

New Zealand – Princess Cruises – 12 days aboard the Diamond Princess

Ken Gill

Brief outline of tour

This was a 12-night cruise (noting that a 13-night option was also available, departing on different dates).

The cruise left the main International Terminal at Circular Quay at 4.00pm and returned to Sydney before 7.00am on the final morning.

The tour cost was \$1,659 per person (Jan 2016) for an obstructed ocean view cabin. (The “obstructed view” was not an issue, as we looked over the top of a lifeboat and were able to see plenty).

The itinerary began with two days at sea travelling to Auckland, then Tauranga, another day at sea, Wellington, Akaroa, Dunedin (Port Chalmers), Fiordland National Park scenic cruising and two further days at sea returning to Sydney.

There are similar cruises visiting the same places, but in the reverse order. The 13-night option also visited the Bay of Islands.

As with most cruises, this trip would suit people with all levels of fitness. A variety of shore excursions were available (additional cost) and these again could be selected to match individual interests and fitness levels.



Major highlights of the tour

MILFORD SOUND: Without a doubt, Milford Sound and the splendors of the **Fiordland National Park** provided a major highlight of our tour. Access to this sound (and Dusky and Doubtful Sounds) is always subject to the weather conditions, but we were fortunate to enter and view all three. The steep cliff faces are dramatic and it seems a wonder that such large vessels can navigate their way through such narrow, cloud blanketed waterways. A very special place indeed.



WELLINGTON: In Wellington, we took a shuttle bus from the ship into the CBD and walked to the **Cable Car** that takes you up to the **Botanic Gardens**. From there, a free shuttle mini-bus took us to **Zealandia**. We would highly recommend a visit to this 550-acre eco-sanctuary, where 9km of pest-exclusion fencing

surrounds a reserve populated by endangered plants, birds and animal life. After a couple of enjoyable hours there, we returned via the mini-bus to the Gardens where a beautiful walk through the grounds returns you to the CBD and awaiting shuttle buses.

AUCKLAND: The **Sky Tower** (walk) and **Museum** (bus) in Auckland are recommended visits.



DUNEDIN: We only paid for one shore excursion on this trip and that was to **Larnach Castle** in Dunedin. The tour of this 1800s building was well worth the visit and there was a later opportunity to further look around the CBD area.

SOME OTHER POINTS: Whilst all meals are provided as part of the cruise, we would also recommend booking into one or more of the specialty restaurants onboard, e.g. Sabatinis Italian or the Sterling Steakhouse. These special dining experiences are well worth the extra per person charge.



This cruise coincided with our wedding anniversary, and one highlight that can be mentioned is the opportunity to purchase “additional packages” to further enhance your enjoyment of the trip. These, as with most shore excursions, are not cheap. However, we particularly enjoyed the benefits of the “anniversary package” which included deliveries of French champagne, glass flutes, chocolates, roses, strawberries dipped in chocolate, champagne breakfast, bathrobes and a terrific guided tour of the ship’s bridge and all its workings. Expensive, but a good reminder of the “little treats” that we should occasionally enjoy!



A major highlight of cruising is the opportunity to meet new people and enjoy each others’ company and stories over meals or afternoon/evening refreshments. “Happy Hour” Trivia each afternoon provides one such opportunity, particularly on “at sea” days.

Other comments

This relatively brief cruise was taken in January 2016.

My wife and I chose this type of activity as we were essentially looking for a relaxing escape where most things were already organised for us and we didn’t have to travel too far.

Our major focus was to enjoy the onboard facilities and the overall opportunity to unwind.

We only booked one shore excursion as we were happy to simply visit the immediate sights in each port. We had already resolved to more extensively tour the broader attractions of New Zealand in a subsequent self-drive holiday.

We had previously enjoyed a Mediterranean cruise with Holland America (2014) and we find it difficult to distinguish between the companies in terms of what they offer and our resulting enjoyment of their cruises. We would recommend either.

Although the Diamond Princess accommodates around 2,700 passengers (and 1,100 crew), we at no time felt crowded or frustrated at having to wait in long lines for various services. With 18 decks and a range of facilities, there was always somewhere quiet to escape. Each night we did not book a table for dinner. We were happy to arrive at different restaurants (usually early) and sit wherever a table was available (again without any long delays).

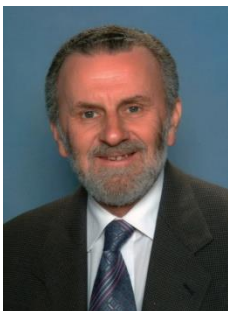


Useful references

www.princess.com.au

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Ken was Principal of Richmond High School (1992-2004) and Macarthur Girls High School (2005-2010). In retirement he enjoys the challenges of golf, the discoveries of travel and the wonders of watching grandchildren growing up.