

Around **New Zealand** & crossing the **Tasman Sea** aboard the **Sun Princess**

Sea monster soup, good weather and resignation that cruise ships may become my second home, on a fourteen day journey around the North and South islands of New Zealand



3rd to 16th December 2018

Mayette and Steve Anyon-Smith – and a few thousand others; this time without as many kids

Short Summary

This cruise was my reward for a successful series of visits to a cardiologist. He explained that I wasn't going to die in my sleep. This was counter to the idea first floated by a Laverty Pathology lass who may need to re-examine her career choice.

The Tasman Sea has become one of my favourite places. An extraordinary number and variety of seabirds and cetaceans live in it. We saw some of them....

During this cruise we managed to visit some fenced eco-sanctuaries and pest-free offshore islands, thus seeing some of New Zealand's endemic birds.

Princess Cruises caters for older and wiser passengers. Few kids were on board. Although our ship was rather old in the scheme of such things it delivered the goods – in spades.

Once more, for our fourth cruise this year, we had a brilliant time making new friends on board and ashore, exploring and enjoying the total distraction that can only be gained by not having to make too many decisions or as some might say, “thinking”. Again, I was the only birder. Go figure.



The Plan

As we have paid for a 106 day cruise on Sea Princess next year we were keen to experience a Princess Cruises ship. Additionally, given our excellent cruise around New Zealand’s North Island earlier in the year we were excited to visit the other half. Not such a complicated plan.

Itinerary

Date	Arrive Time	Port	Depart Time
3 December 2018		Sydney	16:00
4 December 2018		Tasman Sea	
5 December 2018		Tasman Sea	
6 December 2018	07:00	Bay of Islands	16:00
7 December 2018	06:30	Auckland	17:30
8 December 2018	04:00	Tauranga	16:30
9 December 2018	12:00	Napier	19:00

10 December 2018	08:00	Wellington	18:00
11 December 2018	08:00	Akaroa	18:00
12 December 2018	07:00	Port Chalmers (Dunedin)	18:00
13 December 2018	07:00	Fiordland National Park (Scenic Cruising)	16:00
14 December 2018		Tasman Sea	
15 December 2018		Tasman Sea	
16 December 2018	06:30	Sydney	

The total distance cruised was 3442 nautical miles.



(Note re the map above – the arrows are pointing in the wrong direction)

Sun Princess

Ship vitals

According to Wikipedia: The ship was built in 1995 in Fincantieri, Italy at a cost of \$US300 million. At the time of its launch she was the largest cruise ship ever built. Sun Princess was the ship on which the television show *Love Boat: The Next Wave* starring Robert Urich was filmed. She made the news in October 2007 as the largest ship to ever cross beneath the

Sydney Harbour Bridge while entering the harbor for the first time, with a vertical clearance of approximately 2.5 m (8 ft 2 in) to spare at low tide. Some statistics:

Class and type:	<i>Sun</i> -class cruise ship
Tonnage:	77,441 GT
Length:	856 ft (261 m)
Beam:	105.6 ft (32.2 m)
Draught:	27 ft (8.2 m)
Decks:	10 passenger decks
Deck clearance:	3.208 m (10.52 ft)
Installed power:	46,080 kW (combined)
Propulsion:	Diesel-electric; two shafts
Speed:	22.40 knots (41.48 km/h; 25.78 mph)
Capacity:	2010 passengers
Crew:	924

The ship will be used as a floating hotel for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

As with her sister ship, P&O's Pacific Explorer, the layout of the ship is excellent. There was somewhere I could "sea-watch" out of the wind irrespective of which way it was blowing. The ship is as well maintained as anyone who has ever owned a boat plonked in salt water could expect. Sometimes you just have paint over the rusty bits and worry about it later....

Booking and processing

We booked our cruise with Ozcruising. We paid \$A1517 each for an oceanview room on Deck 8. This equated to a little less than \$110 per day – incredible value for Princess, which is generally around 50% more expensive than Carnival or P&O.

Once more the booking, on-line check-in and processing at the Overseas Passenger Terminal at Circular Quay in Sydney Harbour was simple, slick and cheerful. Passengers are issued with an electronic “ship card” for entry and exit to the ship and for all purchases on-board. The ship is effectively cashless. All prices are in Australian dollars.

Cabins

The cabins (known as staterooms in ship-speak) on Princess are smaller than those on Carnival ships. Nevertheless they are sufficient. Ours was modern, clean and fully functioning. The large flat screen television had hundreds of on demand movies, TV shows, shipboard propaganda and the like.

Food

Shipboard dining was mostly better than the Carnival or P&O ships but not markedly so and inclined to be patchy. Significantly there were king prawn dishes and other hot and / or cold seafood in the buffet every day; seafood platters with crab, prawns, oysters and scallops on one occasion and lobster tails in the free fine dining room during a “formal night”. Guess who missed out on the lobster? Anyone who complained about the food deserved to themselves an upper cut and consider quietly removing themselves from the vessel.

Specially trained hand-washing scrutineers would assiduously insist on hand washing before entry to dining areas. Excepting the cut roasts the food was on a self-serve basis in the buffet. If you see Mayette ask her how many prawns she can eat.



The free “fine dining” restaurant available to us – on this ship there was only one – was okay. Lovely décor and service, although on occasion, as with any restaurant, the description of the food on the menu seemed to be at odds with that you discovered plonked

on your plate. As with the other ships of our acquaintance the choices were excellent but the food was sometimes no better than the buffet options. Fine dining did not require pre-booking. In fact the process for doing so was so silly that the management may have been deliberately trying to avoid having guests do it.

