

Travel & Outdoors

TRAVEL 32

Everyone for tennis

WALK 34

An Dun

OUTDOORS 35

Eider it's a duck or not

Liner notes

A cruise to New York on the luxurious Queen Mary 2 is a holiday in itself

CHRISTIAN SYLT

It isn't often you can say you really enjoyed travelling from A to B. Whether it's by air, road or rail there are delays, stress and the inevitability of being crammed into a seat for hours on end. But there is a way to avoid all that.

I've just arrived in New York after a full night's sleep in a bed that wasn't just flat, it was king-size. The food on the way was exquisite and rivalled that found in the best city centre restaurants I've ever been to. Yesterday, after dinner, I soaked in a hot tub as we approached New York and throughout the journey other passengers could be heard saying how much fun they were having. The best part? It only costs £499.

There is a catch. I didn't travel to New York on a private plane but on the Queen Mary 2 cruise liner and it took seven nights to get here. Unlike most cruises, which stop off at ports of call on their way to a destination, the QM2 spends

adventure, people packed into local ferries wave and cheer as the QM2 sets sail.

After the festivities it's hard to resist the urge to explore. There are ten restaurants, seven bars, five swimming pools, a ballroom, a nightclub and the obligatory costly boutiques aimed at that nigh-mythical group of tourists which buys jewellery in the Swarovski store, clothing from the Hermès outlet and sundries from the on-board Harrods concession. However, it's the most

Two outdoor glass lifts rise up the side of the ship

most of the year travelling directly between New York and Southampton. It's the only cruise liner making scheduled transatlantic crossings and the tremendous sense of occasion on board reflects this exclusivity.

It begins as the QM2 leaves from Southampton. It seems like most of the 3,000 passengers are gathered on the top deck, sipping champagne with the QM2's famous red and black funnel towering over. Her horn bellows as we leave the port behind us and over the loudspeaker a maritime historian talks about the history of the port and the liner.

The smell of polished decking is thick in the air and, adding to the sense of

unusual facilities which best convey the scale of the QM2. There's

a full-size theatre, a ballroom, a two-floor spa, a cheesy casino complete with table games and even a planetarium featuring dramatic shows narrated by Harrison Ford. Corridors stretch as far as the eye can see, with an abundance of cream carpets and beech walls. It all sparkles.

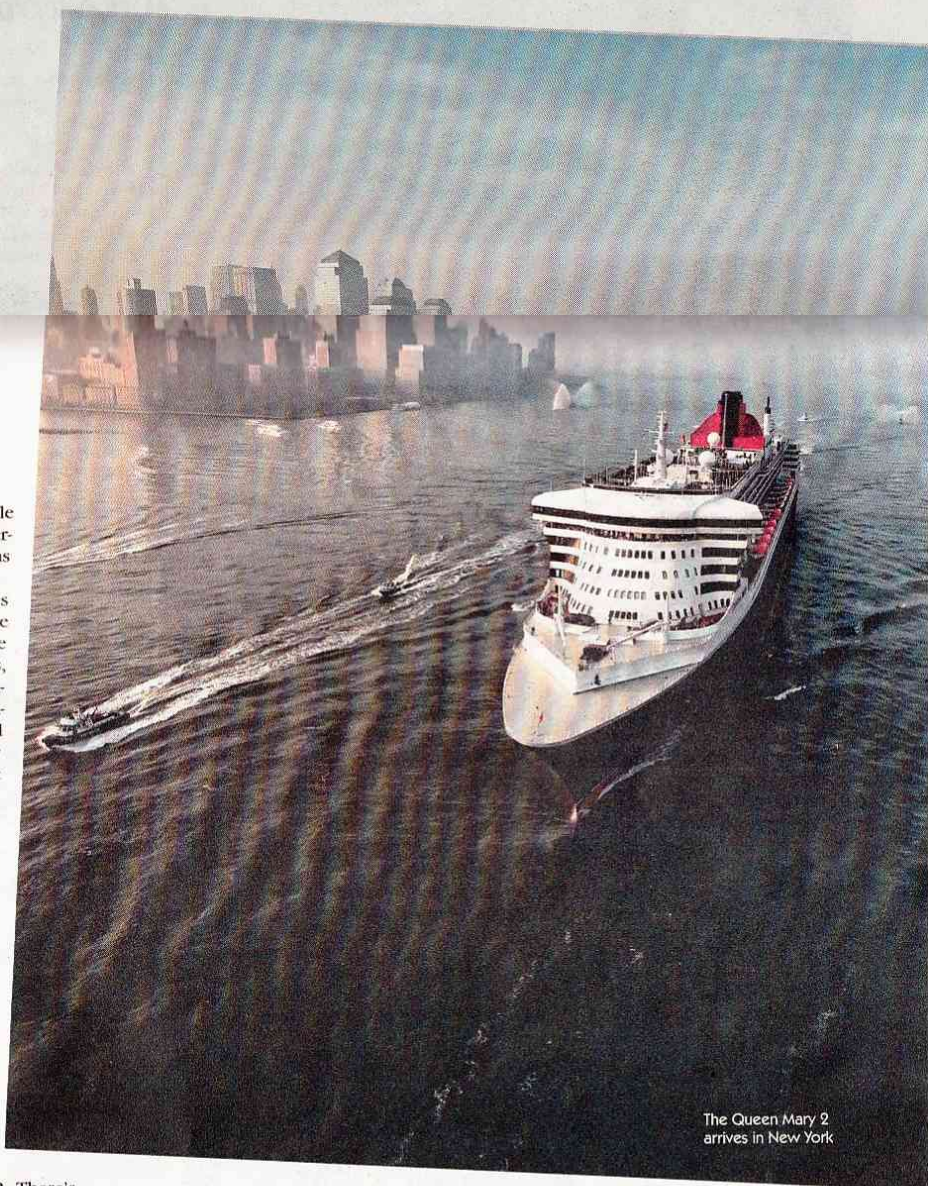
There is an aura of Vegas glitz throughout the QM2, with huge statues of Greek gods straddling the planetarium entrance and two outdoor glass lifts rising up the side of the ship. If you've ever felt queasy about using the glass lift on the exterior of a building, it's best to

avoid these as all there is between you and the Atlantic is what seems like a particularly thin pane of glass.

