

Cruise from Melbourne to NZ on the Grand Princess 2023

Tuesday 28 March. Melbourne

We drove from Deb's place, left the car in Port Melbourne and walked to the ship. Check in and embarkation was a breeze as we had uploaded all documents beforehand, including a negative Covid test. We received our Princess Medallion which enabled us to get on board, and then to book things, plan, get places, see what's going on etc. As we approached our C631 balcony stateroom the medallion even unlocked the door! Later we did our safety exercises, had an orientation walk around the ship, had a lovely dinner at Michelangelo's and watched an amazing show by violinist Katei.

The Grand Princess carries about 2600 passengers, and was the biggest cruise ship in the world when it was built in 1998. Now it would be considered mid size. We very much fit the demographic for people on board – mainly elderly and with plenty of cruise experience.



Wednesday 29 March. At sea.

In the morning we had breakfast at the buffet then went to an excellent presentation on our two next destinations, Eden and Sydney. After lunch at the buffet, we had a read, then watched the movie 'Elvis'. Our Italian-themed dinner was at the Da Vinci and was followed by Sweet Soul Music Motown show by the ship's singers and dancers. Food on board so far has been very good but not outstanding. It rained throughout the day so it was good that we were on a sea day.

Thursday 30 March. Eden.

Eden is a town of about 3000, half way between Melbourne and Sydney. After breakfast we took the shuttle to the town centre, wandered along the main street and visited the whaling museum. This was excellent! Eden sits on Twofold Bay which is rich in krill so whales call there on their migration to and from Antarctica. In the late 1800s whalers and orcas (killer whales) formed an unlikely partnership over a period of 50 years. The orcas herded a bigger whale into the bay, fetched the whalers and helped in the hunt, being rewarded by getting the prized tongue and cheeks. One of these, Old Tom, was particularly loved and developed a special relationship with the whalers, even rescuing them when they came to grief.



Back on the ship we had dinner at Botticelli's and watched another amazing show by violinist Katei.

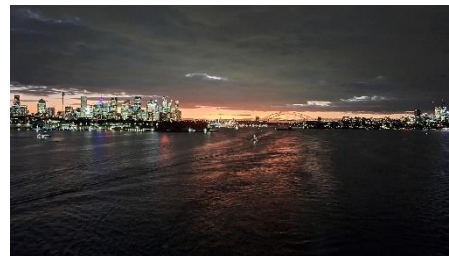
We really enjoyed the first section of our cruise, and quickly got back into cruise mode. We are a little wary of covid and wear masks in busy areas, but by and large everything feels safe and the cruising experience is much as it was before. The Medallion, and its associated app and room TV are brilliant. They make planning and booking a breeze. Also having Internet available (although slow) is great – something we have not had on a cruise before.

Friday 31 March. Sydney.

Transfer to our new cabin B711 on Deck 11 was simple. After breakfast we left the ship and explored the familiar sights of downtown Sydney. We started by walking over the Harbour Bridge to see wonderful views of the ship docked in Circular Quay, the Rocks, and the Opera House. We then walked back to the Opera House and up to Hyde Park, before slowly making our way down through the city centre to the ship. A big walk but pleasant on a beautiful Sydney day.



Our bags had been transferred so when we came back to the ship we zipped through customs and went straight to our new cabin. It is identical to the previous cabin but has a smaller balcony. In the afternoon we recovered from the long walk then had another lovely dinner at Botticelli's. We have decided to eat there each evening as the three main restaurants have the same menu, but we can have our own table at Botticelli's and it is a bit more intimate. After dinner we watched the Sydney skyline recede as we sailed away, then listened to music by the band Asian Soul.



Saturday 1 April. At sea.

After breakfast Ross did a mini putting competition (and won it), then after lunch Kathy did line dancing, then we watched a great presentation (by an Australian!) about Picton and Wellington. Dinner was at Botticelli's and then we watched an excellent show by Johnny Cash impersonator Daniel Thompson. A highlight today was purchasing two high-quality jackets for \$50 each using our on-board credit, and then discovering that Princess had given us more on-board credit than we were expecting. We really enjoy sea days. They give a great opportunity to experience activities throughout the ship and to gather footage for our YouTube videos.