Drink

Tea and coffee machines were found in the buffet area on the bow on Deck 14. They may have been elsewhere. It was observed that there was no Deck 13. The coffee was quite bad. Thankfully you could buy a premium coffee card - \$A36 for 15 fancy (or ordinary) coffees that were available in any size up to a bucket – this was an American company after all. This was worth every cent!



Soft drink and alcoholic drinks needed to be purchased. A range of Australian and imported beer was available in bottles and on-tap. If you bought four bottled beers you gained the fifth one “free”. In this way a Fat Yak cost \$A7 – so this was similar to pub prices in Sydney. My preferred bar – Riviera Bar on Deck 12 would happily put the extra beers on ice until needed. You could also

dump them in the bar fridge in your room.

Wine could be purchased from \$A29 per bottle. I didn't do this as Princess Cruises allows you to bring two bottles on board at the start of the cruise (and with extra bottles for a \$A15 corkage fee).

The duty free alcohol on board was cheap enough as long as you wanted entry level guzzling gear. Of single malts they had very few and they weren't exciting or particularly good value.

On-board facilities and activities

There were a number of swimming pools. The longest was about 12 metres in length. This was heated to some degree and I was able to complete 45 very short laps every day I wished to swim. This pool was open at sunrise. An adjacent hot whirlpool was a wonderful post-swim reward. Rarely was anyone using any of the pools before lunchtime. On the last day in the Tasman with 45 knot winds and a heavy swell, swimming was an extreme sport.

Bizarrely the pool was still open during this time. I had a small crowd marvelling that I didn't hit anything. I was marvelling at this happy fact too.

We attended a few shows in the main theatre. These were excellent, although I confess that live shows and I rarely intersect at home. Our favourite was Steve Larkin and his Freddy Mercury tribute “Mercury Rising”. The down side was that you needed to be seated at least half an hour before the shows started to get a seat. Many of the performances were also rather short – around 40 minutes or so.

There were fewer spontaneous “please the whole family” activities than on the other Carnival brands. This was in keeping with the older demographic who were often quite happy to expire without the need to be startled by conga lines or kids on emu hunts.

Mayette went to Zumba, ballroom dancing and line dancing most days. She had a ball. For mine these types of activities seriously interfered with staring at the sea.

Crew

The crew were exceedingly friendly, chatty and helpful. The majority were either Filipino or Indian; the latter from Goa and Mumbai. Forty-something other nationalities were represented with many of the staff from China or Eastern Europe.

The ship’s captain, Bill Kent, is an Englishman living in Australia. He joined P&O in 1974 and took his first command in 2004. Captain Kent gave twice daily reports that included some informative maritime history and trivia. He clearly loved to speak about his work and life on the sea.



Cruise Director Duvaul and Captain Bill Kent

Unlike Carnival and P&O, Princess’s staff happily served drinks (tea, coffee, water, lemonade etc) in the buffet if you were seen to be without one. It was clear that the crew on Princess were more skilled – and were paid more – than their counterparts on the other cruise lines of our patronage.

Passengers

The average age of the cruisers was 103 years. They were all exceedingly friendly, sober and well-behaved. Princess cater for “traditional cruisers”. This means that they are too old to play games, or attempt to copulate with the crew, each other or themselves. Most of their

serious drinking exploits happened on board the Oriana or the Canberra and their knowledge of how many ways bread could be eaten with dripping is encyclopaedic. We loved them all! Best of all – we felt young!

Whilst many were Australian, there were significant numbers of Canadians, Americans and Asians. As the cruise could also be undertaken from Auckland, several hundred Kiwis were on board.

An American-owned ship based in Australia with an international guest list meant that collisions in corridors were unavoidable as nobody was ever certain whether to keep to the left or the right....

Many cruise ship passengers see cruising as more than a holiday - it is a way of life. The record holder on our cruise was a guy on his 487th cruise (or some such number). Not only did he get free laundry and a well-stocked complimentary mini-bar; he got to sleep with any crew member he could catch (nil).

We made some great friends. In our case Ian Duggan from Muswellbrook and Peg and Mike Smith from Launceston were the standouts. Mayette made so many friends it would be easier to list those that she didn't invite to stay at home, or offer to guide around Sydney.



Sea-watching from Sun Princess

I have refined my views. The first requirement for successful sea-watching is to have something with a backbone to see. The Tasman Sea, particularly those parts nearer to land or over seamounts are fertile hunting grounds. As is most of coastal New Zealand, particularly off estuaries. The second most important factor is the weather. We had weather to die for with hardly any wind on any day excepting the last one. More on that later. Perfect weather pretty obviously allows more critters to be seen, and from further away. However, whilst sea monsters can often be seen breaking the surface on smooth seas from a long distance, they can rarely be identified unless they suspend themselves in the air, something that many are reluctant to do.

All of the whales and dolphins that were identified were quite close to the ship. It seems that they don't much care about cruise ships unless they are about to be clobbered by one. Twice, in the Tasman, Cuvier's beaked whales surfaced within 100m of the bow and dived steeply. Several times dolphins sped toward the ship and presumably sat on the bow (*unfortunately the bow area can't be seen at sea*).



There was always somewhere on board to get unobstructed views of the water irrespective of the wind direction. A light following breeze or windless conditions was best. By the mid-point of the cruise I was known as the “whale man”. Happily almost everything that I managed to spot was in the company of visiting passengers. Most of them could hardly believe that a

seemingly empty sea hid so many birds and mammals.

