

NEW ZEALAND - AUSTRALIA

JANUARY 8 TO JANUARY 28, 2023

A new year, new beginnings, new prospects ... but still an old aching back and tired legs.

As readers of my prior travel musings will recall, beginning with the Silver Seas trip in 2019 my 80+ years-old-legs began to rebel against my climbing hills or walking long distances. This became more severe in Australia in 2020 and on the Rhine-Danube cruise in May-June, 2022. Back surgery (spinal fusion and revision laminectomy, if you please) in late June, 2022, was supposed to correct my increasing stoop and strengthen my legs. Twice-weekly physical therapy sessions from June to November were also designed to stretch and strengthen muscles that led to my stoop and leg weakness.

Ha! On our October 2022 cruise from New York to Montréal, my difficulty in walking persisted. Despite the essential help afforded by my four-wheel walker*, I had to cancel or modify a number of excursions.

*Purchased last March, its metal parts are painted yellow and blue, the same colors as in the flag of Ukraine. It's a sturdy device - and it collapses to a size that allow it to be stowed.

So here we are, more than six months after the surgery, attempting another cruise. Yes, I'll have my walker, again. Lee and I selected excursions that were suitable for people with mobility issues, but I fear that the October problems will persist. This is being written well before the start of the cruise - maybe there will be a minor medical miracle when January arrives. Not likely, but ...

And another thing. In March, 2020, Lee and I spent eight days in Western Australia (Perth and the Margaret River Region) before flying to Melbourne where we planned to join a Tauck tour for eight days in Melbourne, Cairns, and Sydney followed by a nine-day cruise around New Zealand. 'Twas not to be! As Robert Burns once opined, "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, Gang aft agley" (or, in its modern version, "Shit happens.") Early 2020, you'll recall, was when the severity of the SARS-CoV-2 virus became apparent. The result: on our second day in Melbourne, New Zealand announced that it had closed its ports; and one day later, Australia also closed its borders. Our wonderful travel agent, Stefan Bisciglia, managed to get us flights back to the U.S. on very short notice.

Just to prove that we hold no grudge against Australia for "deporting" us and against New Zealand for preventing our arrival, we are returning, nearly three years later, to try again. Surely, there will be no unpleasant surprises this time, right?

The next two paragraphs are from the two 2022 travelogues:

READING MATERIALS In addition to several magazines (*The New Yorker*, *TIME*, *The Progressive*, *Yale Alumni Magazine*), NYT crossword puzzles, Sudoku puzzles, and soft-cover books (*Shards of Memory* by Ruth Praver Jhambvala and *The Biographer's Tale* by A. S. Byatt), I will have my Kindle Reader. In earlier travelogs, I've marveled at the fact that several titles that I downloaded to the Kindle from Amazon through the Pierce County Library have remained on my device, *long* after their three-week borrowing period had ended. From those many titles, these five remain and are unread: Olen Steinhauer's *All the Old Knives*, Robert Harris's *V2*, H.R. McMaster's *Battlegrounds*, Bill Clegg's *The End of the Day*, and Richard Russo's *Chances Are*.

"Surely this is enough for the upcoming trip," you say. Well, yes, but given that my weak legs may force me to stay onboard the ship when I should be out on excursions *and* given that we have two more cruises planned for the next eight months, perhaps I need more. So ... having demonstrated that as long as I keep the Kindle in Airplane Mode, I can ~~steal~~ borrow additional books without worrying about their being snatched back by the (rightful) owner... a few months ago, I arranged things such that 17(!) books would become available for download at the same time. And so, Dear Reader, I exited Airplane Mode for the minimum time needed and I downloaded all 17. Do I feel guilty? Not really. Surely my "possessing"

these e-books does not prevent Amazon from lending them to others. Besides, it's fun to think that I may be poking the lion (i.e., Jeff Bezos) without fear of retribution. At least that's my hope. When the Amazon police come knocking at my door with a warrant for my arrest, I won't be so sanguine any more.

To the pair of soft-cover books mentioned above, I can add James Thurber's "The Years with Ross," borrowed from my friend Heron's Key friend Barbara Pine.

I took 349 pictures of which 225 were deemed worthy of saving in an album. You'll be able to view the photos from this and earlier trips by going to any of the web pages for the courses that I taught, e.g., <http://volweb.utk.edu/~rmagid/index2.html>. If you scan down the page, you'll find the travelogues and a link to the pictures from this trip and earlier ones. If clicking on TRAVEL ALBUM doesn't work, you can go to tinyurl.com/3c549sc or <https://tinyurl.com/548ns62s>.

But wait! There's more. On December 31, our friend Barbara Pine sent us an article from The Guardian, entitled "Viking Orion: hundreds of passengers stranded on cruise ship off South Australia due to 'marine growth'" Say, what? Here are some details:

AAP reports hundreds of passengers stranded on a cruise ship off South Australia are hoping to set foot on dry land for the first time in seven days after the vessel was unable to dock at several ports due to a "marine growth" – reported to be a form of fungus – in the ship's hull.

The Viking Orion has not docked in a port since it cast off from Wellington in New Zealand on Boxing Day, according to ship tracking website VesselFinder.com.

The ship was reportedly denied permission to dock to have its hull cleaned in Christchurch, Dunedin, Hobart and Adelaide before Viking arranged for divers to remove the marine growth about 17 nautical miles off Victor Harbour in South Australia.

Wellington? Christchurch? Dunedin? These are ports that we're hoping to visit next week (January 16-18). Surely ... surely, our Regent ship won't be so negligent as to allow "marine growth" on its hull. (Spoiler alert - see pp. 10-13 for our adventures in nautical cleansing.)

One does have to wonder about Viking. Yes, it has river boats and open-sea ships of many varieties, and it has many dedicated clients, but if something bad is going to happen it seems to happen to them. In early December, the Antarctic-bound *Viking Polaris* was hit by a rogue wave which caused injury to four passengers and death for another. Last May, we learned on our Rhine-Danube cruise that a Viking boat so severely damaged a lock on the Danube that it was closed for nine days. And on our 2015 Rhine cruise, we learned that *Viking Sun* had been involved in an accident, the fourth accident involving a Viking boat in the past month. Am I relieved that all of our river cruising has been with Uniworld and Tauck? You bet!

Not only did we love our earlier visits to New Zealand and Australia (even the aborted one in 2020) but over the years we've become quite enamored of TV programs from down under. Favorites from Australia are comedies like *Rake*, *Offspring*, and *Heart Guy* (Doctor Doctor); and dramas like *Stateless*, *Janet King*, and *Secret City*. And from New Zealand we have *The Brokenwood Mysteries*, *My Life is Murder*, *Nothing Trivial*, *One Lane Bridge*, and *Under the Vines*.

With that lengthy preamble now concluded, we are ready to begin the tale of the 2023 visit to New Zealand and Australia on the Regent Seven Seas vessel *Explorer SS*.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8 TO TUESDAY, JANUARY 10

They say that travel is broadening. Whoever this "they" is/are, they weren't referring to our adventure today that takes us from Seattle to Los Angeles to Sydney to Auckland.

The day begins uneventfully, Beverly, who owns Beverly Tours, picks us up at 1:00 and delivers us to the airport at 1:45. So far, so good. An Alaska employee sees us struggling with the suitcases, the carry-ons, and the walker - he assists us in getting to the Alaska counter where he jumps the line and has us checked in, with our luggage bound for LAX, then SYD, and finally Auckland. We secure a wheelchair and pusher who gets us through security quickly. They just swab me but don't require that I walk through a scanner. At 2:25, we are at N Gate 12. So far so good!!

At this point, Lee realizes that the ticket agent had given us boarding passes for the Alaska flight but not for the Qantas flights from Los Angeles to Sydney and from Sydney to Auckland. The agent at gate N12 tells her that this is normal, that Qantas will issue the boarding passes when we get to LA. I arrange to gate-check my walker. (While at the gate, we see a New York Yankees cap, one of many that we'll encounter today.) In the waiting room for N12, there are numerous chairs reserved for wheelchair users. All, of course, are occupied by young, able-bodied people. Boo!

At 4:40, we board the plane. The jetway, fortunately, protects us from the rain that is coming down quite hard. I say goodbye to my walker, hoping that it and I will be reunited when we land in Los Angeles. On this Airbus A320, we have seats 2A and 2B. Once we're settled in, the chief flight attendant greets us, takes our names, and chats us up. Is this because we're VIPs? Hardly! She does this for all of the passengers in first-class. She also memorizes all of our names and uses them when she delivers drinks and food. I've never experienced this on any airline.

The plane's doors are closed at 4:40 and we are air-borne at 5:06. The captain warns about some bumpy segments, both on take-off and landing. Almost immediately, we are in the clouds - so much for having a window seat. I read a TIME magazine and the start of a New Yorker. The meal that we had pre-ordered is delivered at 5:50: a small salad, a bun with warm chicken, bacon, and pickled apples, which is better than it sounds. Aside from the personal interactions with the flight attendant, Alaska also gets high marks for excellent lighting - it's actually possible to read when *en route*. At 6:50, there is a break in the clouds and we can see lights on the ground. Our approach takes us over SoFi Stadium. We land at 7:11, 14 minutes ahead of schedule. So far, so good. (Hmm, I recall having said that just a few paragraphs ago.)

But now begins the first of three "Flustercucks"* that we will encounter before this very long day is ended.

*Yes, I know how to spell the word. I use this variant so as not to offend those with tender sensibilities. Later in this document, I'll use two other variants.

The plane taxis for a while and halts - as the captain explains, there is no gate available for us, a "punishment" for arriving early. We are finally assigned a gate and the plane's engines are shut off at 8:09. This leaves us less than two hours to get to the International Terminal for the flight to Sydney. There is a wheelchair waiting for me on the jetway, but it takes several minutes before the gate-checked walker makes its appearance.

I had assumed that we'd stay inside security as we make our way to the Qantas flight. Silly boy! Our pusher takes us outside the terminal where we wait in the chilly night-time air for the arrival of the van for people with disabilities. And we wait. And wait. The pusher assures us that she has been in contact with the van and that it would arrive shortly. And we wait. Lee and I are getting quite anxious about getting to the international terminal and we express this with increasing urgency to the pusher. Lee goes back into the building to see if an Alaska agent can do anything. No. We ask the pusher if she'll call a taxi for us. No. This is not good.

Finally ... finally she wheels us directly to the international terminal and to the Qantas gate where we get our boarding passes. An airport supervisor, who was about to go off duty, agrees to wheel us to security, but she's not allowed to proceed past that point. Unlike the minimal pat-down that I got in Seattle, here they insist that I walk through the scanner. I keep setting off alarms, so a TSA agent rudely rips my suspenders off, causing me to be in peril of losing my pants. (Everyone is relieved when this does not

happen.) But this is not the only time-consuming kerfuffle. One of Lee's bags has been flagged for deeper scrutiny. We were so rushed that she never had the chance to remove her clear plastic bag of "dangerous" liquids.

Upon leaving security, we get on an electric van whose driver zooms through the airport, yelling "Watch out" and "Give way." I tell him that he needs a horn. He says that he has one, but is not allowed to use it. Well, we get to the gate, check the walker, and finally are in Seats 12K and 12F on this Boeing 787 Dreamliner at 10:10. I have a window seat and Lee is across the aisle. Whew, we made it!

We see many TCU fans in the airport, all here (I assume) for the BCS Championship game at SoFi Stadium tomorrow. (As it turns out, they'll be very disappointed as they'll lose the game to Georgia by the embarrassing score of 65-7.) And, of course, we see many New York Yankee baseball caps. One is worn by a young girl who "doesn't know any better." As those of you who may have endured reading my earlier travelogues, I despair at the preponderance of these hateful articles of apparel in every country we've visited, whether in Europe or Japan or "down under." I won't repeat the explanation for my life-long hatred of the Yankees and everything associated with them, but if you're interested, you can read my screeds (e.g., in the Rhine–Danube 2022 travelogue, pp. 20-21.)

(Probably nobody cares to read this, but in the interest of full reporting, I will say that I took my evening medicines and used my catheter while the plane is on the ground.)

Whence cometh the name Qantas? I'll bet that you thought that Q is always followed by U, but not so. Consider QAnon (but not for too long). Also Q-Tips. And the wonderful theatrical piece Avenue Q. But what about the airline? Well, according to Wikipedia, that font of all knowledge:

It is the world's third-oldest airline still in operation, having been founded in November 1920. Qantas is an acronym of the airline's original name, Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services, as it originally served Queensland and the Northern Territory, and is popularly nicknamed "The Flying Kangaroo."

The flight attendants, male and female, all have Australian accents. Well, what did you expect? (Lee thinks that she heard a British accent for one of them.) Even before the doors are closed, we are asked to fill out an order for breakfast, to be served shortly before landing. My choice: orange juice, fruit salad, scrambled eggs, bacon, and roast tomatoes. (Also kale, but I refuse to mention that.)

The seat area is very spacious, with lots of places to store books, magazines, whatever. (This is in contrast to the United flight that we took last year from Chicago to Seattle.) The movie selection, however, is a real disappointment. Of the first-run films, the only one that holds any interest for me is "Amsterdam," but I decide not to watch it (or anything else).

There is a delay in leaving the gate, as the captain explains ... apologetically. The doors are finally closed and we are air-borne at 11:05, 35 minutes later than scheduled. There is a very amusing safety video, detailing the history of Qantas from the 1920s to the present. And you can watch it without having to board a flight: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLq8if1nkTM>

We place our orders for dinner: for me, green leaf salad, beef flat iron steak, mashed potatoes, peas and green beans, port wine sauce. I finish reading the TIME magazine and start on my Kindle Reader for "Klara and the Sun," a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. I read a great deal of it on this flight and on the next. I keep my watch on PST for most of the flight, changing to Australia time several hours from now. Dinner is served at 12:30 am.

