



MS Prinsendam, Celtic Cruise

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I had written 27 pages about The Celtic Cruise and here is a chopped down version from the time I boarded the ms Prinsendam (a Holland America Line ship) at Tilbury, just outside London 29 Aug 2011. I returned 12 Sep.

30 Aug - Guernsey. This little island has their own currency although it is part of the UK and is noted for their Guernsey cattle. Children and some adults were evacuated during World War II. My walk to the Castle Cornet took me along the water front passing 18th-century Georgian houses, pubs, cafes and restaurants. Most interesting was seeing the low-tide site with oodles of boats stranded below. Interesting item: William the Conqueror required everyone to be in bed by 8:00 PM. A fact: Some Guernsey and jersey residents believe their ancestors were pouques ('pooks'), or fairies! The last reported fairy was seen in 1900.

31Aug - St Malo, France. Just off the coast of the northern French region of Normandy is an historic walled town. The dramatic tidal fluctuations are among the worlds' most drastic and lends an air of mystery to the island. At Mont St-Michel we drove along the road to get near the entrance which is surrounded by water. On the way out the tide had receded and a street cleaner was spraying water to clear the debris for the cars to park. I hope they all got back to their cars before the tide came back in. The entrance is a small unmarked single door. Once through this very small entranceway we come upon a virtual city with a narrow street lined with shops. More time than we had was needed to explore this fascinating place. Before returning to the ship I walked over to the entrance of the old walled Citadelle. It is also known as Intra-Muros ('within the walls'). Strolling along the narrow cobbled streets was such fun.

1 Sep - A sea day and unexpected excitement was a helicopter coming to collect a seriously ill passenger. The whole procedure took half an hour according to my photos. My cabin was on the 9th deck two decks below the area for the air-lift by The Royal Navy Rescue helicopter. As the helicopter left the Captain said she would be in the hospital in about 20 minutes.



2. Sep - Bristol, United Kingdom. Bath is situated just 13 miles from Bristol and the city was first established as a spa with the Latin name Aquae Sulis (the waters of Sulis) by the Romans in 43 AD. We strolled all around and viewed the baths from various levels. The water flows from the spring into the corner of the bath at a constant temperature of 114°F. Leaving Bath we drove out into the Cotswold countryside passing through Highgrove. We passed the drive to Prince Charles' home (which was hidden back through the trees). This is also the area where J. K. Rawlings began writing her first Harry Potter books at a local restaurant to save on heat.

3 Sep - Cork, Ireland. Of course I 'Kissed the Blarney Stone'. Blarney Castle is one of Ireland's most famous castles. It is now a partial ruin with some accessible rooms and battlements. At the top of the castle is the Stone of Eloquence, better known as the Blarney Stone, set in the wall below the battlements. To kiss it, one has to lean backwards (holding on to an iron railing) from the parapet walk. Legend says that the stone imparts the gift of eloquence to those who kiss it. Surrounding the castle are extensive gardens with trees spread about seeming to be laid out according to a plan and well maintained. The view is gorgeous beyond words.



4 Sep - Anglesey, Wales. Beaumaris Castle is the focal point of this village with its peaceful streets and yachts moored in the harbor. Sheep farming is very much in evidence. It is said Wales has 3 million people and 12 million sheep. On our way to Conwy Castle we passed the Air Force base where Prince William is stationed. Conwy Castle (a rectangular enclosure castle) is among the finest surviving medieval fortifications in Britain. This Welsh castle, boasts eight beautifully proportioned towers. It is built on a rocky outcropping overlooking the river estuary providing it with great military might. A walk through the village brought me to the smallest house in Britain (10 feet by 6 feet). It is also known as the Quay House on the quay.

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoc

h. Currently famous for having the longest town name in Europe, which when translated means 'Saint Mary's Church in the Hollow of White Hazel near a rapid Whirlpool and The Church of Saint Tysilio near the Red cave'. I had read about this place a couple years ago when I was researching for a tour of Britain. The local and abbreviated title for the village is Llanfairpwll.

5 Sep - Belfast, Northern Ireland. Belfast is built on mud flats. When a resident reaches the age of 60 they have available free coach rides. Many of them use this benefit for traveling all over the country. There are 560 bars and drinking establishments and the same number of churches.