Tendering

Once more, the ship should be proud of its tendering service. Before the anchor had touched bottom the tender boats (lifeboats) were hitting the water. Given that many of the passengers were too old to remember trivial things like which hemisphere they were in or the quantity or sequence of their morning drug intake, they were hardly going to rush the tender boats. If we wished to be on the first tender boat – so be it.

Shore Excursions (with more detail in the **Diary** section)

Bay of Islands

We'd visited this exceptionally pretty area in January. The signature activity is the tour of the bay by catamaran. We'd already experienced this and chose to do some wandering in the local forests on well-formed and signposted walking tracks.



Auckland

As we had visited the exceptional Auckland Museum earlier in the year and as the daily ferry to Tiritiri Matangi Island (on offshore sanctuary with the broadest selection of endemic birds off the North Island) returned too late for a guaranteed return to the ship, we visited Rangitoto Island, a ~600 year old extinct volcano near Auckland Harbour's mouth. This national park is quite stunning, predator-free and offers geological and natural history along with some heritage dwellings. Recommended.

Tauranga

Happy wife = happy life. So it was that we took a ship-organised shore excursion to Hobbiton. This 600,000 visitor per year attraction probably needs no explanation. Our visit coincided with pristine weather so we could hardly have had a miserable time. Value for money? Highly questionable from where I'm sitting.



Napier

Many on the ship loved Napier. I have no idea why. Lots of shops I suppose. For me the best aspect of our visit was the late arrival – midday. This meant more time at sea and less of it doing nothing much on shore. Our previous visit saw us walk to the botanic gardens which is rather delightful. This time our focus was getting \$NZ from an ATM and visiting the Philo Shop to get junk food for the crew.

Wellington

New Zealand's capital is quite scenic, relatively uncrowded and offers much to see and do. We caught the cable train up the hill and then onto a free shuttle to Zealandia, a 225 hectare fenced sanctuary where many free flying birds and free not flying reptiles and insects can be seen. We later visited the Wellington Museum, and, briefly, the Museum of New Zealand, which is deserving of a re-visit next time!



Akoroa

This small town has found its way onto the cruise ship itinerary since the repeated earthquakes at Christchurch. Good news for me as Hector's dolphin can easily be seen here and a pre-booked catamaran tour became the focus of our visit. The town is quaint, has lots of tourist shops and in good weather – ours was indifferent, being very cold and breezy – would be a joy to explore.



Port Chalmers (port for Dunedin)

Our only rainy day. Mayette stayed on board as I visited the Orokonui Sanctuary. This brilliant fenced reserve operates in much the same way as Zealandia. There are a scrum of endemic birds, a variety of forest types and incredibly friendly and obliging staff and volunteers.

Fiordland National Park

Quite amazingly the ship was able to enter various "sounds" with ease. Luck was with us as the weather was perfect with glassy seas and not a breath of wind. Often the cruise ships are not able to enter the narrow waterways as the sea is often rough with strong winds. The scenery is breathtaking – the highlight of the cruise. Five different whales and dolphins,

many seals and two types of penguins were spotted. A bonus was ~750 albatrosses and several hundred other seabirds sitting on the water behind a trawler.



Weather

It was colder than expected. At Port Chalmers the maximum was 10 degrees up in the hills. Most days on board required jeans and a jacket (or two). One drizzly day in Port Chalmers and a raging gale off Sydney on the return were exceptional in that it was generally windless and often sunny.

Wildlife

Unlike our previous visit I went searching for New Zealand endemic birds if this didn't require too much effort.



Birds

I was thrilled with my sightings.

New Zealand is something of a basket case when it comes to exotic predators and the number of free-flying endemic passerines that can be seen outside fenced reserves or

predator-free islands can literally be counted on your fingers. For identification I used *The Hand Guide to the Birds of the New Zealand* by Robertson and Heather.

Seabirds are a different story. The Tasman and the areas around New Zealand abound with these guys.

The taxonomy follows Clements 2018.

“lifers” marked in red

1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	many at Akoroa
2	Black Swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	Hobbiton; many at Port Chalmers
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	everywhere
4	Brown Teal	<i>Anas chlorotis</i>	A few at Zealandia at kaka feeders
5	New Zealand Scaup	<i>Aythya novaeseelandiae</i>	Hobbiton and Zealandia
6	California Quail	<i>Callipepla californica</i>	Zealandia and Bay of Islands
7	Brown Quail	<i>Coturnix ypsilophora</i>	summit of Rangitoto Island
8	New Zealand Grebe	<i>Poliiocephalus rufopectus</i>	pair at Hobbiton
9	Little Penguin	<i>Eudyptula minor</i>	occasional throughout
10	Fiordland Penguin	<i>Eudyptes pachyrhynchus</i>	5 at Fiorland NP
11	White-capped Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	abundant NZ waters; a few in Tasman
12	Salvin's Albatross	<i>Thalassarche salvini</i>	occasional NZ waters
13	Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	a couple in Tasman; Australian side
14	Royal Albatross	<i>Diomedea epomophora</i>	common in NZ waters
15	Wandering Albatross	<i>Diomedea exulans</i>	a couple in NZ; several Oz side Tasman
16	Southern Giant-Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	a few NZ waters
17	Northern Giant-Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	common in NZ waters
18	Cape Petrel	<i>Daption capense</i>	~10 in NZ waters
19	Great-winged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma macroptera</i>	abundant Tasman; 150+ some days
20	Providence Petrel	<i>Pterodroma solandri</i>	a few Tasman; Australian side
21	Soft-plumaged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma mollis</i>	one seen following the ship in Tasman
22	White-headed Petrel	<i>Pterodroma lessonii</i>	3 Tasman NZ side
23	White-necked Petrel	<i>Pterodroma cervicalis</i>	2 Tasman Australian side
24	Black-winged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma nigripennis</i>	300+ Tasman Australian side
25	Cook's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma cookii</i>	a few scattered throughout
26	Gould's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma leucoptera</i>	a few Tasman; Australian side
27	Fairy Prion	<i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	several NZ waters
28	Broad-billed Prion	<i>Pachyptila vittata</i>	2 near Napier
30	Parkinson's Petrel	<i>Procellaria parkinsoni</i>	1 Tasman Australian side
31	Westland Petrel	<i>Procellaria westlandica</i>	rather common NZ waters
32	Flesh-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus carneipes</i>	3 seen Tasman
33	Wedge-tailed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus pacificus</i>	common Tasman esp Australian side
34	Buller's Shearwater	<i>Puffinus bulleri</i>	2000+ off Napier, fewer elsewhere NZ
35	Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	abundant NZ waters
36	Short-tailed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i>	a few Tasman; Australian side
37	Hutton's Shearwater	<i>Puffinus huttoni</i>	a few only NZ waters