Sadly, there are very few public areas on the QM2 where guests can see from one side of the ship to the other and the consequence of the lack of wide open spaces is that it can be tough to remember your way around. An exception is the QM2's flagship restaurant, the Britannia. This is a two-storey Art Deco affair which spans the entire width of the ship. There aren't many other destinations where you can be sure that one

eatery, which serves thousands of people every day, will serve top-quality food for seven nights in a row. The menu changes daily yet still manages to serve fresh fruit seven nights into the crossing.

All the food and drink, except for alcohol, is included in the price, you can even get room service and relax in bed all day, should the notion strike you. The mid-range cabins are like rooms in a deluxe hotel and are kitted out with 21st-century touches. There are UK sockets in cabins and wi-fi available through-



The Queen Mary 2 arrives in New York



Relaxing in a Princess Suite, showtime, below



ing return airfare. Standard rates start at £999, which would be reasonable for the seven nights of accommodation, never mind the food and drink. There aren't many five-star hotels which offer that kind of value but this experience isn't just for those on a budget.

Moulin Rouge movie director Baz Luhrmann, *Star Wars* star Carrie Fisher and actor John Cleese have all given talks on QM2 crossings and hosted drinks with the passengers. Seeing stars aboard makes the experience seem even more like a once-in-a-lifetime trip.

Scottish racing legend Sir Jackie Stewart is a regular guest on the liner and describes it as "very spoiling, but most relaxing". He adds that "the accommodation onboard the Queen Mary 2 is probably the finest of any ship in the world. The absence of jetlag is an extra bonus and since it takes six days and seven nights to complete the crossing,

the time change is looked after in a very comfortable way."

One of the most unique on-board features is an ingenious

tiered swimming pool. It has a natural wave-like motion because water picks up even the slightest movement of the ship. Its stepped sides mean that, instead of spilling onto the deck, water from the wave motion flows into the upper tier before cascading back down like a waterfall.

For something a little less active, try sitting in the hot tub watching the seascape through the glass canopy. It couldn't be more different to being squeezed into an airline seat. If you've ever felt like you needed a holiday to recover from tiredness due to a transatlantic flight then the QM2 could get quite addictive.

Compared to the QM2, the plane seems so old-fashioned.

THE FACTS Advertised fares on the QM2 start at £999 per person, tel: 0843 374 2224 or visit www.cunard.co.uk

 Visit www.holidays.scotsman.com for more great holidays

Smashed it

Top coaches are at your service when you book into a tennis training camp

FRANK O'DONNELL

I am standing across the net from the athletic figure of Barcelona-based Martin Cejas, a tennis player and coach who is respected across Europe. I am barely respected in my own club. The gulf in class is palpable.

Cejas speaks little English but this is easily the best tennis lesson I have ever had. All the hundreds of words that spill out of the mouth of the average coach are replaced with simple actions. "No, Frank, thee. Like thee," as he demonstrates the correct movement into the net for a backhand volley.

I am gripped.

Cejas soon has me volleying like I've never volleyed before. Middle of the racquet, with power and directed to the corners. And now it all seems so easy. "Excellent, excellent," he shouts.

It is a Saturday morning and day one of a three-day intensive tennis coaching weekend with Jonathan Markson Tennis at Barnes in west London. Stretched out before me under a hot sun are 20 all-weather and astro courts, of which

six are taken up by the Markson course. Around 35 people, of all ages, are here to improve their tennis, from occasional club players to county standard stalwarts. We are split into groups of five to six based on ability and each group is given an individual coach.

Markson tennis was founded in 1981 by Jonathan Markson, a former pupil of Glasgow Academy who became a great tennis player, a lawyer and an entrepreneur. Sadly, he died last year at just 55. His philosophy, however, lives on in his academy, which teaches a classical view of tennis as a sport of angles, deft touch and precision. If you only want to learn how to hit hard from the back of the court you may be disappointed.

Coaching begins with a thorough warm-up and then players are assessed on all the basic strokes. At the start, we are videoed performing a series of strokes and then videoed again at the end and the differences discussed within the group. The aim is to see significant improvement in technique.

Players rotate within their groups so everyone has the chance to work with each of the coaches over the course of the three days. Head coach Michael Miller walks around throughout to offer individual pointers.

Sessions are split in conventional style between the key strokes (forehand, backhand, volley, serve, overhead etc). There is also a focus on fitness, footwork and mental attitude, in particular developing the "killer instinct" in matchplay



48 HOURS IN

Crieff

■ **Saturday, 10am** Pop into the tourism information centre on the high street for an overview of the area.

■ **Noon** Have a light lunch at Knock Castle Hotel and Spa, a Scots baronial architectural gem, and book in.

■ **3pm** Take a short stroll to the Glenturret distillery, and the Famous Grouse Experience. A mix of Diageo marketing puff and a fun interactive film experience, the centre has a cafe and shop where you can treat yourself to a personally labelled bottle of Grouse (www.thefamousgrouse.com/visit-us/visitor-centre, tours from £7.50).

■ **7pm** Enjoy aperitifs in the lounge at Knock Castle. For dinner, indulge in

