



THE GORDON GROUP  
PROFESSIONAL CRUISE PLANNERS®



# CRUISE OBSERVER

Vol. 9 Issue 2

Inside News On Cruising

Spring 2004

## A New Queen Rules the Seas

Making the biggest splash in years, the debut of the *Queen Mary 2* sets several new standards for cruise ships



QM2

**E**VEN IF SHE WASN'T CHRISTENED BY QUEEN ELIZABETH II, Cunard's new *Queen Mary 2* deserves recognition as royalty among cruise ships. The longest, tallest, widest and most expensive cruise ship ever built, she set so many records for cruise-ship construction that we could easily fill this page with superlatives.

Suffice to say, the \$800 million ship is so large that it is almost easier to compare her with landmarks rather than other ships. For instance, she is nearly as long as the Empire State Building is tall, and above her waterline, she is a bit taller than a 20-story building.

While *Queen Mary 2* has many of the same amenities found on other ships, hers frequently are much larger, including the 8,000-volume library or the five adjoining apartments that can be reserved as one to create a 9,000-square-foot suite – you probably won't be surprised to learn that this is the largest suite at sea.

The *QM2* also brings a few new concepts to cruising, such as the two-deck, 20,000-square-foot Canyon Ranch spa and the first planetarium installed on a cruise ship. In the comfort of the planetarium's reclining chairs, passengers can sit back and enjoy the specially produced *Stars Over The Atlantic*.

And while we've been talking here about the ship and a few of her bells and whistles, the passenger experience aboard the *Queen Mary 2* will determine her long-term success – by any measure, the *QM2* has been an early blockbuster, selling out more than 70% of her available cabins for all of 2004 before she was even launched.

Designers of the *QM2* built a ship with very direct bloodlines back to the Golden Age of the Cunard ocean liners, and that heritage is proudly celebrated throughout the ship in numerous museum-quality displays. That stately and luxurious style of cruising is not just an artifact, though. It is the model for cruising aboard the *Queen Mary 2*, where rich and royal hues dominate the décor rather than disco lights and glitz.

Reminiscent of the magnificent dining rooms of past ocean liners, the three-story Britannia Restaurant has a grand central staircase that sweeps into the room. And the Promenade Deck, with its classic steamer chairs, makes a full, uninterrupted lap around the ship, a rarity among modern cruise ships but quite consistent with an earlier generation of transatlantic liners.

While the *QM2* has modern conveniences such as wifi Internet access, the shipboard experience leans heavily on the classic definition of luxury, providing comfortable yet dignified luxury without attacking passengers with noise, attractions and parties. Afternoon tea, for instance, is served by white-gloved waiters in the Queen's Room while a string trio plays classical music.

For dining, the Britannia is the primary restaurant, with two evening seatings, but the ship has 10 dining venues, including the Todd English Restaurant, named for *Bon Appetit's* 2001 restaurateur of the year. Early reviews indicate that Boston-based English has done it again, providing splendid food and service to those who make a reservation early upon boarding the ship.

Massive though she may be, the *Queen Mary 2* manages to create intimate moments of luxury for many of her passengers, and we suspect she will be a, dare we say it, huge success for just that reason. Let us know if you'd like more information about the *Queen Mary 2*. Chances are we can't get you a highly desirable stateroom this year, but we certainly can start booking for next year.

### These Are Exciting Times

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for keeping us so busy during the early months of this year. It's been a privilege to help you plan your cruise vacations, and we hope we've earned your future business as well.

These are certainly exciting times in the cruise industry, as we discuss in this complimentary issue of *Cruise Observer*. Several new ships have entered service, including the mighty *Queen Mary 2*, and the cruise lines are making substantial efforts to expand their itineraries and to improve the overall cruise experience.

All of which may help explain why we've encouraged quite a few of you to consider later departure dates. Even with all the new ships and the increased capacity, cruising is the fastest growing segment of vacation travel, and seasonal destinations like Europe and Alaska booked up faster than ever this year. As of this writing, the available inventory for European cruises is extremely limited.

Don't be discouraged. We can still get you exactly the cruise itinerary you want on the perfect ship and in just the right cabin – at an excellent value. But you have to start the planning process a bit sooner than you might have been doing when the travel business was slumping in 2001 and 2002. Right now, for instance, would be an excellent time to get the jump on your cruise plans for next winter.

Give us a call. We'll be happy to help!



Sincerely,

Jeff, Karen & Josh Gordon



Britannia Restaurant

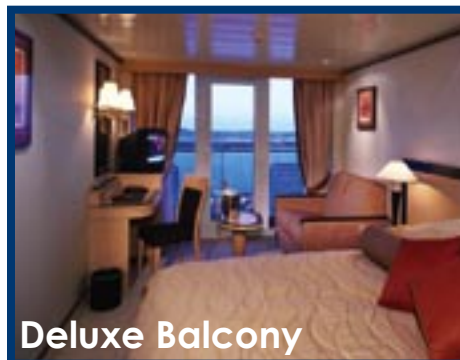
Photos Courtesy of Cunard Line



The Planetarium



The Library



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