38	Fluttering Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gavia</i>	common off North Island
39	White-faced Storm-Petrel	<i>Pelagodroma marina</i>	100+ off Bay of Islands; a few Tasman
40	Black-bellied Storm-Petrel	<i>Fregetta tropica</i>	1 Tasman Australian side
41	Common Diving-Petrel	<i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i>	common off Bay of Islands; a few Tasman
42	Red-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>	1 central Tasman
43	Masked Booby	<i>Sula dactylatra</i>	1 central Tasman
45	Australasian Gannet	<i>Morus serrator</i>	common near NZ coasts
46	Little Black Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	occasional
47	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	who really cares?
48	Pied Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	see above
49	Chatham Islands Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax onslowi</i>	breeding colony off Port Chalmers
50	Spotted Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax punctatus</i>	fairly common, esp South Island
51	Little Pied Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax melanoleucos</i>	another cormorant
52	Royal Spoonbill	<i>Platalea regia</i>	1 Port Chalmers
53	Swamp Harrier	<i>Circus approximans</i>	fairly common
54	Buff-banded Rail	<i>Gallirallus philippensis</i>	1 Rangitoto Island
55	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	fairly common
56	Takahe	<i>Porphyrio mantelli</i>	1 at Orokonui Reserve (not really wild...)
57	Dusky Moorhen	<i>Gallinula tenebrosa</i>	yeah, saw these somewhere
58	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	at Hobbiton and Zealandia
59	Pied Stilt	<i>Himantopus leucocephalus</i>	a few at Bay of Islands and Port Chalmers
60	South Island Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus finschi</i>	common
61	Variable Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus unicolor</i>	common
62	Masked Lapwing	<i>Vanellus miles</i>	a few near Hobbiton
63	Pomarine Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	a couple off North Island
64	Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	a couple off North Island
65	Red-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus scopulinus</i>	very common
66	Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	very common in harbours and near shore
67	White Tern	<i>Gygis alba</i>	several in Tasman
68	Sooty Tern	<i>Onychoprion fuscatus</i>	50+ in Tasman Australian side
69	White-fronted Tern	<i>Sterna striata</i>	common NZ waters
70	Great Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	1 off Fiordland NP
71	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	yeah, saw these somewhere
72	New Zealand Pigeon	<i>Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae</i>	regular in forests
73	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx lucidus</i>	Bay of Islands and Zealandia
74	Sacred Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>	common
75	New Zealand Kaka	<i>Nestor meridionalis</i>	Zealandia and Orokonui reserves
76	Red-fronted Parakeet	<i>Cyanoramphus novaezelandiae</i>	A few Rangitoto Is and Zealandia
77	Eastern Rosella	<i>Platycercus eximius</i>	fairly common Bay of Islands
78	Rifleman	<i>Acanthisitta chloris</i>	two at Orokonui
79	Tui	<i>Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae</i>	fairly common throughout
80	New Zealand Bellbird	<i>Anthornis melanura</i>	fairly common throughout

81	Gray Gerygone	<i>Gerygone igata</i>	fairly common throughout
82	Saddleback	<i>Philesturnus carunculatus</i>	several Rangitoto Is and Zealandia
83	Stitchbird	<i>Notiomystis cincta</i>	10 or so Zealandia
84	Australasian Magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	a few here and there
85	Whitehead	<i>Mohoua albicilla</i>	several Rangitoto Is and Zealandia
86	New Zealand Fantail	<i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>	fairly common throughout
87	Tomtit	<i>Petroica macrocephala</i>	2 Bay of Islands (lookout); 6 Orokonui
88	New Zealand Robin	<i>Petroica australis</i>	2 Zealandia; 2 Orokonui
89	Welcome Swallow	<i>Hirundo neoxena</i>	common
90	Silver-eye	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	common
91	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	very common
92	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	several
93	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	towns
94	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	farmland
95	Australasian Pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	1 en route to Hobbiton
96	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Bay of Islands
97	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	somewhere
98	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	see above
99	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	see above but more often

Mammals

Endemic land mammals. None. There aren't any. Except for a couple of bats.

Sea Monsters. Lots of. Happy – the highlight of the cruise! (aside from not dying at sea, which, come to think of it, may yet happen....)

There were several sightings of medium to large sea monsters that could not be positively identified. One was probably a Bryde's whale – also off Fiordland NP. There was much activity here – a local fishing boat had over a thousand seabirds sitting on the water and no doubt profiting from the sorting tray. Most of these were albatrosses.