At 1:45, I close my eyes, but sleep very little, finally giving up at 3:00. Over the next several hours, I go for several walks (and also use my catheter when the plane is not bumping and grinding). At 4:30, I'm served a coffee, a cookie, and a Dove Bar. At 5:00, I read some of The New Yorker and the Ishiguro novel. This

is a challenge, as the light in the ceiling is blocked by my body, and the small spotlight near the back of the seat offers only minimal help. While reading, I doze off a couple of times. At 6:45, I finally set my watch 19 hours ahead and change the day and date. I manage to do a NYT crossword in the meager light.

At 6:30 am (Australia time), we are served breakfast. Lee talks to the head flight attendant who assures her that my walker will be delivered promptly and that a wheelchair will be present when we land. We have less than an hour to get to the flight from Sydney to Auckland. She also says that we may not have to go through security but will have to go through immigration. The plane touches down at 8:05, but (as happened in Los Angeles) we are parked on the tarmac, waiting for a gate to open.

And now begins "Fustercluck"* number 2. We encounter a series of events that add to our delay in

*See the explanation on p. 3.

getting to the next flight: (1) When we get to the gate, the airplane's door is not opened for a long time. (2) There are no wheelchairs outside the plane, so I have to walk, unaided, toting my carry-on, the full length of the jetway. (3) My walker is also very slow in arriving. (4) And, contrary to what we were told, we do have to go through security; this time, my suspenders are not a problem, but a pair of manicure scissors (seezers in the local pronunciation) are confiscated. (5) A wheelchair pusher gets us to Gate 36 only to discover that the flight is delayed by a couple of hours. (Why did we rush??) At Gate 36, I nearly fall when I try to stand because the pusher had not locked the wheelchair in place. (6) The wheelchair pusher takes us to the Qantas lounge and promises another wheelchair when our flight is called. Lee brings some coffee and sweet rolls to our table while we sit through several additional delays, announced on the P.A. Delay upon delay occur - during this time, a "later" flight leaves for Auckland. (Again, I take advantage of being on firm ground by deploying my catheter at 12:15.) (7) Finally, a woman at the desk in the lounge calls, yet again, for a wheelchair and pusher - one arrives with two wheelchairs on a motorized frame and, although she keeps saying that she's going to be fired for driving it, takes us and another wheelchair user to the gate at 12:35 after nearly everyone else is already on board.

The plane is an Airbus A330 with 1-2-1 seating. Lee and I have window seats, 6A and 7A. The walker is taken on the plane and brought to the front where it is stowed. The doors are closed at 12:40 and we are air-borne at 1:00. I advance my watch two hours for New Zealand time. At 4:00, lunch is served: a stewed piece of beef, potatoes, green beans. There is a chocolate cake with cherries, much too rich for me so I eat only half. We descend through heavy clouds and are on the ground at 5:05, more than two hours after we had expected.

And, now, begins a series of events that make up "Custerfluck"* No. 3. (1) I had assumed that we'd get

*See the explanation on p. 3.

off the plane quickly, as our seats are at the rear of business class, just in front of the door where we entered. Not so! They are using the forward door and we are instructed to remain in our seats until everyone is off the plane. Obedient persons that we are, we wait, then head to the front to take charge of my walker. (2) The wheelchair pusher takes us only a short distance, delivering us to an electric van. Lee (plus the walker) takes one seat, I take another, and an employee takes the third. The disabled person from the plane never arrives even though we wait for her. (3) The van takes us partway (not at the great speed as we had on the other van) and we get to Passport Control where we turn in our entry document (filled out on the plane) and passport. (4) Another wheelchair pusher takes us to Carousel No. 2 where luggage from our flight is supposed to be. Bags go around and around, but ours are not among them. The pusher, who can certainly speak and understand English (but gives the impression of total disinterest in our dilemma), refuses to check other carousels (in the event that our luggage arrived on the earlier flight from Sydney). (5) Finally, I convince her to take us to the Missing Luggage area where she is reluctant (why?) to engage the person behind the window. I give her the sheet with the stapled baggage tags and ask her to have the employee scan them. Finally Lee, who had been monitoring the arrival of bags,

arrives and takes charge. (6) The agent fills out a Property Irregularity (indigestion?) Report, using the baggage numbers, our names, a description of the bags, and instructions to deliver them to Hotel Cordis. He does a search and tells us that the bags are still in Los Angeles, but are on a flight to Melbourne and then to Auckland. (7) Even though we have no luggage, we have to go through Customs which we get through in an expedited way, despite very long lines for others. We exit and are delighted to find a Regent representative, still waiting for us.

A driver takes us to the hotel. The walk to his car is unpleasant - it is rainy, very windy, and cold (16°C) - this is summer?? We arrive at the Cordis, a good four hours later than what we had expected. Our room is pleasant, but with minimal amenities. And, of course, we are without necessities such as fresh clothes, medicines, reading matter, toiletries, etc. Nevertheless, we make do with what we do have in our carry-ons. It's fortunate that I packed another pair of underpants, although no socks or shirts. Most serious, for me, is that I have only five catheters.

We describe our dilemma to the woman at reception - she seems quite dumb and uncomprehending. We do all speak English, no? Exhausted, we go to bed at 10:00. And then the damned alarm clock goes off at 2:00 am. (I'm guilty of having set it incorrectly.) We get back to sleep and finally rise at about 7:00.

From my 2010 travelogue about New Zealand:

Why does New Zealand have 3 time zones? The north and south islands are in one time zone, but the Chatham Islands, located about 860 kilometers (534 miles) east of Christchurch, have a separate time zone, which is 45 minutes ahead of mainland New Zealand. Tokelau, an archipelago in the Pacific and a dependency of New Zealand, brings the total to three time zones.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11

The day is cloudy and rainy, much like yesterday. I take a much needed shower to cleanse this smelly, filthy body, but still have to put on worn socks and a soiled shirt. Before breakfast, we check in at the Regent desk and get some information, although the women at the table are not Regent employees but, rather, contractors. They assure us that Regent has much experience with cases like ours and that everything will work out. Well, that's an easy prediction - she didn't say that things *would* work out well.

We go to a buffet breakfast. I have orange juice, a fruit cup, scrambled eggs, sausages, mushrooms, toast, and coffee. We return to our room (for computer use and reading), but leave around 11:00 to allow housekeeping to enter. We sit in the lobby, which is unbearable noisy. Really really really deafening. I return to the room to see if the maids have finished and to retrieve the report that we filled out at the missing luggage counter. But, damn it, my key doesn't work. I prevail on a housekeeper to let me in (she's reluctant) to retrieve the form and return to Lee in the lobby. Together, we go to the desk (apparently we need new keys) and then back to the room, after having ascertained that the hotel's concierge is about as dim as some of the wheelchair pushers we've encountered.

Ready for "clusterfuck" (spelled correctly, this time, see p. 3) No. 4? There then ensues an awful afternoon consisting of: (1) trying to call the lost luggage department to see if they have an update - either the call won't go through or it cuts off after completing or goes to voice mail where no messages can be left because it is full; (2) sending an email to the baggage handlers - no reply; (3) going to the internet under "Qantas lost luggage" where I can track (supposedly) where our bags are - it seems to work, up to a point, but never gives useful information; (4) interacting with Stefan via numerous emails to see if he can do anything; (5) trying to call the company that does transfers from the airport to the hotel to the ship; most of this is wasted time, although Lee does get back some text messages that really say nothing; (6) talking to the Regent people about what to do if we still have no luggage tomorrow; the woman gives me the number of the hotel doctor whom I will contact about my shortage of catheters; (7) talking again to the useless concierge.

Well, it did keep us busy for some five hours, at the end of which we know no more than we did at the beginning. So we go to dinner. The main dining room is closed (actually it isn't -the web site was wrong) so we go to the hotel's bar which sports the name "Our Land is Alive" where we have hamburgers. Like the rest of this hotel, it is unbearably noisy. What is it with New Zealanders?

Well, no luggage has arrived, so I call the hotel doctor to explain my catheter predicament. He calls back with the news that he has no catheters at home but does have some in his clinic which he plans to deliver to our hotel room ... tonight!! And so he does, at about 10:30. The catheters, 10 in all, are quite different from the ones I'm accustomed to - very flexible tube, small inlet hole - and he supplies a tube of lubricant to coat them. When I tell him that my urologist at home had suggested reusing catheters after washing them, he was most dubious, but he did write a prescription for an antibiotic.* He's not the most

*His first choice was augmentin, but I told him the story of our last visit to New Zealand in which augmentin (specifically the clavulanic acid in the blend) gave me three days of diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. He pooh-poohed (so to speak) my problem. He said that it would cause no problem as long as I took the medicine while eating food. I rejected his advice, which made him unhappy.

personable of individuals, but he did take the time to get the catheters from the clinic and to come to the hotel. His name: Peter Boot! No wonder he's so sullen.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12

We had gone to bed at 11:00. I awoke at 2:30 and was unable to fall back asleep because I was musing over all of the items (clothing, medications, toiletries, books) in the missing suitcase. I did manage to all asleep at about 4:00 and stay asleep until the alarm at 6:15.

After my morning ablutions (I love that word), I put my carry-on outside the door for it to be collected and taken to the ship. It is with some trepidation that I do this, aware that the small suitcase carries what little remains of my worldly belongings. Before breakfast, we go to the desk to beg for some extra time before checking out. With great reluctance and gnashing of teeth, our wish is granted.

We take a taxi to Westfield* Shopping Centre (New Zealand spelling) which opens at 9:00, just as we

*I wonder if the Westfield Centres in New Zealand are owned by the same person who owns those in Australia, namely a distant (very distant) relative named Magid. If you'd like to consult my Australian travelogue from 2014, you could read about my visit to "Dr. Sam," who asked me if I was in Australia to visit relatives. If only ... A very positive feature of this building is that the employees and shoppers represent a multi-ethnic society: white, brown, yellow, black, indigenous, European, etc. etc. etc. A negative feature is that there is a dearth of dogs, both in the building and on city sidewalks. This does not speak well of this population.

arrive. Inside the building, we find a bank with an ATM where I could get 200 NZD. Our next goal is to find a pharmacy, where Lee can buy some toothpaste and shampoo. We then look for the large department store Farmers where we can purchase clothing items. The center (or centre) is huge, filled with all sorts of name-brand, high fashion stores on three levels. Farmers is the largest chain of department stores in the country.

First we go shopping for me: socks (a four-pack), underwear (a two-pack), knit shirts (two of them), shorts, and a sun hat. This is accomplished in under thirty minutes. We deposit my intended purchases with a clerk at the check-out counter, with whom I have "fascinating" conversations while Lee goes off to make her selections. Hours later (OK, only an hour later) she returns with her arms filled with outer garments and unmentionables. The total cost: 719 NZD!!

Leaving the building, we have trouble finding a taxi (there are none at the location where our earlier driver

had indicated) and it has begun to rain, hard at times. Finally, Lee spots a taxi and hails the driver. We get back to the hotel at 11:10. The rain has abated, somewhat, but the ambience is still hot and humid.

We rest for a short while in our extended visit room (no emails or phone calls about the suitcases had come), then head downstairs to settle the bill. Breakfast is free, so our only charges are 100 NZD for last night's dinner and a whopping 417 NZD for Peter Boot's visit and for the catheters.

We get on the bus at about 1:00 and arrive at the cruise ship terminal. Next to the terminal, we recognize the Ferry Building, where we had eaten dinner in 2010, and the nearby car carrying ship which Lee had assumed was a building, until it started to move. This could not be explained by jet lag.

The terminal is large, but its main characteristic is a floor made entirely of wooden planks. This is in keeping with its nautical connection but, also, is a detriment for people (like me!) who have walkers. First, we fill out health information forms and a query about our COVID vaccination status. Of course, they don't believe us, so we have to show proof of receiving the vaccine and boosters. We have our pictures taken and are issued key cards in cases. Everything has proceeded smoothly until we get to the long, snaking line to pass through security. I'm asked to remove my laptop and place it, alone, in a bin. I then avoid walking through a sensor but, still, I am wanded and padded down. There is no embarrassment caused by my pants' falling down when my suspenders are removed.

We are then permitted to enter the ship, the Regent Seven Seas Explorer, walking first along two very long covered walkways before getting to the gangway and onto the vessel. There is an offer of champagne (which we reject) and the parting words, "Good on ya!" (a familiar expression in these here parts). We are immediately "captured" and taken to Deck 4 where we shown our muster station (to be used in an emergency). The ship's employee then escorts us to Deck 11 (because the rooms are not available yet*) where we can have lunch at La Veranda. I'm not particularly



*This is not correct. The Explorer Suite (like ours) and similar suites are ready.

hungry, but Lee and I take seats at the outdoor Pool Grill where she has a Reuben sandwich and wine, while I eat a hamburger and sip a beer. While seated we hear the announcement that *all* of the cabins are now available to guests.

We head to Suite 1005 where we meet our butler, Dhiraj, and stewardess, Nina. Unlike the situation on the smaller RSSC Navigator, last October, the entry door and the door to the bathroom are wide enough to allow easy passage for the walker. The entire suite is beautiful: subdued, but elegant, well-appointed and with lots and lots of storage space, shelves, drawers, etc. (It would be nice if we had some clothing to put in them.)



We head to the Reception Desk where we report the problem with our suitcases. We talk with Elena (alas, a thick Eastern European accent). Lee fills out a very long report (not really needed since all of the information is also on the report that was generated at the airport) and we are told that the Executive Concierge, Catherina Sandu, will use all of her contacts to try to locate the luggage. To ease our pain, we are offered a 25% discount on purchases made onboard. While Lee is talking to Elena, I go to Destination Services to ask if my walker would impede my being able to use the tender on tomorrow's excursion and to board the boat that will take us around the islands. I receive a positive response, as long as I'm capable of walking.

In the late afternoon, I put on a fresh shirt; after all, I had been wearing this one since last Sunday! A special offer (for those of us without luggage) from the cruise ship is that we can set out a laundry bag late in the evening with the promise that the laundered goods would be returned in the early morning. So we do exactly that! Lee and I collect our dirty clothes and set them out for pickup.