Sunday 2 April. At sea.

After breakfast Ross went to a lecture on famous Australian shipwrecks. Lunch was a burger around the pool then in the afternoon we did our AGM. Afterwards we went to the gym and had a swim in the spa pool. Dinner in Botticelli's was formal, and was followed by an excellent show in the Princess Theatre, this time 'Showtime with Boys in the Band'. Another lovely day at sea.

Monday 3 April. At sea.

After breakfast we had a good long walk around the ship then sat in the atrium, had a coffee and listened to the lovely music. After lunch we revised our wills, went to the gym, had a spa, read a book and edited our cruise video. After a lovely dinner at Botticelli's, we went to a concert by Daniel Thompson, this time singing country. The music on this ship is of a very high quality.



Tuesday 4 April. Picton.

After breakfast we caught the shuttle into Picton and had a coffee and a wander around the lovely foreshore. We were then picked up by our friend Bridget Byrne and taken to see her new place outside Blenheim. Bridget then drove us south to Marfell's Beach where we had a lovely picnic. It is a beautiful spot with views over to the North Island. Back on the ship we had a spa, another nice dinner at Botticelli's and then watched a concert by 'Boys in the Band' and Katei. Another great day!



Wednesday 5 April. Wellington.

After breakfast we took the shuttle into the city and met Michael who lent us the car so we could drive home. We dropped some bags, did some washing, did the lawns, had a pie, then drove back to have coffee with Sarah. Back on board we had spa then had dinner at Botticelli's and watched a show by comedian Simon McKinney. The weather in Wellington was beautiful but windy.



Thursday 6 April. Napier.

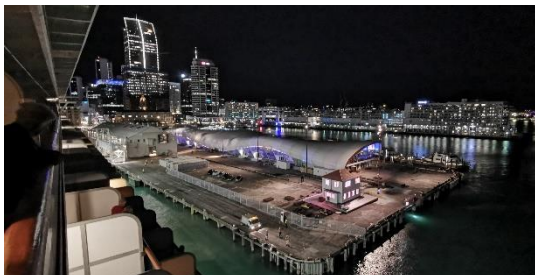
After breakfast we caught the shuttle into town and wandered through the art deco streets to meet our friend Libby. She showed us her new place then delivered us back to the city and we had a lovely walk along the foreshore. There has been much cleaning up after the recent cyclone. We had lunch and a catchup with friends Diane and Martin Fairley in Ahuriri and then returned to the ship. After a spa we had dinner at Botticelli's and then watched the production 'Stardust' by the ship's singers and dancers. Excellent.



Friday 7 April. At sea.

We were supposed to dock in Tauranga and meet up with Scott and Jan and Bob and Prue. Sadly, the Captain decided to head off a storm and make for Auckland so we missed out on seeing our friends. We anchored off Auckland's North Shore and we're finally allowed to dock close to midnight.

After breakfast we caught up on our correspondence, walked around the decks and tidied up our video. In the afternoon we chatted with our friends, and had a spa. We farewelled our excellent servers in Botticelli's, Joel and Glemer, then went to a country show by Trevor Knight.



Saturday 8 April. Auckland.

We disembarked smoothly and caught a bus up to K Road and then walked down Queen Street. We met up with cousin John Pipe and his wife Diane for a long overdue catchup. After lunch they took us to the airport and we flew to Wellington on Jetstar. We took the Skybus and train back to Paraparaumu where we were met by Archie and taken home.



We thoroughly enjoyed our cruise on the Grand Princess.

- We learned that post-covid we could cruise safely.
- The ship is comfortable and well appointed.
- We fitted the demographic on the ship: older people and regular cruisers. The activities and approach on the Grand Princess suit this demographic.
- We enjoyed the port stops especially catching up with friends.



Our video for the cruise can be watched on our calros3 YouTube channel. https://youtu.be/ePDgsSWw_V8