The last and best sighting of Cuvier's beaked whales made two of the earlier ones positive. Of the Arnoux's there is no doubt – size, rounded dorsal, scarring and the location helped, along with close views in good light (and a reasonable photograph!).

"lifers" marked in red



	Sea Monster	notes
1	Short-beaked common dolphin	10+ off Sydney 200+, 30, 10 off Napier (3 pods)
		40+ West Tasman Sea
2	Striped dolphin	5, 15+, 12+ Tasman Sea
3	Bottlenose dolphin	12 Bay of Islands 30+ Dusky Sound
4	Dusky dolphin	a few mixed with commons off Napier
5	Hector's dolphin	~30 near Akoroa "heads"
6	Antarctic minke whale	2 (maybe 4) off Fiordland NP
7	Long-finned pilot whale	~15 off Fiordland NP
8	Sperm whale	1 off Bay of Islands
9	False killer whale	~12 off Napier
10	Cuvier's beaked whale	1 west Tasman, 2 central Tasman,
		1 off Fiordland NP, 7-8 east Tasman
11	Arnoux's beaked whale	2 off Fiordland NP
12	NZ fur seal	common
	other	
	tuna	Tasman - big ones and medium sized ones
	sunfish	2 in west Tasman
	no ID shark	1 off Fiordland NP



Diary

Day 1 – 3 December 2018

Having morphed from cruise ship virginity to shipboard tragics in the space of less than a year we figured we knew all about boarding procedures at the Overseas Passenger Terminal in Sydney. Princess Cruises emphatically advised that we were to board at 1430 and not a minute earlier. We arrive an hour earlier than this and were ensconced in our stateroom, D210, shortly thereafter.

Our room on Deck 8 toward the front of the ship on the port side was perfectly good. A critic might marvel at how large folk can fit into the bathroom, onto the toilet or turn around in the shower. Yet they must achieve this somehow as they were easy on the nose.



It seems evident that many cruise ship passengers wish to squeeze every cent out of their passage fare by starving themselves for two days prior to their First Lunch on Board. For us finding a seat in the buffet proved problematic.

A wander about the ship was necessary. We discovered a library. There were many books. There were none that were worth reading. We met Ian Duggan, from Muswellbrook, a cruise fancier since 1973, who was beaming at the chance to hear the safety briefing. He was just as happy and enthusiastic with every other aspect of his life as a bachelor. Ian became good friends with us both.

The ship departed a little earlier than scheduled. Cruising Sydney Harbour never gets tired.

We hadn't ventured far to sea before our first pod of short-beaked common dolphins appeared. They tried to chase us, the silly Billies. Although maybe it worked – they chased us away... It was more difficult than usual to find an ideal birding vantage point as we were heading into the wind. A Gould's petrel was the best of the birds.

We discovered that our room was above the main stage of the Princess Theatre. (Note to self: bring more than one pair of earplugs in future).

Day 2 – 4 December 2018

The coffee on Sun Princess was just as abysmal as any other ship we'd been on. We later discovered the Coffee Card - \$36 for 15 premium coffees. This proved to be excellent value for great coffee!

Calm seas and very little breeze failed to produce white caps for most of the day. Tuna the size of dolphins were seen along with dozens of sooty terns scattered over a wide area. (*curiously no sootys were seen on the return journey*).

There was some cameo afternoon entertainment. We sat on the Promenade Deck, Deck 7, out of the wind, to watch birds. Some of the ship's maintenance dudes decided to weld a chunk of metal to the wall. So they taped off a short section of the deck with yellow hazard tape. This failed to deter the Deck 7 Lap Club who had a God-given mission to walk around the deck a predetermined number of times. (*On "Sun" class cruise ships it is usually possible to walk the Promenade Deck unobstructed*). The hazard tape failed to stop them. So a second set of tape was placed to prevent persistent pacers from limbo-ing underneath the first. Many of the walkers reminded me of Monty Python's Ken Clean-Air System. This John Cleese character, similarly not too overwhelmed by grey matter, was interrupted on his daily jog by a parked car. Like Ken, our pacers were horrified that they had to walk in the other direction.



Why the Club's members only walked in a counter-clockwise direction should be the subject of some psychiatric evaluation. We often walked the other way just to be bastards.

We sat next to the tape and offered advice whilst considering the complaints. I was tempted to ask folk if they had ever been welded to anything, and if so, was it an experience they would recommend to others?

Undoubtedly the highlight of the day was two Cuvier's beaked whales that surfaced ~100m in front of the ship, had a quick sticky at future events and got out of Dodge in a hurry by diving straight down.

As far as the birds went, they were pretty much constant all day. The best were black-bellied storm-petrel, more than 50 sooty terns and two Gould's petrels.

At 1630 we went to an event available for passengers who had completed at least one previous P&O or Princess Cruise. There were prizes, singers, a band and an excellent speech from the captain. So the ship is US-owned, made in Italy, registered in Bermuda, captained by a Brit living in Australia and with an international crew.

An excellent day at sea!

Day 3 – 5 December 2018

I slept until sunrise and as I poked my noggin against the window of our cabin I was startled to see that there was no wind. I couldn't wait to get upstairs for some pre-breakfast sea-watching! This produced a couple of wandering albatrosses, various petrels, a school of medium-sized tuna and a pod of striped dolphins.

After breakfast I managed 45 laps of the pool. More birding.