Before dinner, I try to surf the internet and send email messages, but the connection is unbearably slow, causing web sites to load very slowly (or not at all) and messages to get hung up without being sent. We had experienced very poor WiFi connectivity on earlier cruises, but none as bad as this. Our butler, Dhiraj, assures us that it will be better once we're at sea. This is contrary to expectations, but I'm willing (and hopeful) to see if he's correct.

As for the missing suitcases saga, Stefan has found VP for Menzies Aviation (the people who handle baggage in Auckland) on Facebook and is challenging him to do something ... anything ... to get our goods returned to us. We have dinner at Compass Rose* and it's as good as I recall from earlier cruises.

*The food at all of the ship's restaurants is excellent. Equally pleasing is the precision with which food is brought to the dining room from the kitchen and distributed without making an error. One of the younger staff arrives, carrying (with one hand) a large tray on which are seven or eight main courses on heavy plates covered with domes. How does his/her wrist not break? 'Tis a mystery. This tray is then deposited onto a service station where the individual plates are carried to the correct passenger.

I'll list what I ordered, but this time only - rest assured that future evenings will be as good as this one. I eat shrimp cocktail, Bibb lettuce salad, chicken supreme, and New York cheese cake. Back in our cabin, the internet connection is still very spotty, so we give up and go to bed at 10:30.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13

Friday the thirteenth. Uh-oh! We rise at 6:30 and at 7:30 are at The Coffee Connection for a light breakfast: bagel, corn flakes, juice, and coffee. The hours from 8:00 to 10:00 am are for my consultations with the medical staff, so we arrive exactly at 8:00 at the clinic in Deck 3.

We know this facility very well. On a 2018 cruise on this very ship in France, Spain, and Portugal, Lee had a serious mishap. While docked in Bilbao, we were having breakfast in La Veranda. Lee had finished eating, but went back to the food area to get another sweet roll. Big mistake! She tripped and crashed into a table or chair, creating a huge gash around her right eye and an extraordinarily painful right arm. Medical personnel appeared almost immediately and whisked her, in a wheelchair, to the clinic. A very competent doctor stitched the wound to staunch the bleeding and then, with the assistance of two strong-armed staff, wrestled her shoulder back into place. They had already ascertained, using x-ray equipment on board, that there was no bone break but a dislocation.

Fast forward to 2023. My purpose is to get a supply of my prescription medicines in the event that our suitcases never arrive; and to get some catheters. I fill out a medical history form and give the nurse a list of my prescription meds. I then meet with Dr. Rowyn, not the same person who attended to Lee in 2018. It's only later that I discover that Rowyn is her first name, not her last. She is Dr. Rowyn Las Pinas Pangga; and her nurse is Maria Czarina Genovea Junsay.

As for the catheters, the only ones that she has are the Urological Foley brand that Dr. Boot supplied. I tell her that I had difficulty using them because the tubes are so flexible. I also say that I recall my urologist's saying that the catheters that I've been using can be cleaned and re-used. She is not especially happy with that. As for my meds, she is able to supply all except pantoprazole for which she substitutes omeprazole. The only other adjustments made had to do with dosage. For example, I'd been taking 25 mcg tablets of levothyroxine. She has 100 mcg tablets, so she cuts a few into fourths.

Although the internet connection is weak, I manage to send a message (via MyChart) to my urologist,

Christopher Arroyo, asking if my memory was correct that he once suggested washing catheters and re-using them. A reply from Sarah, his nurse, came almost immediately: "You can use hot water and vinegar (sic) to clean them."

There is an announcement on the PA from the ship's captain, Rosario Giovanni Vasta, a native of Sicily, that the authorities in New Zealand have determined that our ship's hull is covered with alien organic materials, including barnacles, and must be taken out of territorial waters to be cleaned. As a result, the excursion to Bay of Islands is cancelled. The captain is hard to understand, but immediately over the PA we hear from Andy Heath, the cruise director, who repeats (in unaccented English) what we had just heard. Isn't Capt. Vasta annoyed by this? Apparently not, as this "song-and-dance" routine will be replicated throughout the cruise. This has resonance with the problems of the Viking Orion, described on p. 2, which was not allowed to dock in Australia or New Zealand over a two-week period.

Yes, we had a good laugh about the Viking Orion (and other ships, such as Cunard's Queen Elizabeth) with similarly fouled hulls but hubris demands that we now find ourselves in a similar situation. We learn that our ship had supposedly been certified* by the New Zealand authorities as recently as January 3. So,

*Last week, the Seven Seas Explorer (55,250 gross tons) submitted pre-arrival documentation to New Zealand. According to Hallett, "It didn't meet our biofouling standards because of higher than allowed levels of algae, barnacles, tube worms, and potential oysters present." Potential oysters???

<https://tinyurl.com/57vtp9j5>

we wonder, how could it have been infested in such a short time? And, as we'll learn in the coming days, January 13 will not be the only day when we are banished to international waters so that divers could scrape the hull clean. Worth listening to is the New Zealand official at the following web site - not a New Zealand accent but, unmistakably from Scotland: <https://tinyurl.com/bdem73aj>

We attend a lecture by Warren Fahey, "The Māori People of New Zealand." He is described as a cultural historian, the author of twenty books, and a stage actor and producer. The talk is entertaining and informative. New Zealand is the last significant land mass to be colonized by humans. The Polynesians who came first called it Long White Cloud, but it didn't acquire its current name until Abel Tasman's visit. He observed the island from his ship, but never out foot on land. The Polynesians arrived in long boats. They had a diet of birds and fish, there being no mammals until white settlers came later. The birds, both massive and tiny, were easy prey - many had evolved without wings, as they had had no natural predators. The Māoris, a name given to them by the white colonists, proved to be fierce warriors - they adorned their bodies with tattoos, a practice followed by their ancestors, today.

Tasman and the Dutch arrived in 1646 followed by Englishman James Cook in 1708. By 1830, the white population exceeded 10K. Māori customs, all originating from centuries ago, are the Poi Poi dance by females and the Haka dance by males - the latter is used to welcome people as well as to scare them off. Today, the demographics of the populations 17% Māori, 64% European, 5% Asian, and 14% other Islanders. A charming tradition is the nose-to-nose greeting, something that we're unlikely to personally experience.

During the talk and throughout the day, we hear (and sometimes feel) the vigorous scraping by the divers who are under the water.

Well, we won't perish from hunger. Following the lecture, we have coffee and a sweet roll in the Coffee Connection. Lee then asks our butler to bring a plate of prawns and another of spring rolls at 5:30 today. We go to La Veranda for lunch, but I'm not hungry. (I wonder why.) Nevertheless, Lee brings me a baguette with ham, cheese, and mustard. Both in La Veranda and other venues throughout the ship, light jazz is piped in - I find it pleasant, except when an organ takes over the melodies.

At 3:00, Lee attends a lecture, "From City Girl to Cattle Queen," by Lorraine Gordon. I decline, but Lee

says that it was entertaining and informative. We are notified that we now have these on-board credits: \$100 from Regent, \$150 per person from Virtuoso, \$250 per person for the cancelled excursions, and a 25% discount on purchases on the ship. What a shame that they can't be converted into cash! It can, however, be applied to the \$260 bottle of Lagavulin that we asked Dhiraj to acquire.

At 5:30 our canapes are delivered. There follows an announcement by the captain, followed by the "translation" into English, by Andy. There is still one section of the hull to be cleaned, but they will seek permission from the New Zealand authorities to dock at Tauranga for tomorrow's excursions. At 6:30, we go to Compass Rose for dinner where we share a table with Bonnie and Kyle, mother and son, from College Station. I ask Dhiraj to procure some white vinegar for me. What he brings is a drinking glass with plastic wrap across the top. I'll ask for a smaller and more suitable version tomorrow.

We go to bed at 11:30.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14

It was a restless night. I tossed and turned from 2:30 to 3:30, worrying about our missing suitcases and the important (and expensive) items, clothing, medicines, books, etc. in them. We are docked in Tauranga. Breakfast at La Veranda consists, for me, of juice, a bagel, corn flakes, and coffee. As I look around the dining room, the words "Cruisers so white" come to mind. I think that there is one Black couple, one Oriental couple, and that's it!

The captain (in his heavily accented English) and Andy (in unaccented English) tell us that we must leave Tauranga at 3:00 and head back to international waters, 35 miles off shore, where cleaning of the hull will continue tomorrow. Thus, Sunday's excursions are cancelled (no visit to Napier for us). Lee sends an email to Stefan, inquiring if he has any information about our luggage. We ask Dhiraj to provide a smaller bottle of vinegar, capped, and with much less liquid.

We receive a bill for my medical visit yesterday: \$149 for the doctor's fee, \$107.97 for the prescription medicines.

Today is sunny and mild. At 9:00, we board a bus for the excursion to explore Māori culture. The excellent guide, on board the bus, is Ruby. She is 19 years old and a student in a university nursing program; she is also a mother. The bus driver (whose name I can't recall) is excellent and keeps up a humorous patter about the neighborhoods we traverse during the first part of the excursion before turning things over to Ruby.

Before we get off the bus, Ruby goes over the items on a sheet that she had distributed. On one side is information about pronunciation of Māori words, a brief glossary of important words, and the lyrics to a Māori song that she leads us in singing. Her voice is excellent. I can't say as much for the occupants of the bus. On the reverse side of the information sheet is information about Māori culture: protocols, customs, the traditional greeting ritual (consisting of a speech by a woman and a Haka-like dance by a "warrior" followed by a poi-poi dance by a woman). Among the other protocols is a formal greeting from a Māori



followed by a response by one of our crew, then a procession consisting of women in front (men in back), then another procession with the order of men and women reversed.

We arrive at the Māori village. First, we get to eat! There is coffee or tea, cookies, and little cakes. We then enter an ancestral home (shoes off! except for those of us who receive dispensation on account of

our infirmities) where guides, both female and male, talk about the house, the carvings, the meaning of various artifacts, etc. I am sitting next to a middle-aged flower child, whose long grey hair has strands of something that glistens. She is wearing large rings and pendulous earrings. How weird. Following this, we go to a school house where teenage boys and girls sing traditional songs and then invite members of the audience (the brave extroverts) to accompany them in traditional dances (poi poi for the women, haka for the men). It is a delightful experience.

The bus, on the way back to the ship, climbs to a neighborhood with excellent views of the water and surrounding hills, then returns us to the ship at 1:45. While onboard the bus, Lee receives a message from Stefan indicating that our luggage has been found (shout Hallelujah, brother!), and will be sent to Christchurch where we'll be on Tuesday. When back on the ship, Lee goes to the reception desk to determine if they have, independently, received the news about our bags. They hadn't. We then go to the Pool Grill for ice cream and coffee.

Every time that I see the name of this cruise ship company, Regent Seven Seas, I tend to misread the first word as Reagent. Once a chemist, always a chemist!

Back in our suite, the internet connection is awful. In fact, it is unusable. Perhaps it will get better once we are in open waters, as did happen when we left Auckland. We sit on our balcony for a while, then leave for a 5:00 reception for Virtuoso travelers. We sit with John and Laurel (from White Salmon, WA). I'm unable to hear Lee's conversation with John, but mine with Laura is deeply edifying (and not in a good way). Although she claims that she and John are natives of Washington state, she presents as a southern belle from a family that had servants. (Shame on me for making such a judgment.) White Salmon,* which I'd not heard of, is on the Columbia River, across from Hood River, OR. Laurel went to

*Later, I had the opportunity to look at Google Maps. It turns out that we *had* been in White Salmon, many years ago, when we were driving in Oregon on the south side of the Columbia River. There was a bridge from Fort Hood to Washington State. I said to Lee, "I've never been in Washington" ... so we crossed on the bridge and then turned back. So *that's* White Salmon!

college (I forget where) but "finished" at Katherine Gibbs School. He accent and demeanor hint of aristocratic southernness (is that a word). She loves White Salmon, but complains it's being ruined by New Yorkers who try to impose their New York ways. Well!

Because we are still sitting in the room where the Virtuoso reception is, we "miss" the 6:00 mad dash through the halls by members of the crew. A pity! At 6:30, we go to Compass Rose for dinner where we share our table with Carol and Austin (from Orlando). He is a commercial real estate developer. We head to bed at 10:30.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15

Uh-oh. I awake at 6:00 with severe diarrhea. Why?

At 9:00, I visit Catherina Sandu, the Executive Concierge. Alas, I was beaten to her desk by Laura from White Salmon. She has many many complaints: about bread not being delivered to her table at Sette Mari, about poorly prepared lamb chops, about nothing worth buying in the boutique, about how Regent's service has gone downhill from its lofty position, about ... about ... about What she was really doing was trying to get Sandu to give her a cash refund instead of a shipboard credit. She was not satisfied with the answer of No, nor with the offer to apply the credit to a future cruise. When I finally get to ask my question, I am *assured* that Regent employees will get our bags at Christchurch and not allow the luggage to be taken on yet another plane to goodness-knows-where. I tell her that our U.S.-based travel agent had the information that the suitcases were arriving today, via Air New Zealand, Flight 547 at 3:25.

After breakfast at The Coffee Connection, we go to another lecture by Warren Fahey: "Bush Tucker,

Rheumatism, and Buckets of Fruit." It is not as informative as his first talk, but it does conclude with his singing a bush-worker's song. Following the lecture, we head to the Cruise Consultant to book a second reservation at Prime 7. Then it's on to the Pool Grill for outdoor seating and an all-German lunch: bratwurst, kielbasa (sp??), sauerkraut, goulash, a bread dumpling, and a pretzel. Burp!

While eating lunch, we hear another announcement from the captain, made clearer by Andy's repeating it. The divers are finished for today, but work remains on cleaning the hull. "All marine organisms must be removed, say the New Zealand health officials, even if they are part of the normal life process." They? The authorities? In a further announcement, he says that it is now halftime in the Seahawks-49ers playoff game with Seattle in front, 17-16. Alas, upon returning to our room and watching much of the second half on TV, Seattle's miracle season comes to a crashing and humiliating end, 41-23.

