about their chosen subjects which include Caribbean History, the destinations on this cruise, and also the memories of a retired journalist talking about the famous people she has interviewed. Also on board we have a vocal coach, a painting instructor, and bridge instructors so there is plenty of entertainment choice for passengers!

Our schedule of talk sessions is awaiting us in our cabin, and we need to give the Cruise Administrator our talk titles, and a few words of explanation for each one. These notes will be included in the daily paper which will be delivered to passengers' cabins tonight, and the deadline for publication is 3pm!



Although we already had our lectures mapped out for all available sea days - 9 in total - we now realise that we will only be giving 7 talks, so some rearranging is necessary. We need to decide which talks can be removed without jeopardising the whole, and this takes some time as we need to rewrite some of our PowerPoint pages.

We are able to make a revised list of talk topics and take them to the office in time for the 3pm deadline. Our first talk is scheduled for tomorrow afternoon, is called "An Introduction to Mobile Computing" and will set the scene for all our future talks.

When all passengers are safely on-board the Braemar, we all need to attend the Lifeboat Drill. Fortunately this is conducted in the warmth of the lounge, and not outside in the cold and wet!

All Guest Speakers are expected to eat in the Informal Restaurant. This is no problem to us as we actually prefer to eat in the Informal Restaurant - the food is the same as the main restaurant, and because it is self-service we can take as much, or as little as we want, and at times to suit ourselves, and our work schedule.

On day 2 we give our first lecture, and are pleased to see around 60 people in the audience. The presentation goes smoothly, and most people keep awake until the end! We have a talk with the cruise director asking him if it is possible to fit in some practical workshops, and when we get our daily paper detailing tomorrow's entertainment, we see that he has given us a one hour slot in the upstairs Skylark bar.

Day 3 sees our very first computer workshop held in a separately partitioned area in the Skylark bar. Around 20 passengers await us as we walk in through the door, and as we set up our 4 laptops on separate tables, another 40 or so arrive and squeeze in to the room! Not sure how we will cope with so many people, we set groups of 4 the task of writing their names in one of our computers. Owain and I move between computers explaining to passengers how to save, move and find their own work. It feels a bit like spinning plates and trying to keep too many spinning at once! Some passengers leave after 10 minutes or so, as there is standing room only at this time.

We know from past experience that the first lesson is always fraught, and we expect a quieter day tomorrow



On day 4 we have been allocated an extra hour for our workshop, which should help with the workload. As it happens it is much quieter - around 30 people - and having two hours means that we can spend much more time with each passenger. We carry on with a little word processing, and teach passengers how to insert pictures into their word documents. Our afternoon lecture is called "Create Your Own Cruise Diary" and this will be explained again using our own cruise diary and pictures.



Tomorrow we will be berthed in Madeira, so we have a day off work. We have chosen not to take a tour of Madeira, or to act as couriers as we wish to catch up with our emails. Fortunately Madeira has free Wi-Fi almost everywhere, so it should not cost us a penny!

After our stop in Madeira, we will be sailing on to Tenerife tomorrow where we have another relaxing day ahead of us.

More later...