Morning coffee at the International Café was a joy. More birding. A yummy lunch was taken in the restaurant before - more birding. The calm conditions along with a thin overcast made for perfect conditions. A soft-plumaged petrel floated behind the ship 14 decks up. It sometimes entered into some unseen part of the ship below me before reappearing. Weird.

Another Cuvier's beaked whale surfaced in a current line near to the port bow. It was in the company of several white terns, black-winged petrels, a black petrel and a lively pod of striped dolphins. These swam up to the bow and then along the port side of the ship.

Dinner in the buffet was fine. We managed a few laps of Deck 7 before settling into our seats for the Freddy Mercury tribute show – "Mercury Rising" with Steve Larkins. This was very good indeed and like Freddy, he didn't take himself too seriously. We all had our "Wembley



moment” as he revved up the crowd. Many of these were too old to know who Freddy Mercury was...

Day 4 – 6 December 2018

Bay of Islands

We entered the bay shortly after first light so there wasn't any birding time at sea. A distant sperm whale surfaced a few times.

Mayette and I were off the ship and had escaped the tender boat by 0730 and began a walk to Haruru Falls. Mayette flagged after three kilometres and returned to the ship. I hopped on the free ship's shuttle to Pahia town and then onto a trail within the Opuia Forest to Pahia Lookout. The 1.4km track traverses some delightful vegetation on its way to the lookout over the bay and town.

En route I quizzed a local chap who claimed a good knowledge of the forest's birds. He explained why my principal target – the tomtit – didn't live in the forest and the reasons for why this is so. So the pair that I photographed at the lookout must have just arrived.... Whilst there I chatted with visitors from Belfast, Israel, China and Germany before returning to the ship.

Lemonade and a burger and chips for lunch. This is the life. The pool was empty so a lazy 45 laps was enjoyed in front of some musicians doing a pretty good impression of the Santana Band.

It was Italian night in the Regency restaurant. Despite this the food was okay.

Ship curiosity. The captain explained that a ship's anchor does not hold the ship in place. It is the chain. The length of chain dropped depends on the water depth and wind strength. We had 100 tons of chain in the bay.

We were away at 1730; seeing me leave the restaurant for the upper decks rather abruptly... It was pure magic. The insignificant south-westerly breeze was behind us and the light was spot-on. We soon entertained a lively pod of bottlenose dolphins and vice versa. The numbers of seabirds was truly biblical. Thousands of Buller's shearwaters were in the company of hundreds of white-faced storm-petrels, common diving-petrels, gannets and other shearwaters.

Nicki Bennet was performing a Helen Reddy tribute in the Princess Theatre. I stood at the back as all the seats were taken when I escaped the seabird soup outside. Ms Bennet can certainly sing.

Back to room D210 for a glass or two of Shiraz. Had I stayed on deck I might have identified the sea monsters seen splashing about outside our window....

Day 5 – 7 December 2018

Auckland

Woke to the sounds of large moving metal things. Some of these were tugs.

My preferred assignment was to go to Tiritiri Matangi Island, an offshore predator-free sanctuary where a dozen or so endemic birds had been re-established. We checked the ferry schedule and reconfirmed that it was very tight if we were delayed getting back. Mayette likes several hours to spare, not 15 minutes.

We considered the hop-on hop-off bus around Auckland. Having already seen one of the premier attractions, the Auckland Museum, I found the bus itinerary a bit sad. Ultimately we caught a ferry to Rangitoto Island. This rather large volcanic island popped out of the sea about 600 years ago.

The island has a lookout at 260m a.s.l., lava tubes, military and other history, beaches, and breeding colonies of kelp gulls and others. It is largely uninhabited. I found it fascinating as we have no comparable islands in Australia. The return ferry costs \$NZ36 and takes about 30 minutes.

For most of its life Rangitoto was over-run by Australian possums, rats and other feral animals.



These were eradicated in relatively recent times resulting in flourishing vegetation and the re-introduction of kiwis and takahes. Both of these are breeding well. Other birds including saddlebacks, whiteheads and red-fronted parakeets were seen. We were ably assisted by Tim, the ranger, who travelled on the ferry with us and was happy to sit down and explain where all the chook things lived.

Time and motion constraints didn't allow me to get to the takahes, which live on an adjacent island, Motutapu. This is connected to Rangitoto by a causeway – next time!

Mayette faded on the ascent to the lookout and returned to the jetty area, where our friend Ian kept her company. Brown quail were extraordinarily tame at the lookout and could be approached to within a metre! The lava tubes were stunning.

Mayette returned on the 1245 ferry. I stayed for the 1430 to visit the kelp gulls, chat with Tim and learn more about the history of the island. An excellent day!

Some rotund yaks, dinner in the buffet and the shipboard Auckland Harbour cruise to sea meant you couldn't get the smile off my face.

Day 6 – 8 December 2018

Tauranga

This was “Mayette Day”; the visit to Hobbiton, the sheep farm location for much of the filming of two of the Lord of the Rings movies.

The day started languidly. We docked at 0400 – something to do with the tides and the draught of the ship. Our ship-organised shore excursion left at 0840. Coach driver Ivan “The Terrible” took us via Pilot Bay, Mount Manganui and reputedly New Zealand’s best surfing beach, which had no surf whatsoever. This was actually great news as no surf = no wind.

Ivan had the best part of an hour and a half to explain his 5th generation Kiwi knowledge of local farming history. He had an obsession with kiwi fruit. We saw none. His verbal delivery was such that every two spoken sentences were followed by a significant pause. If I hadn't been sitting in the front row of the coach I may have been forgiven for believing he had expired.