Our excursion takes us to County Down to visit the grave site of Ireland's patron saint, and Down Cathedral. Then on to Saul nearby to see the first ecclesiastical site in Ireland and on to Gray Abbey.

6 Sep - Greenock, Scotland (Glasgow). Our destination today is Inveraray Castle and Loch Lomond. There are 5 million Scots and 9 million sheep.

I never knew who invented the television! John Logie Baird (1888-1946) was a Scottish engineer and inventor of the world's first practical, publicly demonstrated television system, and also the world's first fully electronic color television tube.

As we approach Inveraray Castle the flag for the Duke of Argyll (the head of Clan Campbell) was flying, meaning the Duke is at home. Our guide instructed us should we meet the Duke we would greet him as 'Your Grace'.

Its fairy-tale exterior suggests the grandeur of its gracious interior, which reflects the many fascinating tastes of the family throughout the years. Inside, there is a fine collection of family pictures and superb tapestries set in painted rooms of outstanding beauty. The armory hall alone contains 1,300 pieces. Fine 18th-century French furniture, English and Continental china and family artifacts form a unique collection spanning the generations.

We were taken to the dining room, the salon, the main hall and the front salon and upstairs to a couple rooms, then down to the basement to see the huge kitchen. It seems there were about six ancient large stoves. Our next stop is Loch Lomond, the famous and beautiful inland loch, known as the Queen of Scottish Lakes, and noted for its fishing, is the largest loch in Great Britain. The loch is featured in a well-known song which was first published around 1841.

7 Sep - We were unable to go to the next scheduled port due to gales in the North Atlantic. We had to vacate the dock and move about 5 miles to Holy Loch.

8 Sep - Portree, Scotland (Isle of Skye) United Kingdom. Skye is part of the Inner Hebrides which lies closer to mainland Scotland. Portree is one of the original tourist destinations. Visitors have been crossing from the 'main' British Isle for centuries.

Loch Alsh, Loch Duich, and Loch Long meet at Eilean Donan castle. This is now my favorite castle. The first fortified castle at the site was completed in the 14th century. Since then, at least four different versions of the castle have been built and re-built as the feudal history of Scotland unfolded through the centuries. Partially destroyed in a Jacobite uprising in 1719, Eilean Donan lay in ruins for the best part of 200 years until Lt Colonel John MacRae-Gilstrap bought the island. At the beginning of the 20th century, he launched a restoration project. It took two decades, but the faithfully restored castle re-opened in 1932.

This is Scotland's most-photographed castle. Eilean Donan's image has graced the covers of calendars and postcards and has even starred in such movies as Highlander and James Bond. The castle's tower rises from the water's edge and is joined to the shore by a narrow stone bridge with sheer mountains as a backdrop. We walk across the bridge to the entrance. The contents of Eilean Donan reflect the history, from the billeting room and its 12-foot thick walls, to the lavishly decorated dining hall, with its secret tunnels behind the walls. We continue exploring inside of the castle. Once outside I walked all around the castle. This is the first castle I have visited that is really in use and it was exciting to walk and climb the circling stone steps/stairs from room to room. Although not occupied it is used for special occasions.

9 Sep - Kirkwall, Scotland. We head northeast of mainland Orkney to the Broch of Gurness. Broch means 'stronghold,' and is a type of building unique to Scotland. There are about 50 examples of brochs in Orkney. I have read a little about the stones but it is exciting to actually see some of them.

Brochs comprise circular stone towers, apparently built to house the elite of a community and also provide safety for everyone in a time of need. The structure of the broch was carefully designed and built; a double wall of stone, thicker towards the base and tied with cross slabs at various heights to provide stability as well as internal galleries. The external face was pierced by only one opening – the entrance. Internally, tall slits penetrated much of the height of the building, reducing the weight of stone as well as providing light for the galleries between the walls. The space inside the broch provided living accommodation. Some areas were divided by timber partitions, some by stone.

The broch at Gurness was discovered by chance by the Orkney poet Robert Rendall. One day in the summer of 1929, he was sitting on the Knowe (Scottish variant of Knoll) of Gurness sketching the view of Rousay Sound, when one of the legs of his stool slipped into the ground. On removing some of the stones he uncovered a descending set of stairs. Excavations were carried out that year, and the broch along with an impressive arrangement of outbuildings was recovered.