The internet in the room is painfully slow ... and extremely frustrating. At 3:00, Lee goes (alone) to another Lorraine Gordon lecture, "The Regenerative Agriculture Journey." Our ship is presently 35 miles off the coast of New Zealand in international waters. We are facing north, which is *not* the direction in which we'd like to sail. To the east, we can see White Island, the notorious site of a 2019 disaster when 22 people from a cruise ship were killed when the volcano on the island suddenly exploded. Wisps of smoke are still coming out of its crater. On our 2020 visit, that one that was cancelled before we could get from Australia to New Zealand, the original itinerary included a visit to White Island. The final itinerary omitted this destination.

In late afternoon, we receive a phone call from Catherina Sandu, the Executive Concierge. The suitcases are in Christchurch and will be released to the Port Authority where a Regent employee will receive them. That's great news, if it's accurate ... and if the ship will actually stop at Christchurch. At 6:00, we go to Setter Mari for dinner. We tell the maitre d' that we'd like to share, but when nobody comes to sit with us, we order our dinner and begin eating. Very late, a couple does arrive. We should have rejected them, but we are just too polite. They are Janet and Ken, from Sarasota, FL. She is a world-class motor-mouth, rarely stopping to breathe or order food, or eat. Thus, our stay in the restaurant extends an hour beyond what would have been the case had they not sat with us. Ken is a physicist who had an interesting career. He was the supervisor, in 1975, when the Browns Ferry nuclear disaster occurred. Browns Ferry is located in Northern Alabama, near the Tennessee border. A workman, using a candle to check for leaks, inadvertently set some insulation on fire; the fire spread and came close to causing a reactor melt-down, which was narrowly avoided by flooding the units with water. http://www.cnr.org/browns_ferry.html

It's 9:45 when we finally escape and return to our cabin. During dinner, the captain announces (and is "translated" by Andy) that cleaning operations are suspended because of darkness. They will resume tomorrow. As a result, the visit to Napier is cancelled; instead, the ship will anchor near Gisborne - tenders will bring people to shore, although there are no formal excursions.

MONDAY, JANUARY 16

We rise at 7:00. I go to the health clinic for more catheters - I ask for four but they can only supply three. So this means that I'll have to do what Sarah advised: wash the used catheters from home with very hot water and disinfect them with vinegar. We get an announcement by the captain and Andy: we will remain anchored off Gisborne while cleaning operations continue. (Why do I have images of The Flying Dutchman, the ghost ship of myth, whose fate was to sail the seas without ever being able to come to port?) We have tentative approval from the New Zealand authorities to re-enter the country's territorial waters. There will be an announcement, later today, of which ports we will visit and on which days. I pray (not that I ever really pray) that we *will* stop at Christchurch.

There is fog this morning, but as it lifts we are greeted with a sunny, warm day. Breakfast at La Veranda is my regular: juice, corn flakes, a bagel, and coffee. The noise level in the restaurant is painful, a combination of loud voices, clattering dishes, and that awful light jazz with its organ. After breakfast, we go to the spacious library on Deck 11. Lee heads down to talk with the Executive Concierge who assures her,

yes she does, that we'll stop in Wellington tomorrow and Christchurch the next day, each a day later than on the original schedule. (Unless a port visit is cancelled, we'll be in Melbourne a day later than what we told Jock. We shall see.)

We read in the library, pick up the day's Mensa quiz (they are getting easier with each passing day), and then do two non-strenuous laps on the jogging track on Deck 12. Lunch at the Pool Grill follows: a cheeseburger and fries for me, a Reuben for Lee. Back in the room, the internet connection is terrible - and, I'm unable to load NPR.org, just as was the case on our Regent cruise last October. It's apparently a security issue. What? Our minds are going to be polluted by liberal drivel from NPR? Because I can't get to the Will Shortz Sunday morning puzzles, I ask Steve to do the honors.

At 3:00, there is a call from the Reception desk, confirming that the suitcases will be delivered to the ship on Wednesday when we dock in Christchurch. PLEASE, LET IT BE TRUE. At 4:00, the captain, with "help" from Andy, announces that we *will* be in Wellington tomorrow and in Christchurch the following day. All of the planned Wellington excursions will be done, but the times are likely to be changed from the earlier schedule. At 3:50, Lee goes off to have her hair washed and blow-dried, Be still, my jealous heart!

We set sail at 4:15; and at 5:15, Dhiraj brings the laundry that we had sent this morning. Because of our problem with not enough clean clothes, Regent allowed us to get expedited laundry service. I also ask him what is wrong with the magnifying mirror at the cosmetic table in the bedroom - it is so distorted that it's like a funhouse mirror at an amusement park. He agrees and says that he'll report it.

At 6:30, we go to Prime 7 for dinner. Lee had requested a table for four, but instead we have one for six. Seated before us are Carol and Ken from Tallahassee - she is a retired special ed teacher and he was in finance. Then come David and ??? (she is so soft-spoken that neither Lee nor I catch her name) from Newcastle, which is north of Sydney; he is a retired orthodontist. At a table near us is a most unusual-looking woman. Spackled and plastered would be a fair description of her face. There were probably ample injections of Botox. Her hair is blond (probably not natural) and is styled with two big poufs on either side, a Princess Leia look. Lee dubs her Debbie Doll.

Because the revised time for our Wellington excursion tomorrow, Lee places an order for room service breakfast.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17

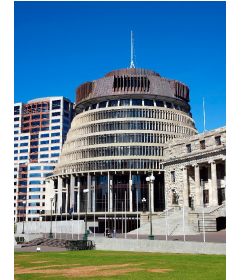
As requested, Dhiraj delivers a tray of food at 7:00. For me, my standard: juice, corn flakes, bagel, and coffee; for Lee, French toast. Along with breakfast is an envelope from the health center, indicating that I've run up a bill of \$44.31 for the catheters. I will be using the last of those catheters this morning. Following that (and until our suitcases arrive) it will be the washed/vinegared catheters from home

I've neglected to mention that, on every day, Andy has read an announcement written by New Zealand health authorities, warning against bringing any food to shore. The warning also appears in every issue of Passages: "New Zealand has strict biosecurity laws. Before leaving the cruise ship ... all food must be left onboard ... This includes items such as fresh fruit, sandwiches, yoghurt, milk, bacon, ham, sausages, eggs, and honey." The restriction even applies to commercial bottles of water which Regent doesn't even make available. Violation of these rules can result in a \$400 fine.

We are on the bus at 9:00. Just as was true on the visit to the Māori village, seats at the front of the vehicle are reserved for me. Our driver and guide is David, an interesting guy who has dabbled in music, playing piano with Charlie Watts (from the Rolling Stones) and in the U.S.: blues in New Orleans, Memphis, and Chicago, and here in Wellington. Our drive begins through an ugly warehouse and small store neighborhood (although Lee and I recognize the parking lot in which we dumped our rental car in 2010 before getting on the Inter Island Ferry to the south island.) But shortly we're in a much more scenic area, alongside the waters across which we can see downtown Wellington. We stop at a historic light-house (I

don't bother getting off the bus); at 10:30 we are at Pencarrow Lodge. It's a handsome place. We sit at long tables where we can consume coffee or tea, small sandwiches and slides, cookies and pastries. (Debbie Doll, in casual clothes today, looks just as weird as she did at Prime 7. We also see our Flower Child who is sporting a T-shirt saying *Spiritual Gangster*.) Oh, yes, there is a man with a New York Yankees cap. Boooo! Getting around the inside of the lodge is difficult for me because it is on several levels, connected sometimes by wooden steps, other times by large stones,

The main purpose of this stop is to meet the owner and his wife, Mike and Jane Curtis, who are farmers (I might call them ranchers) with a huge herd of sheep. The man gives a long talk (sitting in my walker, I'm almost out of sound and sight range) about his dogs, two of whom are with him, and how they herd sheep. The animals then demonstrate their technique and ability. It's fascinating - and would be more so had I been able to get closer. Back on the bus, we return to Wellington. David drives us past a Parliament building called the beehive - and returns us to the ship at 1:20.



At the Pool Grill, I have a bowl of ice cream and coffee; Lee has a salad and a pina colada. While seated, I work rapidly through today's Mensa quiz sheet; and provide hints for a woman at an adjacent table who is stumped by some of the questions. As I said, day by day these puzzles are getting easier.

At 5:00, Dhiraj delivers canapes: a cheese-and-cracker plate and shrimp with cocktail sauce. While we are consuming these delectables, the captain (and, of course, Andy) announce a new schedule: tomorrow we'll be in Christchurch (they'd better not change that!!) and on January 19 they've added full day at Timaru. ("Timaru and Timaru and Timaru, creeps in this petty pace from day to day.") January 20 will be spent in Dunedin. But then, some significant changes: we will *not* be cruising Dusky, Doubtful, and Milford Sounds (apparently our ship is not "clean" enough for those pristine waters) nor will we stop in Dunedin. Also cancelled is the excursion stop in Tasmania. We'll be in Melbourne on January 23, on the day originally scheduled, followed by Geelong and Sydney as planned. To make up for all of this turmoil, they are giving a future cruise credit of 30% on any Regent cruise within the next 24 months. To be precise - the discount is on the cruise portion of the total cost - the airfare is not reduced. (Two days from now, Lee will ask at the Reception Desk for the breakdown on the price, but could get no clear answer beyond, "Ask your travel agent.")

We have dinner (alone) at Compass Rose. While seated, I notice that my left wrist has a nasty-looking sore that is bleeding a little. I must have scraped it, somewhere, on our walk to the restaurant. When we return to the room, I wash the wound and apply a band-aid. After using the internet and reading, we go to bed.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18

We dock in Lyttelton at 7:15, well ahead of schedule. A cloudy day, the sun will break through shortly, The sore on my wrist has bled through the band-aid, so I apply a fresh one. Breakfast is at The Coffee Connection - I'm not hungry, so my meal consists of juice, a bagel, and coffee. We had hoped against hope that we would find suitcases in our room when we returned from breakfast. Alas, that does not occur, so we board the bus for the day's tour at 8:45.

A CATASTROPHE OF MONUMENTAL PROPORTIONS! No, not the suitcases - they are a catastrophe of earth-shattering proportions. No, my notes on today's excursion are lost, gone, vanished. Why? Because later this evening we will go to a piano recital in the Constellation Theater (*vide infra*, as we say in the chem biz) where I will stupidly leave my note sheet and my Parker T-Ball

Jotter on a little table where we are sitting. I won't realize their absence until about 9:30 tonight, but will be unable to return to the scene of the "crime" because another musical performance is taking place. Tomorrow morning, before going to breakfast, we'll return to the theater, but of course no pen and no precious sheet of notes can be found. I'll report the missing pen to the Reception Desk, but they will probably be so pissed off at us for our screaming at them later today (concerning the suitcases) that they're probably going to keep my pen.

[So, without my written notes, the following is constructed from memory] We board the bus at 8:45. As was true on the previous excursion, seats in the front of the bus have been reserved for us. I am not the only passenger needing assistance. There is a woman on crutches who uses a walker similar to mine. And there is an otherwise able-bodied young man who has no use of his legs. He uses an electric scooter on land, but in this part of the excursion he sits in the stairwell for the doors, rather than trying to mount the four steep steps.

Well who needs notes? Not I, when I can "borrow" from Regent's description of this excursion that I had presciently saved on my computer before leaving home. "Depart the pier in Lyttelton for the drive around Lyttelton Harbor, an extinct volcano, then on to idyllic Governors Bay, traveling through the countryside, with its picturesque bays, panoramic views of rolling hills and sheep grazing in the green fields." The first part of the drive is, shall I say, ugly We pass down-market stores, shops, car dealers, loan offices, etc. until, finally, we get to the other side of Lyttelton Harbor and drive along the shore. There is a brief stop to examine a lighthouse ("Yep, it's still there") but I don't bother to get out of my seat.

Our driver and guide is Gavin* who keeps up a running commentary, replete with interesting information

*In a while, I'll share a long list of New Zealand pronunciations, which, in my 2010 journal I called NZish, a new language. The most striking variant is that the short e vowel sound is replaced by a long e. For example, fresh bread becomes freesh breed. The first time we encountered it in 2010 was when a hotel clerk said that there are no peests (pests) on the island; and another clerk asked if we were going to visit the geezers (geysers). For today, I'll share a few from Gavin's spiel: teen perceent, feences, fleex. (NZish is pronounced En-zish or, using the local accent, perhaps as En-zeesh)

and laced with humor, jokes, ad-libs, and other types of jollity. It's a long drive before we finally reach Manderley Farm at 10:00. We are greeted by Mary, one of the owners, and later by Ross, her husband. But before the demo of sheep herding and sheep shearing (try repeating those two words several times), we get to eat! Coffee or tea plus little sandwiches (pasties and egg salad) and sweets are on long tables in a large room inside the house. Alas, New Zealand has not heard of the U.S.'s ADA - and, so, there are no ramps for those of us who are challenged by steps. With only a little difficulty, I get over the first step onto the porch, but then to reach the room with the food, I have to descend on uneven stone steps - fortunately, an employee is there to help me.

Following our snack, we go outdoors. Ross begins with a long introduction about the history of the region and, in particular, this farm. He also talks about the sheep, the economics of raising sheep, the kinds of dogs used, and the training of the dogs. As he is unamplified, and as I, a "cripple," am confined to the outer perimeter of the assembled crowd, I don't hear much of it. Nor can I really get a good view when he heads to the pasture, sets the dogs loose, commands them to bring the sheep, and so on. According to the Regent brochure, what I didn't get to see with my own two eyes, is "Another key member of the shepherding team is the dog. You'll marvel at the considerable talents of these four-legged herders as they perform a lively display of their abilities for you. See top New Zealand sheep dogs gather a mob of sheep from nearby (nearby, I suspect) hills herding them down for their master for your photo opportunity. These champion sheep dogs will take whistle commands from half a mile distance with speed and agility. Ross will talk about his life experiences farming the hills over the last 30 years."