The journey through the Bay of Plenty countryside was an education. Tiny spots of remnant forest could be seen only on the highest and most inaccessible peaks. The numbers of exotic weeds, woody and otherwise, was extra-ordinary. The number of non-introduced birds could be counted on the fingers of one

hand.

I had no prior knowledge of what to expect at Hobbiton. I didn't know that half of New Zealand worked there, that thousands of people visit every day and that the surface area of gift shops, visitor centres, car parks, restaurants and the like exceed the area of the actual attraction by a factor of ten.

The highlight for me was the story of how the site was selected in the first place. Apparently some dude fronted unannounced at the Alexander sheep farm and knocked on the door of the homestead. The old man was watching the footy on the tele. The site selection guy asked if he could look about. The resident sheep grazer told him he could wait until the game was over, interfere with a sheep of his choice, or piss off and do whatever. The rest, as they say.... Sheep? Who needs 'em?

Our tour was led by Chloe, a French tourist who could explain every scene from every LOTR movie in intricate detail. Most of the time I couldn't understand a word she was saying. This didn't matter to me as I didn't really care and we had perfect weather. The farm is rather pretty (for a farm) and is clearly relevant to the movies.

Our rather expensive package (\$A180 pp) included morning tea – at midday. This consisted of a muffin and a traditional Hobbit drink – ale, ginger ale or cider. No decision there. The lake in front of the restaurant had a scrum of birds. Black swans competed with New Zealand scaups and New Zealand grebes, amongst others. A New Zealand pipit was seen on the road.



Back on the ship I found a note to say that my credit card had been denied. This gave me the chance to chat with Iva from Montenegro and Nataliia (yes, her name is not misspelt) from Ukraine....

Others were in my swimming pool but that failed to deter me. The water was warm, there was live music playing and I didn't crash into anyone more than once.

A delicious dinner in the restaurant was mitigated by a noisy Italian-Australian immigrant. He ranted about how he had lived on bread and dripping in a tin shed. He had clearly never heard or seen the "Four Yorkshiremen" sketch. I whispered it to the Canadian lady sitting next to me. I'm not sure whether she took me seriously. Otherwise it was the first time I'd eaten a meal and watched common dolphins leaping clear of the water from our restaurant table simultaneously.

We watched an encore performance from Steve "Freddy Mercury" Larkins before transferring to the Vista Lounge for the 70s Motown Dance Party. I returned to our stateroom via the violinist and cellist (very good), the crooner, the band and the pianist.



**Day 7 – 9 December
2018**

Napier

Fortune smiled on me as we were to dock at the only really boring place on the itinerary at noon. A glassy sea saw me up

at sunrise and glued to my perch. Hundreds of common and fewer dusky dolphins were spotted over a broad area. These were joined by a dozen logging false killer whales, albatrosses, penguins, pomerine and arctic jaegers, Westland petrels and large numbers of fluttering shearwaters.

Time off was taken for a swim before getting back on my station and chatting with Mike from Launceston and Mike #2 from Perth. Also had a brief chat with Captain Kent as he appeared on the port wing of the bridge as we approached Napier "harbour".

Hundreds lined the rails as we delicately manoeuvred into the rather cramped port. The Celebrity Solstice was moored nearby.

We had no fixed plan for Napier, a town of shops, old cars and a black shingle beach that nobody swims on. We interrogated at ATM and patronised the local Filipino shop before returning to the ship.

Despite constant warnings, there was a small crowd of cruise passengers at the port's entry point who had not carried their photo ID with them. They had to go to the Naughty Seats where others could stare at them. Presumably they received a spanking and a damned good talking to.

The evening's show was excellent. Titled "The British Invasion", it was a song and dance performance that celebrated, not the invasion of Normandy, but some of the best music of the 60s to 80s. The dancers were stunning, the sets much more elaborate than you might imagine on a cruise ship, and the music flawless. Anything from Petula Clark, The Hollies, Beatles, Rolling Stones, Queen etc.



Day 8 – 10 December 2018

Wellington

This was a much anticipated day, for me at least. I thought we'd pass through part of the Cook Strait on the way to Wellington. Due to a lack of basic geographic knowledge on my part, we did not.

Mirror-smooth seas greeted our arrival in Wellington Harbour. Although no whales or dolphins were sighted there were several royal and white-capped albatrosses.

The Sun Princess docked in front of the Golden Princess, a newer and larger ship.

We hopped onto the free shuttle into town and walked the short distance to the Wellington Cable Car. This is more of a tourist attraction than public transport. The quaint "train" took us steeply uphill to a worthwhile lookout over the picturesque city. From here we jumped on the free shuttle bus to Zealandia, a wildlife sanctuary.

The entry fee at Zealandia was \$NZ19.50 and represented very good value. A labyrinthine series of trails takes visitors to various feeders for free flying bird and sites that are used by reptiles and insects. Only in New Zealand do insects become tourist attractions.

Windy Wellington started to live up to its reputation. It became quite cold and overcast. Nevertheless the endemic bird-life was quite prolific and during a couple of unguided hours we had added North Island robins, brown teal, North Island kaka (awesome parrots!) and stitchbird to our trip list. All of the more common forest birds were present.



We had a quick look through the Wellington Museum on our return to the capital. It wasn't too thrilling. The Museum of New Zealand was much better although we spent little time there. Mayette was getting jaded with forests and museums so we queued for 45 minutes to get a shuttle bus back to the Sun Princess. When two ships are in town at once.....

Having completed my laps of the ship's pool I was delighted to learn that beer'o'clock was rapidly approaching.