On to the center of mainland Orkney to visit the Ring of Brodgar and view the Standing Stones of Stennus. This is the finest known truly circular early Bronze Age stone ring, and is the icon of Orkney's ancient heritage. And I thought Stonehenge was until I read about these!

This great henge monument is situated on the Ness of Brodgar, surrounded by the agricultural heart of Orkney. Henges are an entirely British phenomenon, dating from approximately 3000 BC and occurring as far apart as Cornwall and Orkney. Usually they contain a circle of standing stones. The purpose of the ring is not known, but it is commonly accepted that all henges had a ritual or ceremonial purpose. Were the rings a method of mapping the heavens and marking the passage of time – an ancient observatory? There are certainly astronomical alignments at Brodgar, when natural landscape features mark the rising and setting of the moon at specific times of the year.

The surrounding land is portioned off for agriculture, sheep, Black Angus cattle, etc. The area has been farmed for 5000 years. Sheep that we had seen in the lower areas, Wales and Ireland could not survive here where the ground is always wet, although the grass is plentiful. The cross between Cotswold and Shetland sheep had made the sheep that can stand the damp earth of Orkney. Orkney Beer is brewed here and called Skull Splitter. A question was asked about snow in the area. There is not much snow, just a dusting because of the salt in the air.



10 Sep - Rosyth (Edinburgh) Scotland. Rather than see another castle I chose to see the Falkirk Wheel. It is a rotating boat lift located in Scotland, UK, connecting the Forth and Clyde Canal with the Union Canal, opened in 2002. The Wheel is a massive structure that lifts boats more than 100 feet into the air -- a stunningly simple-yet-intriguing alternative to the ancient system of locks and gates. Our boat maneuvered into the bottom gondola of the Wheel, which then made a graceful sweep, lifting the boat up and depositing it on the Union Canal that is supported on columns 100 feet above. This is an awesome experience similar to a ferris wheel, only we are inside a boat. We hardly knew we were moving as we rose in the air. The ascent takes approximately 15 minutes, allowing plenty of time to enjoy the stunning views. To

a non-engineer it seemed as though there was a giant cog wheel raising us up. The difference in the levels is 79 feet, roughly the equivalent to the height of an eight-story building. The wheel is the only rotating boat lift of its kind in the world, and is regarded as an engineering landmark for Scotland. The wheel was constructed by Butterley Engineering at Ripley in Derbyshire under Millennium Plans to reconnect the Fort and Clyde Canal with the Union Canal, mainly for recreational use.

The Antonine Wall was built around 143 BC and stretched from Bo'ness on the River Forth to Old Kilpatrick on the River Clyde. The fort is the best preserved of the 19 castles constructed along the length of the Antonine Wall. (Of course the castle is long gone) Turf ramparts 20 feet thick on a stone base defended this fort and double ditches run around the three sides. Over the causeway, across the Antonine ditch, lies a series of pits called lilia. These originally had a pointed stake at the bottom of each to serve as a trap for anyone attacking the fort.

11 Sep – sea. I took this opportunity to have a special dinner in the Pinnacle Dining Room.

12 Sep - For just a short period each summer when the Royal Court has left London for summer vacation in Scotland it is possible to view the 19 state rooms of Buckingham Palace. The Queen makes her annual visit to Balmoral Castle in Scotland from late July to early October. I am fortunate that this is the time I am passing through London. The traffic is horrendous and we are an hour late but we are allowed to skirt around the lines. We enter the Grand Hall and look across the expanse of deep red carpet towards the Grand Staircase. Magnificent fittings, furniture, chandeliers and paintings are featured throughout the State Rooms. Now on display is The Duchess of Cambridge's (Kate Middleton) wedding dress, designed by Sarah Burton for Alexander McQueen. The dress is covered with lace intricately stitched over the dress. There was a description of the dress and statistics about it. Sorry, I can't remember those details. The staircases are all open and provide a dramatic transition to the second floor. We leave the palace by the Bow Room and stroll across the gardens. The garden is truly a 'walled oasis in the middle of London'. We end our tour with a walk along the south side of the garden, with splendid views of the west front of the Palace and the famous lake. What a wonderful place to stroll. We follow the path and come to a gate where we exit and find our way back to our coach to transfer to the London airport to catch our flights.

Cars pay 10 pounds per day to drive in London. Cars are photographed, matched by computer. If there is no match the charge is 80 pounds. If this is not paid the car is returned, crushed and on a truck.