And then it's to the shearing shed for a demonstration. This would require mounting about eight steps, so I choose to stay outside. A woman named Karen is outside with me, not because of the steps but because

she's seen shearing before and, more important, the odor inside the shed is, shall we say, super-pungent?

From the brochure: "Next, you will proceed for a drive along the shores of Lake Ellsmere, and through the small township of Tai Tapu en route to Christchurch. While driving through the city, you will see some of the areas affected by the 2011 earthquake." Lee and I had spent about three weeks in New Zealand in March 2010. We particularly enjoyed Christchurch - the museums, the shops, the cathedral, the large parks, and (best of all) Rutherford's Den. (If interested, you can read about it in my 2010 catalogue that can be accessed at <http://volweb.utk.edu/~rmagid/index2.html>) I mention this, because this city and the vast surrounding region were clobbered by a 2011 earthquake the following year. From newspaper reports, we learned that much of this city was severely damaged. And so, today, as Gavin drives us through the city, I recognize absolutely nothing; and I see many homes and buildings that still look as if they'd been leveled by a bomb. (Earlier on today's excursion, while still in Littelton, Gavin talks about huge boulders that tumbled down from a hillside and crushed the homes below.)



We return to the ship a little after 1:00 and head straight to our room, hoping/praying/imploing ... the gods to have delivered our suitcases. Damn!! No suitcases. With anger surging within our bods, we march to the Reception Desk and berate Elena and Christina about the situation. They assure us that the luggage will arrive before the ship pulls up its gangway at 4:30. Lee asks, "Why didn't a Regent representative gather the bags at the airport and deliver them this morning?" Catherina gives us virtual pats on the head and says not to worry.

Yeah, sure.

We go to the Pool Grill. I have a small baguette with turkey and a wrap with shrimp salad; I also take a slice of pizza, but leave it uneaten because it is laced with anchovies. I also have some ice cream. Lee has a salad.

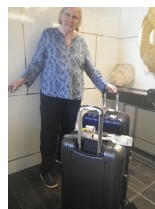
Back in the room, we try calling the numbers listed in today's Passages for the port agent. Lee tries with her cell phone while I use the ship's phone in the room. Lee is more successful than I, except that when she connects the person on the other end can't hear her. Finally, she gets a good connection, only to be told that the phone number was not for the port agent in Christchurch. However, he offers to call the correct agent and report back to us. And so he does. He says that the bags are on the way. A while later, I get a call from Catherina: the bags are here, are being screened (for what?), and will be delivered to our room in a few minutes.

And the miracle occurs!! Both suitcases are festooned with tags, including those that were affixed in Seattle plus others acquired on the way. We cannot figure out where the bags had been and where, but we are excited to be reunited. I even composed a little "pome" that I emailed to friends who were following our exploits, headed with O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!:

AN ODE TO MY SUITCASE

Suitcase, suitcase, strong and grey -
Please tell me why you went astray.

I deeply strongly now implore
Your promise that you'll roam no more.



We spend the rest of the afternoon unpacking the suitcases and finding shelf and drawer space to stash everything.

At 6:00, we are invited, as members of the Seven Seas Society (an "exclusive" group of people who had

sailed with Regent three or more times), to a piano recital by a member of the ship's orchestra. He is a Ukrainian, named Oleksandr Melnychuk. He begins with a composition written by a countryman and friend, whose name I did not recognize. Following this, he played selections by composers from various European countries: Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Scarlatti, and Grieg. And when he got to Spain, I thought "Uh-Oh" surely not Rodrigo. Surely yes! It was an abbreviated version of the Concierto de Aranjuez* accompanied by

*As some of you know, I have an unusual aversion to this piece. It is an agreeable piece of music, but some program directors at classical music radio stations have a weird fixation on it. When we lived in Knoxville, WUOT-FM seemed to play it whenever we were in our car and had the radio on. This persisted when we drove rented cars in France and Germany. And in Gig Harbor, KING-FM has continued the "tradition." How do they know, with such unfailing accuracy, when we are going to turn on the car radio? I worry about this.

a Flamenco introduction and an improvised jazz ending. But it was still Rodrigo.

We go to dinner at Compass Rose. There being no table where people, already seated, want to share, we choose to eat alone. It's then back in our room when I realize that I no longer have my pen and my page of travel notes, as was described in the indented paragraph on pp. 15-16.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19

We are docked in Timaru. I hope that the city is not as ugly as its port, which features oil storage drums, rusty ships, and sheds. The day is cloudy and murky. There having been no excursions that appealed (only two were on offer in this unscheduled stop), we choose to sleep until 7:30. As mentioned earlier, we check the theater for the missing pen and notes followed by breakfast at Compass Rose.

In contrast to the excellent internet connection while docked in Christchurch and when sailing to Timaru, there is *none* here at the port. Around 10:00, Lee sets off to see Māori rock art and, of course, to do some shopping. I spend the time reconstructing the details of Wednesday from memory.

When Lee returns at 2:00, we head to the Pool Grill for ice cream and coffee. At 5:00, Dhiraj arrives with plates of spring rolls, which we accompany by a wee dram of Lagavulin. The ship sets sail at 6:00. Tonight we have a reservation at Chartreuse, one of the specialty restaurants. We are joined by Dan and Ann. He was involved in "industrial distribution" (whatever that may be) and she was an elementary school teacher. They now live in Houston but for a while they actually resided in Knoxville. At 9:15, we're back in our room where we discover that the internet connection is better - not good, but better - so I get to read the Seattle Times, News-Tribune, and New York Times. We go to bed at 11:00.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern resigned, today, after six years in office. My son Steve postulates this "plausible" explanation:

I think I know what happened with Jacinda. After your attempt to infiltrate New Zealand in the early days of COVID, you were identified as a possible 'bad actor'. Thus, when you attempted to invade a second time (on a contaminated ship, no less), the government seized your luggage as a precaution. Once PM Ardern became aware of this, she insisted upon its (their?) return. This in turn caused her political opponents to proclaim a 'deep state' conspiracy theory involving you, Jacinda, and your wardrobe (can suspenders be used as a weapon?). In order to dismiss any notions of impropriety, she had no choice but to resign. I expect you, Lee, and your contraband to be forced out of NZ waters within the next few days.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20

Because we have an early excursion, we rise at 5:45 and have a quick breakfast at Coffee Connection: for me, a sweet roll, juice, and coffee. The day begins warm, overcast, and humid. At 7:45 we are on the bus

for the "Highlights of Dunedin" tour. Our driver and guide is Roger. He proves to be informative but nowhere near as humorous as guides on previous days. Dunedin, we learn, is New Zealand's oldest city - it was settled by Scots, which means that some of the local churches are very strict in the Calvinist tradition; those churches founded by English immigrants are much more liberal.

We drive through Dunedin, reminding ourselves of its unique architecture (from our visit here in 2014). There is a brief stop for interested people to visit the glorious railway station (under renovation), but we stay on board. The world's steepest street is here - we drive past it twice but make no attempt (not that it would be allowed) to climb it. Every year, there is a race (on foot) to climb up and down the hill. The winner for the past several years has a time of just under two minutes.



We then drive to Olveston, a Jacobean-styled house from the early 20th century. Lee goes on the hour-long tour, but I stay on the bus to read my Kindle and chat with Roger. He had visited the western U.S., but not Seattle, so I tell him a bit about the city and its threat from earthquakes and volcanoes, things that New Zealanders also worry about. He had just returned from a visit to Perth, so we talk about that as well.

We next drive to the Botanical Gardens. This time, I do get off the bus and, with my walker, stroll a bit before returning to my seat; Lee stays in the park a little longer. And then it's back to the ship at about noon. Unlike on previous tours, this time the port agent is extra careful, examining every passenger's photo ID and Regent key card before we can even leave the bus. When we walk to the gangway, there is no Regent employee at the base of the stairs, so I (and my walker) have to wait for someone to come down to help me.

From Roger, we pick up additional examples of NZish: tweenty-seeven, teenth. And additional examples, drawn from the 2010 travelog: cheek (check), cheedar (cheddar), cheef (chef), feastive (festive), Deceember, weeb (web), deet (debt), speending (spending), anceestor, respeeect, and many many more.

Starting a few days ago - and continuing today and on future days - we begin playing the "game" that we invented when stuck in a hotel ballroom for seven hours last October, waiting for the cruise ship to arrive. The "game" is to say which of our fellow passengers bear remarkable resemblances to residents at Heron's Key. Here are the identifications (some amazingly accurate) thus far: Joyce Meyer, Alice Kaltinick, Linnea McNair, Ralph Wozniac, Pat Curtis, Mike West, Jeannie Grisham, and Bob DeLaney, On future days, we'll spot Barbara Casey (with the same hairdo and glasses as worn by the Heron's Key original).

We go to the Pool Grill for lunch. I order a Hebrew National all-beef hot dog and fries; I follow this with two scoops of chocolate ice cream. Mixing beef and dairy is not Kosher, but who cares? I doubt that I'll suffer from starvation on this voyage. Following this, we return to our room to take advantage of the stable internet connection, as long as it will last. The day has turned progressively more cloudy and, shortly, we are visited by heavy rain.

Our ship sets sail at 3:30. As it approaches open seas, the waters become more choppy and the winds pick up. It's not as uncomfortable as was the cruise in October, but we still have two full days to cross the Tasman Sea on our way to Melbourne. From 6:30 to 8:00, we are at dinner in Compass Rose. We turn the room's TV to the navigation channel on the TV and learn that our speed is 28 km/hr or 19 knots.* We

*"What is a knot?" I hear you ask. "Well, it's one nautical mile per hour," I reply, condescendingly. "Uh, so what is a nautical mile?" you inquire. In truth, I've forgotten the answer, but to the rescue comes this description that I wrote in my 2018 Netherlands-Belgium-Ireland travelogue and others.

Wikipedia offers this extremely "clear" description: "A nautical mile (symbol M, NM or nmi) is a unit of distance that is approximately the length that spans one minute of arc on the surface of the Earth, measured along any meridian. By international agreement it has been set at 1,852 metres exactly

(about 6,076 feet)." Now do you understand?

Perhaps it would be clearer if I told you that 1 NM is 1.1507794480235 mile? (The laptop's conversion calculator doesn't know about significant figures, does it?) I think it would be safe to say, simply, that a nautical mile is a bit longer than a mile by about 15%. Now some smarty-pants is going to ask "What is meant by a *knot*?" Well, my children, one knot is a speed of one nautical mile per hour. Right? Right! So, one knot is 1.852 km per hour or 1.151 miles per hour.

spend the evening reading. And we set out clock back one hour, according to the instruction in today's issue of Passages. Tomorrow, we'll set them back another hour (Australia is two hours earlier than New Zealand.)

Because it was an exhausting day, we head to bed shortly after 9:00. The ship continues rocking and rolling; and the sound of fierce winds persists through the night. There must be small gaps in the doors to our balcony because there is a horrid whistling/moaning sound as the winds find their way to us.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21

The shaking of the ship is fierce, but nothing compared to our experience last October on the New York to Montréal cruise. Nevertheless, we don't feel confident about carrying our plates of food in La Veranda, so we have breakfast in Compass Rose. When we check in, the host tells us that there is a table occupied by two people who are eager to share, so we accept.

They are Marc and Ellen, both retired and currently residing in Guilford, CT. He was an architect, specializing in design of bathrooms for people with dementia; and she was a school teacher in the Philadelphia school system, with many tales of dangerous interactions with some students. Interestingly, they had lived in Cumming, GA, where Steve and Melynda now reside.

At 10:00, we attend the Warren Fahey lecture, "A Snapshot of Australian Aboriginal & Islander History." With many photos and videos, we learn about the history of these peoples, not all of it especially benign in interactions with the Europeans who settled here. It's estimated that close to a million natives were on the continent prior to Capt. Cook's arrival, but the number dropped to less than 100,000 by 1900. In the succeeding century, the population has grown to close to its earlier size. Fahey mentioned that we will dock in Sydney on January 26, "Australia Day," which is recognized by the Aborigines as "Invasion Day." Following a hundred years of removing Aboriginal children from their families and having them raised by white families (for their "protection"), the government has acknowledged its injustice and is paying restitution to those offended.

As the day is very windy, we eat lunch inside at La Veranda. Upon leaving, we traverse the pool deck, unaware of the rough seas that we will shortly encounter. Back in our cabin, the PA comes to life with an announcement from the captain. Our winds are Beaufort Scale 6 ["large waves begin to form; the white foam crests are more extensive everywhere; probably some spray"] at 18 knots (35 km/hr). Because of the heavy winds, he can't predict our time of arrival in Melbourne. The navigation channel on the TV reports that the barometric pressure is 1011 hPA (that's hectopascals, in case you're curious) which is 758 mm Hg. The ship's speed is 33 km/hr or 18 knots.

Starting at about 2:00 and continuing through the afternoon, the rocking of the ship has become fierce and unpredictable. This is now beginning to feel like the early days of the October cruise when we were encountering the remnants of Hurricane Ian. I do my best to type this journal while Lee watches tennis from the Australian Open. The ferocity of ship's motion decreases at about 4:00 and the sun has come out, but it still potentially dangerous when walking around.

At 6:30, we head to Prime 7 where our dinner partners, again, are Ann and Dan (see January 19). We make it back to the room at 8:00 - the ship's bucking makes walking difficult. After some internet activity,

we set our clock and watch back another hour (for Australia time) and are in bed at 10:00.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22

When we rise at 6:45, we are relieved that the ship's back-and-forth and side-to-side motions are somewhat lessened. The winds, also, seem not as fierce as they were yesterday. We have breakfast in Compass Rose: for me, an omelette with ham/cheese/mushrooms, an English muffin, juice, and coffee. While seated in the restaurant, we hear an announcement by the captain (with a clarification from Andy) that we are cruising at 19 knots, the maximum possible given the current conditions. We are still 600 nM from Melbourne. We now expect to arrive in Melbourne, not at 8:00 am tomorrow but at 5:00 pm. Also, the excursion to Geelong is cancelled (thus adding to an already long list). We'll stay in Melbourne on January 24, not leaving for Sydney until 5:00 pm.

Today's Passages has this amusing tale: "In 2005, we made headlines around the world by stopping the vessel in the Indian Ocean and hailing a passing fishing boat to purchase all their tuna haul in exchange for three cases of whisky. The result was probably the freshest fish ever served on a cruise line!" (Not to mention the drunkest sailors on the other boat.)

Continuing with the Doppelgänger game begun on p. 19, on the street in Dunedin was a dead-ringer for Kenneth Branach; this morning in Compass Rose, I saw both Jeff Daniels and Penelope Wilton (or close facsimiles thereof). So it's movie stars, now, and not just residents of Heron's Key.

From today's *USA Times*, we note that the weather predicted for some 30 U.S. cities is described as cloudy or sunny or rainy or showers ... except for Seattle for which it is *dreary*. Yep.

A letter from the ship's staff tells us, "In addition to the 30% Future Cruise Credit based on your paid cruise-only fare, and the \$500 per guest shipboard credit previously provided, we are providing a 25% refund on your paid cruise-only fare." That's nice, but I really would have preferred visiting all of the announced destinations.

We spend about 30 minutes in the ship's library before going, at 10:00, to another Warren Fahey lecture, "Convicts and the Wild Colonists." When England could no longer deport its criminals (convicted of minor property crimes, but still sentenced to long prison terms) to the U.S., it began sending them to Australia. From 1778 to 1867, 168K prisoners were sent - of these, 68K were sent to New South Wales, 67K to Van Dieman's Land, and 10K to Western Australia. (OK, these don't add up, so I probably made a mistake on copying them from the screen.) They included 70% English, 24% Irish, and 5% Scottish. The cruel process was called "transportation" and sentences ranged from seven years to 14 to 21, depending on the seriousness of the offense. The conditions were very harsh. Flogging was common. And other forms of torture were employed. Now-a-days, many Australians proudly trace their lineage to prisoners in the 19th century.

Back in our room, the internet connection is (temporarily) stable, so I read the Seattle newspapers and the New York Times headlines. I also write to Jock MacNeish, explaining our "tardiness" and saying that while it's unlikely that we'll make it to Melbourne for dinner tomorrow, we will be spending an extra day in port and could meet for lunch the following day. A reply from him agrees that lunch on the 24th would be a suitable alternative.

At 12:15 we go to the Pool Grill where I have a hot dog, fries, coffee, and ice cream. Back in the room, I turn on the Giants-Eagles playoff game in which "our heroes" already trail 21-0 in the second quarter. Unable to watch any more, I shut off the set, but return a little later ... and it's even worse.

At 5:00, Dhiraj brings plates of crackers/cheese and sushi rolls. We sip Lagavulin along with the goodies. At 6:30, we have a reservation at Pacific Rim where we share a table with Debbie and Dan (or is it Dave?) from Lake Oswego, OR. He is a physician who also does certification of airplane pilots, both commercial

and individual; she is the office manager for his practice. Of all of the couples with whom we've eaten, he is the least enjoyable. (I say "he" rather than "they" because he did almost all of the talking for them.) The evening was pleasant enough, only once venturing into a discussion of government interference in our lives. I pretty much held my tongue. While Lee and I were still eating our desserts, they had finished theirs, popped up, and left the table. Good riddance, I suppose.

A notice in our room says the Australian Border Force in Melbourne requires a face-to-face inspection of every guest. This will take place, starting at 6:00 tomorrow evening, in the Cruise Terminal. We will be called by deck number. As for the following day, only one of the planned excursions is being cancelled - the vintage train ride that we had signed up for. Well, that's OK because we're planning to meet Jock and Di for lunch.

On the TV in our room, we check the latest navigation information (ship's speed, wind speed, humidity, course direction, etc.) I note that we are sailing just north of Tasmania, which had been a scheduled stop but not any more. We go to bed at 10:30.

MONDAY, JANUARY 23

It is a bright, sunny day with mercifully calm seas. Alas, I had trouble sleeping during the night - and I think that I'm coming down with Lee's cold. We go to Coffee Connection for breakfast (juice, bagel, coffee) and then to the Library where we read while our room is being cleaned.

Observations about the crew.

- The servers in the various dining rooms are very well-trained; they deliver the orders and clear the tables efficiently. One demerit - they often interrupt conversations instead of waiting for a break. They are, for the most part, from southeastern Asia or from the nearby islands (with a small number of Eastern Europeans). The servers in Pacific Rim appear to be Chinese or Japanese.
- The personnel at the Reception Desk are all Eastern European women, imperious and cold, every one of them. I can't say that I've enjoyed my interactions with them. Had they been alive during the 1940s, they would have been in the Gestapo, if the Gestapo accepted women.
- The captain and his officers are Italian and Croatian.
- The cruise director (Andy) and his wife, social director Tammy, are from Missouri.
- Our butler is Indian (I would guess); most of the housekeeping people seem to be from Southeastern Asian countries.
- In the final issue of Passages, there is a list of the nationalities of the crew. Represented are 36 in all, from Europe, Asia, and Africa but none, alas, from anywhere in the Western Hemisphere.

Back in our room, we read (I'm enjoying James Thurber's "Life with Ross") until it's time for lunch. We go to Prime 7 (no reservation needed at lunch time). I'm not very hungry, so I have only a bowl of clam chowder. While in the restaurant, Andy announces that we plan to dock in Melbourne at 5:00; hmmm, Lee says that Cruise Mapper has us arriving at 1:30. Whatever. At 6:00, every passenger must go to the Cruise Terminal, carrying passport, Regent door card, and Incoming Passenger Card. The latter is filled out, in part, by Regent - but incorrectly! My card has Lee's date of birth and vice versa. Lee goes to the desk and learns that the cards for every couple on this ship have also been filled out incorrectly. The desk applies white-out to the incorrect dates; when it dries, we can write in the correct numbers.

The ship docks in Melbourne at about 3:00, so not at 5:00 nor at 1:30. I go onto the balcony to take pictures of the skyline and the dock. At 4:30, Andy makes several announcements: (1) because of an outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease in Indonesia, everyone will need to walk through disinfectant liquid when getting off the ship; (2) the Australian government, warns against removal of food items from the ship, just as was true in New Zealand. (3) it is a criminal offense to take a picture of a port official. Noted.



At 6:00, the face-to-face inspection begins, starting with passengers on Deck 6 and working upwards, finally inviting those on Decks 10, 12, and 14 to the Cruise Terminal. The process goes smoothly. We had been warned that passengers would not be allowed back on board until *all* of the travelers have cleared the inspection. There are, in fact, two large rooms with chairs where people are seated, waiting for permission to return to the ship.

AT 6:40 we go to Compass Rose for dinner. It is almost deserted because most passengers have opted for the BBQ cookout at the Pool Grill on Deck 11.

On pp. 9 and 22, I raved about the quality of the meals and the precision of the entire restaurant operation. The scope of the operation is impressive. Consider the following (from one of the Passages delivered to our room): "With a full complement of 87 personnel, the Executive Chef relies on his staff to prepare food 24 hours a day in six galleys ... There are 64 chefs (sous chefs, outlet chefs, cooks, and assistant cooks) being aided by the corps of 23 utility cleaners who continually wash down the working areas and clean the dishes and pots ... The Cold Galley prepares all sandwiches, ice and fruit carvings, lunch and dinner appetizers, salads, and dressings. The Hot Galley makes the broths and sauces, cooks all poultry and meat, steams fish, and boils the vegetables to order. The Pastry Chef runs a separate operation alongside the Baker ... Bread is baked fresh three times a day ... Preparation for the lunch and dinner menus start at 7am ... over 1800 eggs are used, 150 lbs of onions chopped, and 300 to 400 lbs of potatoes are peeled ... The Butcher de-bones the chops, slices and dices the meat ...

Back in our room, I really want to send Agosta evidence of my getting a 2 on Wordle today. Alas, neither Microsoft Outlook nor GMail will load. Will this be the case for the time that we spend in Melbourne?

Well, now that we are well within Australian waters, it's time for a geography and time zone lesson. Because I'm too lazy to do this afresh, the following comes from my 2014 and 2020 travelogues.

An illuminating discussion of Australia's geography would be helpful here, but I'm probably not the best qualified person to provide it. Nevertheless, let's give it a shot. Australia is surrounded on all sides by water; thus, it has no borders with other countries. It is shaped like a kidney or (if one wants to avoid mentioning body parts) a kidney bean. Like the lower 48 states of the U.S., it is more or less rectangular in shape. In size (2.97×10^6 sq mi), it's slightly smaller than the contiguous U.S. (3.12×10^6 sq mi). It makes do with three time zones (as compared to our four) and with seven states (as compared to our 48, if one ignores Alaska and Hawaii, something that I enjoy doing). Australia's eastern time zone consists of four states which, from south to north, are Tasmania (Tas), Victoria (Vic), New South Wales (NSW), and Queensland (Qld). Tas is an island off the southern coast of the mainland; Vic, NSW, and Qld are stacked one atop the other. The central time zone consists of two states: South Australia (SA) and Northern Territory (NT); their names reveal which is to the south and which is to the north, right? The western time zone makes do with just one state, appropriately called Western Australia (WA); it is the largest of the seven, encompassing about 1/3 of the total area.



Daylight Saving Time in Australia is from October 4 to April 5. But not all of Australia goes on daylight

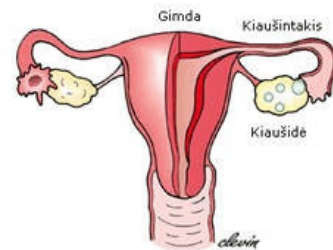
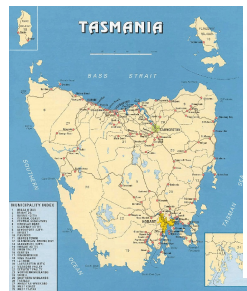
time on October 4. WA (Perth, Margaret River) stays on standard time and is **16** hours ahead of PST, but Vic and NSW (Melbourne, Sydney), observing daylight time, are **19** hours ahead of PST; Qld (Cairns), however, is **18** hours ahead. For example, when it is **4:00 pm** in Seattle on a **Thursday**, it is **8:00 am** on **Friday** in Perth and it is **11:00 am** on **Friday** in Melbourne and Sydney. ["But if Australia has only three time zones," I hear you say, "Why isn't the time differential between Perth and either Melbourne or Sydney *two* hours?" Good question! It's because daylight saving time is observed in the NSW and Vic, but not in the west. "Oh."]

One result of all this madness is that when we are scheduled to fly from Auckland to San Francisco on January 28, we leave at 2:00 pm in the afternoon and arrive **the same day** nearly **eight** hours earlier at 8:50 am! This, it seems to me, is tampering with the natural order of things - no wonder the world is being visited by increasingly violent weather systems.

To further complicate things, SA and NT have a weird half-hour time zone. SA observes DST but NT does not. So ... from October 5 to April 6, when DST is (or is not) observed, the time in Tas, Vic, and NSW will be (say) *11:00*; the time in Qld will be *10:00*; the time in SA will be *10:30*; the time in NT will be *9:30*; and the time in WA will be *8:00*.*

*Although I've just described the times in the seven Australian states, this account would not be complete if I failed to mention Eucla, a tiny locality (population less than 100) in WA, right at its border with SA; the time there is *8:45* and it does not observe DST.

It's a shame that we'll not go to Tasmania on this trip (as we had done in 2014). Not only is it a truly weird place (you can consult the 2014 travelog for details) but it would allow us to continue the description of the shape of geographical entities using human body parts. Tasmania, as I'm sure you'll agree, looks like a human uterus. Of course, the comparison would be a lot better if only King Island and Flinders Island (to the north of the main part of Tasmania) were to droop southward; and if the parts of the uterus had not been labeled in Lithuanian in the diagram that I found.



Australia's population is about 23 million, with the highest concentrations of people in the large southeastern cities (Sydney 4.6 million, Melbourne 4.2 million, Brisbane 2.2 million, and Adelaide 1.2 million) and in Perth (1.9 million) on the west coast. It's not clear if this is myth or fact, but supposedly the word kangaroo came into the English language when Aborigines were asked what the animal is called and they responded "kangaroo" (which translates either as "What are you talking about?" or "I don't understand you"). There does seem to be agreement that "koala" comes from an Aboriginal word that means "animal that doesn't drink water." In fact, koalas sleep some 18-20 hours a day, using that time to digest the eucalyptus leaves that they've eaten. The leaves do not have a lot of nutritional value, so great quantities of leaves are eaten in a given day. And the animals have a very low metabolism. Hence the long periods of sleep. Koalas are related to wombats. Fun fact: the animal's pouch opens from the bottom, not the top.

The national government (in Canberra which is located in Australian Capital Territory, much like D.C.; i.e. not part of any state) and each state government is built on a parliamentary system: whichever party has the majority of seats (or, failing that, can form a coalition to gain a majority of seats) names the Prime Minister* in the national parliament or the Premier in each state. And to confuse things even more, the

*This does not mean that the person does not have a name. Rather, the federal parliament consists of a House of Representatives (the lower house) and a Senate (the upper house - well, what did you expect?). The House of Representatives has 150 members, each representing an electorate of about

the same number of registered voters; the Senate has 76 members, 12 each from the six most populous states, 2 from Northern Territory and 2 from Australian Capital Territory. It is the House of Representatives that selects the Prime Minister. Each of the individual states has a similar legislative structure with two houses of Parliament and a Premier.

Queen or King of England names a Governor-General for the country and a Governor for each state. Wikipedia explains the function of the Governor-General this way:

The Governor-General is President of the Federal Executive Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Defence Force, as well as viceregal representative in the Australian Capital Territory. The functions of the Governor-General include appointing ambassadors, ministers, and judges, giving Royal Assent to legislation, issuing writs for elections, and bestowing honours. The constitution grants the Governor-General a wide range of powers, but, in practice, they follow the conventions of the Westminster system and responsible government and, with rare exceptions, act only on the advice of the Prime Minister of Australia or other ministers or, in certain cases, Parliament.

Beyond constitutional functions, the Governor-General has a ceremonial role: He or she hosts events at either of the two viceregal residences—Government House, Canberra, and Admiralty House in Sydney—and travels widely throughout Australia to open conferences, attend services and commemorations, and generally provide encouragement to individuals and groups who are contributing to their communities. When traveling abroad, the governor-general is seen as the representative of Australia, and of the Queen or King of Australia, and is treated as a head of state. The governor-general is supported by a staff headed by the Official Secretary to the Governor-General.

The Governor-General, beside the relatively meaningless functions described above, does have one ultimate power: he or she can fire the prime minister and appoint a new one.

Thus endeth the discussion of geography, time zones, and government. I hope that you've found it useful. Now, at 9:30 with the internet connection still too weak to send emails, we shut things down and head to bed at 11:00.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24

There is still no WiFi this morning. I really want to send Agosta my Wordle from yesterday on which I finished in **two**, I also wanted to see if there were any updates from Jock about meeting him and Di for lunch, today.

Because I'm still sneezing and coughing, we decide to eat breakfast "outdoors" at the Pool Grill: juice, corn flakes, bagel, coffee. Following that, we head to the Library to read and to find out why we couldn't solve two questions on yesterday's Mensa quiz. Today's quiz is even more of a challenge - either these quizzes are getting harder or I'm getting dumber ... or both. I finish reading James Thurber's "Life with Ross" and begin reading an issue of *The New Yorker*. And, after some effort, Lee and I manage to solve all of the Mensa problems but one.

The day is cloudy, muggy, humid, and warm but at least it's not as hot as January days in Australia can get. In the early morning, another cruise ship (P&O Pacific Explorer) has tied up on the opposite side of the pier. From our vantage point, the windows look much smaller, as do the balconies. And there is a zip line on the top deck that people are enjoying.

At 12:10, we head to the car park where we're to meet Di and Jock at 12:30. It proves to be a surprisingly long walk, first threading our way back and forth through the Cruise Terminal, then exiting the building and walking away from the water. The walk is a bit of a challenge, as passengers for the P&O ship are heading in the other direction, toward us, lugging large suitcases. (Note: Regent does not expect its guests to bring their own suitcases to the ship. Note, also: the passengers for the P&O are decidedly down-market, as

compare to the clientele on our ship. Not that we're upper class, but relatively speaking ...)

Well, we finally get to the car park and see Di and Jock, standing there, waving to us. It's a bit of a challenge to "squeeze" my walker into the trunk (boot?) of the Audi A3, but Jock discovers that it does fit if turned sideways. And we're off into the town, heading to an underground car park for the Langham Hotel and its restaurant, Melba. Featured is an enormous buffet (fixed price) with every type of food imaginable: hot or cold; Australian; Indian; Japanese; and who knows what else. We fill our plates, more than once. Having promised to treat them to dinner (the original plan), I change it to lunch. The bill is about 330 AUD. My MasterCard does not work, even with its PIN. Lee's AmEx, apparently, doesn't require a PIN.

The conversation around the table is spirited and congenial - after all, these are friends whom we last saw in March 2020, the day before we were kicked out of Australia. Jock, a gifted cartoonist, gives us a drawing that he made of our ship in the grip of a giant squid. He also gives us aerial photos that he made of the Explorer, earlier today, when he flew overhead in honor of his 80th birthday. Following lunch, Jock takes us back to the pier where we retrace the long walk and get on board at about 3:30.

The P&O departs at 4:35, but our ship, which was scheduled to leave at 5:00, is delayed, apparently because two passengers, whose names are called on the PA, cannot be found. Shades of the missing Russian couple on the 2014 Regent cruise along the Norwegian coast (see pp. 18-19 of the travelogue for details). finally, we are underway.

At 5:00, we go to a Virtuoso Travel cocktail party on Deck 5, but eschew (love that word!) the Captain's Farewell Party and "Krew Kaper Crew Show." Dinner at Compass Rose lasts from 6:30 to 8:30. Back in the room, I'm eager to use the ship's WiFi to send read my email and to send messages to friends. For example, I want to tell Steve and Agosta that I have an answer to the Sunday Shortz puzzle. And I want to send Agosta my Wordle, from yesterday, which I finished in two!

My hopes are dashed. Although the settings do show a network connection; and I can load such things as the NYT headline news, there is no success in opening either Microsoft Outlook or GMail. Damn! I also want to send Jock my "famous" birthday poem in honor of his 80th birthday, yesterday.

As distinctive as the New Zealand accent is (see NZish on p. 16), the Australian accent is also interesting. Here are some pronunciations that I picked up on this and earlier trips:

AusSpeak: The country's name is pronounced Austreyelia, and aggressive is rendered as aggreyyessive. We also have white for wait, bite for bait, precedent for precedent, geeven for given, nile for nail, incorrect for incorrect, and beyecon for bacon. And aible for able, veegetable for vegetable, meen for men, conceentric for concentric.

AUSTRALIAN SPELLING: Consider defence, authorised, colourur, flavourur, harbourur, labourur, centreu, litreu, metreu, etc. just as is done in England.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25

We rise at 7:00 and head to The Coffee Connection for a quick breakfast (juice, bagel, coffee) because Lee has an 8:30 appointment for a hair washing and blow dry. It's a bright, sunny day. The ship is rocking a bit, but nothing as compared to our transit across Tasman Bay.

Before leaving the room, I had tested for WiFi and, *mirabile dictu**, we are blessed with a fast connection.

*I've told this story in other travelogs, but it's worth relating here. One of my University of Tennessee colleagues, a professor of English, returned an exam paper to a student who hadn't been doing well. The grade was higher than typical for this student, so my colleague wrote *mirabile dictu* across the top.

The student immediately filed a complaint with the Head of the English Department because his teacher had called him a miserable dick. True story.

So I carry my laptop to the Library where I receive and send emails, read the News Tribune and Seattle Times.

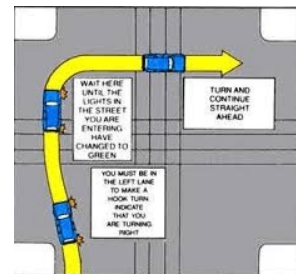
My cold is almost gone, although I do have a sneezing spell toward the end of Warren Fahey's final lecture, "Waltzing Matilda on the Outback Track." We return to our room and find our suitcases artfully placed on the beds. Hint, hint. We get a confusing note about shipboard credit that seems to have a huge deduction for something unrecognizable. Lee goes to the Reception Desk for clarification. And, *mirabile dictu* once again, we are very much in the black. After expenses such as my medical visits, the bottle of Lagavulin, Lee's visits to the salon, and the bottle of wine purchased at dinner last week, we have all sorts of credits: \$50 (times 2) from Regent, \$150 (times 2) from Virtuoso, \$250 for "good will," and \$500 (times 2) for the missed ports, and 25% refunds on various purchases, we are \$807 in the black. Best of all, this is not deferred until our next Regent cruise but is refunded right now. Lee gets some Australian money to use as tips when we get to Sydney - the rest will be credited to her AmEx card. [Note added in proof: today's mail, February 10, has a check for \$767. Hooray!]

We have lunch at the Pool Grill. The ambience is L O U D - in addition to the chatter of passengers, the clanging of plates and silverware, and the groaning of the ship, a man and a woman are singing and playing instruments with almost painful amplification. This seems to be characteristic of New Zealand and Australia. Is it possible that because they are islands and so isolated from the "civilized" world that they compensate by assaulting the ear drums with sound? Well, it's possible. The theme of the lunch offerings is Italian. I have chicken cacciatore and lasagna.

Back in the room. After finishing today's Mensa quiz, I do Wordle but before I can send it to Agosta, the WiFi goes bye-bye. Again. This is getting quite frustrating. Most delicious news story of the day (when the WiFi allows me to see it) is that Mike ("So Help Me God") Pence also had classified documents in his home. So, Trump, then Biden, and now goody-two-shows all possess documents that belong to the government, and to us, the taxpayers.

It's too bad that Jock didn't take us into the center city because that meant that we'd be unable to see the famous Melbourne hook turn. No matter. Here is the description from an earlier travelogue:

Nearly all of the east-west major street in downtown Melbourne have tram tracks, as do a few of the north-south ones. Now picture an east-west street, horizontally in your mind's eye, with east on your right. The street has six lanes. The two lowest are for vehicles that are traveling from east to west (i.e., from right to left) - recall, this is Australia, not the U.S. The two highest are for vehicles moving left to right. Between these lanes for cars and trucks, there are two tram lines: the lower one is for trams traveling right to left, the higher for trams going the other direction. Now, imagine that you are in a car traveling from east to west and you want to make a right turn at a particular intersection - this will require your crossing two tram lines as well as two lanes of west-to-east car traffic.



To prevent you from blocking the trams, what you do is approach the intersection and pull to the far *left*. (Why left? I thought we were making a right turn! Bear with me.) And you pull into the intersection, staying to the left. (This has the advantage of allowing cars that are traveling from east to west to pass you on your right.) You put on your right directional signal and wait until your light changes from green to red. At that moment, you make a hard right turn across two lanes of cars heading westward, plus two tram lines, and two lanes for cars heading to the east. And if all goes well, you complete the turn. Perhaps two or three other drivers behind you will also succeed in making this turn.

It all works brilliantly, except when it doesn't. What can possibly go wrong? Well, since your sharp right turn has put you in a north-bound direction, you are counting on drivers in the top two lanes to wait patiently even though their light has turned green. Should one of them decide to jump the gun, a collision occurs. The other thing that can go wrong is if traffic heading north backs up into the intersection - then you find yourself stopped, perhaps on the tram tracks, to the great annoyance of everyone. Melbourne is the only Australian city to allow hook turns. For a video showing how a local driver overcomes the fears of his passenger, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoUPGLn38-A>

The ship's WiFi is sporadic in the afternoon, but I do manage to attend to emails and read political articles from the NYT. In the afternoon, we pack our hard-sided suitcases - they are to be placed in the hallway no later than 10:00 tonight. I take advantage of some free time by beginning Walter Isaacson's "The Code Breaker" on the Kindle. At 5:00, we have our final cheese/crackers tray, courtesy of Dhiraj, accompanied by a wee dram of Lagavulin. After dinner at Compass Rose, we finish packing and say a fond good-bye to our suitcases, hoping and praying that they will not go astray during the next couple of days. We go to bed at 10:30.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26

We rise at 6:00, finish packing (I have trouble stuffing everything into my carry-on, but I succeed), have a fast breakfast at The Coffee Connection (juice, stale bagel, coffee), and assemble on Deck 4. Because our driver is not expected until 9:00, we're given permission to sit in the Deck 4 lobby. Lee calls the hotel and asks if the driver can come earlier - they agree on an 8:30 arrival.

Two more Heron's Key people to add to our Doppelgänger list: Ruth Heathman and Monnie Moen.

Heading down from Deck 10 to Deck 4, the elevators (no surprise) are very crowded. Ours stops at Level 7 (I think) and two people get on, to the great consternation of our Pat Curtis look-alike who, angrily declares, "We were here first!" As the elevator descends, the woman who did succeed in getting on says that the ersatz Pat has displayed all sorts of nasty behavior on this voyage. Not only that, they encountered her on a cruise ten years ago and she was just as nasty then.

The final issue of Passages informs us that we sailed a total of 2943 nM. (I wonder how different that would be had we not spent two-or-three days anchored in international waters while getting scrubbed.)

So (with the assistance of able-bodied crew for the walker and carry-ons), we make it down to the pier. An employee offers me a wheelchair, so how could I refuse? We find our suitcases (wouldn't it be ironic if they were lost again? No, it wouldn't) and wait for the car to arrive. The area is controlled bedlam - passengers milling around everywhere, looking for the bus that will take them ... wherever.

The car is a black Audi town car, very classy. We arrive at the hotel Shangri-La at 9:00 and are delighted to learn that our room is ready. Its number: 1007 (easy to remember because we were 1005 on the ship). It is a lovely, spacious suite, with excellent views of the Harbour Bridge, the opera house, the many+ boats (commercial and private) streaming through the harbor (oops, I mean harbour).



We go to the Horizon Lounge: coffee and a sweet for me, the same plus eggs benedict for Lee. The views from the restaurant's windows are even better than from our room. With the concierge of the lounge, Lee makes a dinner reservation for 6:15 at Altitude, the formal restaurant on Floor 36. Unable to find a menu online, Lee asks if the concierge has one. She doesn't but goes upstairs to fetch one. I would describe the fare as "precious" but conclude that I'll be able to find something that I like.

Music (and I use the term loosely) is piped into the lounge. How to describe it? It's new agey and repetitious and pulsating and never gets anywhere. I'm reminded of the same sort of assault on the ears at our Sydney hotel in 2014. Is there something wrong with Australians that they tolerate such dreck? Not

just tolerate - they embrace it. As we look down through the windows, all of the little boats are moving left to right, presumably to be at "ground zero" when the celebrations for Australia Day begin.

While I read the Walter Isaacson book, Lee goes to a record shop, not far away, to buy a three-CD Archie Roach collection. It's only a 12-minute walk, according to Google Maps, but the three blocks from our hotel to George Street are steeply downward - which means that the return trip would be steeply upward. That, plus the heat and humidity, convince me to stay in the hotel. While typing this message, at noon I hear the unmistakable sound of fighter jets (presumably friendly) going past - by the time I get to the window, they're gone.

Lee is gone a surprisingly long time. Why? Because the first store that she went to, a place whose web site indicated that they did have the CDs, but was more devoted to games and electronics turned out to be a mess. One clerk seemed to think that he could find the CD, but failed. He confessed that their web site had not been updated in months. He directed her to another store which did have Archie Roach CDs, although not the specific one that she was seeking. The first store was in the Strand Arcade, the second in the Queen Victoria Arcade, both on George Street. Of course there were other stores in these malls and, of course, Lee made some other purchases. Because of the heat and humidity, she chose to take a taxi each way.

Upon her return, we go back to the lounge on Floor 30 for some savories (e.g., crab salad wrap) and sweets. I have a long black (it's not what you think) and she has an iced coffee. Lee then goes to the level below the lobby, only to discover that the shops there have been closed since COVID. Back in the room, we try to find the Australian Open on TV (we had watched a fair amount of it on the ship, even when WiFi for computers was so iffy) but none of the sports channels seem correct. We find rugby, cricket, golf, and a weird female basketball game in which there are no backboards, just nets on top of poles, Shades of James Naismith and his peach baskets. Lee then checks online and discovers that there are no matches until this evening.

Near the door to our room is a vial containing a liquid and with bamboo sticks protruding from it. The bottle is labeled Essence of Shangri-La. We recall tour guide Tim, who was with us in Japan when we stayed at the Tokyo Shangri-La, saying that Shagri-La hotels all over the world have a certain aroma. Now I believe it. And my hands now reek of the essence. A difference, however, between the two hotels is that Tokyo's had the most modern (and weird) bathroom fixtures and plumbing, whereas Sydney's fixtures are conventional and show signs of age. Well, don't we all?

Back in the room, I continue reading Isaacson. I'm a bit disappointed at his naive attempts to explain scientific concepts and to describe the motivations that drive scientists. But I'm more disappointed at some of his sentences that could certainly have been improved by a zealous editor. For example, "Craig Ventner ... as a draftee during the Vietnam War, had attempted suicide by swimming out to sea, and then became a biochemist ..." Yup, attempted suicide is a good preparation for a career in science.

UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATION ABOUT AUSTRALIANS (but that doesn't make them any less true):

- In all restaurants, the accents of our fellow diners are Australian. That's no surprise. The voices, however, are VERY LOUD! Question: are they really very loud or do I perceive them as such because of their accents?
- Sad to say, but very few Australians look like Hugh Jackman, Eric Bana, Cate Blanchett, or Nicole Kidman - in fact, they tend not to be a very good-looking people. Perhaps it's because they're all descended from convicts? Or maybe it comes from living south of the Equator or because of the intense sunlight* (even in winter) and strong UV radiation levels? Or maybe it's because they

*Not a fun fact: Australians have the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world. For this reason, school kids not only all wear sun hats, even in the winter, but these hats have a protective flap to

prevent the rear of the neck from burning.

bequeathed all of their cuteness to koalas and kangaroos?

- The method of handling cutlery at the dinner table looks strange to us, but it's the same as what one sees in England. The fork is held in the left hand, "upside-down" (i.e., with the convex surface up). The knife is held in the right hand. One function of the knife (the one that we're accustomed to) is to cut up meat or vegetables or whatever. But then ... the piece of meat or whatever is speared on the fork and, with the fork still held "upside-down" the knife is used to push items onto the upper surface: mashed potatoes, vegetables, sauce or gravy, whatever - and when the fork is holding as much as it can, the user then raises it to his/her/its mouth without spilling anything. Amazing!

The day has turned murky and it has begun to rain. I hope that it doesn't interfere with the fireworks display promised for the harbor on this Australia Day holiday. We go to Altitude for dinner - the menu is "precious" and unusual but I do find some tasty things that are not too off-putting. Back in the room, we read and do computer work as we await the fireworks display.

Many commercial and private boats are anchored in the waters near the opera house. Among these is the P&O Pacific Adventurer, a huge (3500 passenger) ship. On a Sydney map, we see a suburb named Woolloomooloo. That's eight O's, boys and girls. Wooooo Hooooo! Or as Mel Allen would have said, "How about that!"

The "festivities" begin with a choreographed "parade" of about ten sailboats that proceed in formation, turn in circles, and (as daylight ebbs) are lit by blue and red lights. Projected on the surface of the opera house are the Australian flag followed by the Indigenous Peoples flag, From 8:45 until about 9:30, there are lighted drones flying back and forth, lighted speed boats in synchronized motion on the water, laser beams projected into the sky, and a spectacular fireworks display involving varied bursts that are imaginative and continuously changing. The window is well-insulated, but we can hear the explosions from some of the bigger displays.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27

We rise at 6:45 and head to breakfast in Altitude at 7:45. On offer is a modest menu (I have French toast and Lee gas waffles) supplemented by a buffet bar with juice, fruits, and sweet rolls. I'm glad that we arrived early because the line to get into the restaurant, when we left at about 8:30, was extremely long. Both on that line and inside the restaurant are numerous young children who'd never learned (or never been taught) not to use their outdoor voices inside. On the other hand, one benefit of the screaming is that the "music" on the PA system is drowned out.

We note that our ship and its traveling companion from P&O are gone from the distant pier, but on a pier very close to us and the opera house is the P&O Pacific Adventurer, complete with water slide and, presumably a zip line, although we can't see it. Why are they allowed to park so close?

From our hotel window, we can watch an interesting scene that is unfolding, There are three lanes of traffic going from our side of the bridge and three coming from the other direction. To the left of "our" three lanes is a large open area on which are three flat-bed trucks, three police cars, six policemen standing near the cars, and other workers in orange vests. Most of the time, nothing happens. But then, apparently mindful that they're supposed to be doing something, the police flag down cars from the far left lane, apparently at random, and direct them to the open area. At each car, two officers interview the driver, then send the car on its way, What they were checking for, I have no idea. But after a while, they tire of this. The policemen take the traffic cones, stash them in the trunks (boots), and drive off. The flat-bed trucks do the same. It was an interesting scene, but what did it mean?

We note that the skies are turning dark and that rain clouds are arriving. Irene and Steven (and their red Mazda) arrive at 10:00. Our first destination is the brand-new New South Wales Museum of Modern Art. It's a beautiful spacious building and the collection is excellent, much of it featuring indigenous artists. On the way from the car to the museum, it has begun to rain but by the time we leave the rain has ended. During the drive, we talk (as old friends do) about politics, travel, interests, family, medical issues, etc.



We drive to Bondi Beach and have lunch on the outdoor patio of the Tearoom at Dunbar House. The food is very filling and the lunch hour conversation is wide-ranging and interesting. We next do more touristic sight-seeing, most of it alongside the water. Driving across downtown and beneath the Harbour Bridge, we arrive at Barangaroo Reserve, a large green area, repurposed from an old industrial site. We walk along the periphery of the park. Following this, it is but a short drive back to our hotel where we arrive at 3:00, hot and sweaty. We Gig Harborians are not accustomed to heat and humidity.



Back in the room, I attend to computer "business" and bring this journal up to the present. I'm not hungry for dinner, but Lee orders a club sandwich from Room Service. She also asks for an order of fries, not knowing that the sandwich, itself, comes with fries. To say that we have an abundance of fries would not be an understatement. I do nibble, grudgingly, on some fries. And I drink the cup of coffee that was part of the order. We watch a semi-final match of the Australian Open before going to bed at 10:30.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28

How unusual - I awake at about 1:00 and am unable to sleep except for a few brief episodes before the alarm goes off. This may be the world's first case of jet lag *prior* to the start of a journey. It is a warm, muggy morning as we finish packing and check out of the hotel at 9:45. The driver, whom we hired, is right on time and we get to the airport at 10:15, well ahead of our 2:00 flight to San Francisco.

Checking our bags and getting boarding passes are accomplished with ease and speed, but then we are asked to sit in selected chairs while waiting for a wheelchair and pusher to arrive. And we wait. And wait. Lee had remarked how smoothly the check-in had proceeded. For this act of hubris, we are punished by having to wait. Two or three times, one or the other of us returns to the desk to ask how much longer the wait will be - each time, the answer is "15 to 20 minutes." Uh-huh.

It's around 11:00 when a wheelchair and attendant appear. We get through passport control very quickly and arrive at security. Because I am deemed "infirm," I do not have to walk through the scanner; instead I merely submit to a pat-down and a swab of my clothing. United Airlines does not have a lounge, so we are permitted to use the Air New Zealand facility while we wait for our flight. It is a large, well-lighted, relatively quiet place. Lee secures some cookies, small sandwiches, and coffee for us. I read more of the Isaacson book on Kindle. To my great surprise, without any additional requests, a wheelchair and pusher arrive at 1:00 and we get to the departure gate.

At this airport and at San Francisco's and Seattle's, we again encounter a number of people wearing the

despicable New York Yankees cap (see my comments on pp. 3, 4, and 15). "What is this world coming to? I ask."

We board the plane, a Boeing 777. Our seats are 9A and 9B, window and aisle, respectively, in this 1-2-1 seating. Because of the configuration of each pod, I cannot see Lee nor she me, unless one of us rises and steps into the aisle. The plane has two Business Class sections. Seats 1 - 8 constitute the first section, 9-17 the rear. The door through which we entered is right in front of Row 9, meaning that I need to do only a short walk to get to my seat. Or so I think. To avoid confusion (mine!) in setting my watch 19 hours back to PST, I keep it on Australian time until dialing it back does not also require changing the day and date.

The selection of movies is uninspired. There are only a couple from 2022-23. Available are the entire Harry Potter and Indiana Jones episodes, along with titles from the relatively recent past (*Fargo*, *Schindler's List*, *Shakespeare in Love*, etc.). There is, however, one current movie that I'll watch after a while: *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

The doors are closed at 1:55, the plane is pushed back at 2:00, and we are air-borne at 2:15. At 2:35, we are offered wine and warm nuts. At 3:00, we are offered a salad and cold shrimp. From the four meals on offer, I choose beef filet with au gratin potatoes and veggies; for dessert, chocolate ice cream with chocolate sauce.

The sound quality through the head phones is very poor, so I have trouble understanding much of the dialog in *Everything ...* I also have trouble understanding why it has become a candidate for best picture of the year. Yes, the special effects are well-done, but the storyline is incomprehensible and unlikely. Following the movie, I read *The New Yorker* and the Kindle book by *Walter Isaacson* and I work some crossword puzzles. At 7:05 pm Australian time, I set my watch back to 12:05 am PST. I close my eyes, but fail to sleep (despite having hardly slept last night in the Sydney hotel). I watch the 2003 film *Lost in Translation* - it is a delight! And even though it's now 4:00 am, I take my night-time pills. I also walk around the cabin, a bit, and manage to deploy my catheter during the times when the plane is not bumping. There are two lavatories directly in front of Row 9. The one on the port side is the largest I've seen on an airplane, but the one on the starboard side is typically minute. I am offered a grilled cheese sandwich and tomato soup, both very enjoyable.

At 6:00, breakfast is served. I choose the French toast which is accompanied by a fruit cup (cantaloupe, watermelon, apple, grapes), a croissant, and coffee. We've been flying in darkness for a while - the first light arrives at about 7:00. The captain announces that we hope to arrive early (8:00 rather than 8:50) owing to our departure on time and a strong tail wind. Ordinarily, this would be welcome news, except for today when we are already facing a seven-hour wait until our next flight leaves. As we approach SFO, he announces that we'll not be as early as he'd hoped because only one runway is open owing to poor visibility.

And he's right! When we cross from ocean to land, the terrain is bathed in strong morning light until we clear the range of mountains and descend into the valley - here, everything is covered by a thick layer of fog. Even as we descend, we don't reach the fog layer until about 1,000 feet. The captain must be using instruments to find the runway. Even at ground level, visibility is very poor.

We are told that we'll be departing through two doors: Door 1, between the cockpit and Row 1; and Door 2, the one through which we entered and is very close to us. Then, a change of plans - Door 1 only. And, because wheelchairs are slow in arriving, we're asked to delay our departure for a while. Do we have a choice?

When we are finally allowed to emerge from the plane, the wheelchair and pusher and my walker are all present on the jetway. With the use of our Global Entry cards, we get through passport control very quickly and receive a receipt that is then turned in at security. We head to the baggage carousel, trembling with

fear that no luggage will appear. Whew, the two bags finally do emerge (despite that priority tag on them) at the very tail end of all of the luggage from the plane. We take them to a nearby location where they are sent to another location to await our next flight. One last opportunity to get lost, I think.

We head to United's Polaris Lounge, a huge facility with ample seating, lots of snacks and drinks, a full-service restaurant (we're not interested) and, downstairs, the opportunity to take a shower (Lee indulges, I don't). The lavatories are interesting. Each is behind a door (that can be locked) and consists of a toilet, a sink, a chair, and lots of room. Time to deploy another catheter, this time on stable ground. I also take my morning pills.

Because there is a loud cell phone user near us, we change seats to a place that also has a large table. I connect to United's wi-fi and use my laptop to read the newspapers, send emails, work Wordle, etc. We munch on crackers, cheeses, and sweets. Following my laptop work, I read and also work some crossword puzzles. To nobody's surprise, I have trouble staying awake - my sleepless night at the hotel and on the plane are catching up with me.

At 3:25, a wheelchair and pusher arrive in the lounge and we are taken to the gate for our Seattle flight. The plane is an Airbus A319 with the first four rows designated for Business Class. We leave on time and arrive in Seattle, also on time. A very nice wheelchair pusher takes us to baggage claim where, for the final time, we say a silent prayer as our suitcases arrive. A phone call summons Jesse from wherever he's been waiting.

Of course, it's cold and raining. Well, what do you expect for Seattle in January? The drive home is smooth. We regale Jesse with tales of our lost luggage and our ship's dirty bottom.

READING DURING THE TRIP

In addition to several issues of *The New Yorker*, *TIME*, *The Progressive*, and *Yale Alumni Magazine*, I read the following books on Kindle: Kazuo Ishiguro's "Klara and the Sun" and Walter Isaacson's "The Code Breaker"; and one soft-cover book, James Thurber's "The Years with Ross."