Roast lamb in the buffet required no decision on my part. Back to sea we went and lots of albatrosses and other seabirds were spotted. Choppy conditions may have prevented me from finding any blubber-gutses.



Below is our pilot boat trying to catch up.....



Day 9 – 11 December 2018

Akoroa

Akoroa has a population of 650 permanent residents and rather more during the school holidays when hordes descend from nearby Christchurch. Apparently cruise ships only started stopping at Akoroa relatively recently. I think this had something to do with earthquakes in Christchurch.

The “harbour” is actually a volcanic crater lake that managed to get connected to the sea somehow. The scenery is quite odd as a result.

The day started off okay but soon became very cold and quite bleak, with the maximum temperature struggling to reach 13 degrees.

We’d pre-booked a local dolphin-watching tour with Akoroa Dolphins (\$NZ85 pp for two hours). The ship also ran their own tour and although the prices weren’t too dissimilar Akoroa Dolphins had a greater success rate for finding Hector’s dolphins, and appeared to have a much fancier and newer boat.

We had a couple of hours to kill in Akoroa town before our cruise. Ian, Mayette and I poked about some forest trails, visited the relocated lighthouse which looks a bit stupid at a place where no light is necessary, and pondered the strip of ship-dependant gift shops.

Hector's are the world's smallest marine dolphin, reaching a maximum size of 1.5 metres. They are very beautiful, confiding and occur in predictable locations around river mouths. Hector's dolphin is endemic to New Zealand. They eat about 10% of their body weight in very small fish every day. The population at Akoroa has risen dramatically since gill-net fishing was banned.



Our harbour-tour skipper was also the port's pilot and gave a good and informative commentary. Also on board was a terrier that reputedly could hear the echo-locating clicks of the beast-lets and allegedly would spin about and carry on like a loony when the marine critters were under the boat. I found the first pair of dolphins, the second group, third etc. The dog was a fraud and an ornament, at least on this day. Mayette wisely told me to stop spotting things.

Breeding colonies of spotted cormorants and New Zealand fur seals added to the mix. A few little penguins were seen.

Our cruise included a glass of local white wine and some homemade biscuits. I'm not sure that I needed wine at 10am but there you go.

Our skipper went on to say that the locals - farmers and graziers included, were becoming much more focussed on wildlife conservation and taking action to protect what's left. I hope this is true.

At the end of our cruise we hopped onto a tender for the ship as it was too cold to walk about the streets. This led to some much needed slothing in our warm room. I briefly considered going for a swim if only to amaze the small number of semi-frozen folk that would have pointed at me, and most likely called the ship's security. Sensibly a beer drinking and people-watching option was selected.

As we left the harbour we watched several Hector's dolphins speeding about and occasionally breaching high into the air.

I dropped Mayette at the show with Ian and managed to disappear. Strangely not a single bird or anything else with a backbone was seen so I gave up and went to bed.



Day 10 – 12 December 2018

Port Chalmers (for Dunedin)

Overcast, cold and wet conditions greeted our arrival at Port Chalmers. Unlike most ports in New Zealand, at Port Chalmers you can walk through the shipping terminal and out into the street. Given the weather, Mayette had decided to stay on board.

I was determined to get to Orokonui Ecosanctuary, about seven kilometres uphill

behind the port. As there was no other public transport and there were only two taxis waiting for fares I left the ship at 0730 even though the sanctuary doesn't open until 0930.

The cab driver explained that in addition to the ~\$NZ25 fare I needed to pay an extra \$15 because I wasn't going to Dunedin. A priceless breed, your taxi driver. So I soon found myself with almost two hours to kill under the cold, foggy, drizzly and windy awning in front of the visitor centre. Joyfully the utterly delightful Cherrie arrived at work more than an hour early and let me into the building and the reserve. We talked for a while (as it was still raining) as I marked a map with the likely sites for each of the birds I wished to see. I also scored the use of a very large umbrella.

Orokonui is a 307 hectare sanctuary run as community led not-for-profit conservation project. It is awesome! The forest is gorgeous and the trail network extensive. Unlike Zealandia there are few visitors. Despite the less than ideal conditions I was soon gawking at the reserve's male takahe. A bit of a stupid-looking beast, like most flightless birds. South Island kakas, brown creepers, rifleman and South Island robin all fell in quick succession. Only the fernbird eluded me. A couple of Californians from the ship engaged a guide and managed to miss the creepers and the robin.....

A return to the visitor centre to warm up with an excellent coffee before trying again for the fernbird. The wet and windy conditions saw me fail in my quest. Next time.

Back in the visitor centre I asked Cherrie if she knew of anyone returning to Port Chalmers. I was happy to pay the equivalent taxi fare for two reasons – it would be quicker than waiting for a cab, and it would deny a taxi driver his or her extortionate fare.

I was introduced to a delightful older couple who offered to drive me back to the ship straight away at no charge. As I was in no hurry I insisted that they have their lunch first. We had a fine gasbag in front of the fire (in summer!!) over the differences in Australia and New Zealand with respect to the impact of feral animals.

Back on board for a late lunch, a swim and immersion in the hot whirlpool.

We didn't leave the port until 1800 due to a medical emergency.

Taiaroa Headland, near the harbour's fairly narrow mouth is the site for a breeding colony of northern royal albatrosses. Around 20-30 pairs could be seen; some were performing their mating rituals whilst others sat on eggs. Nearby was a mixed breeding colony of Campbell Island and spotted cormorants.

Once in the open sea many more albatrosses could be viewed along with thousands of sooty shearwaters. Patches of what I assume were krill could be seen a couple of metres down.

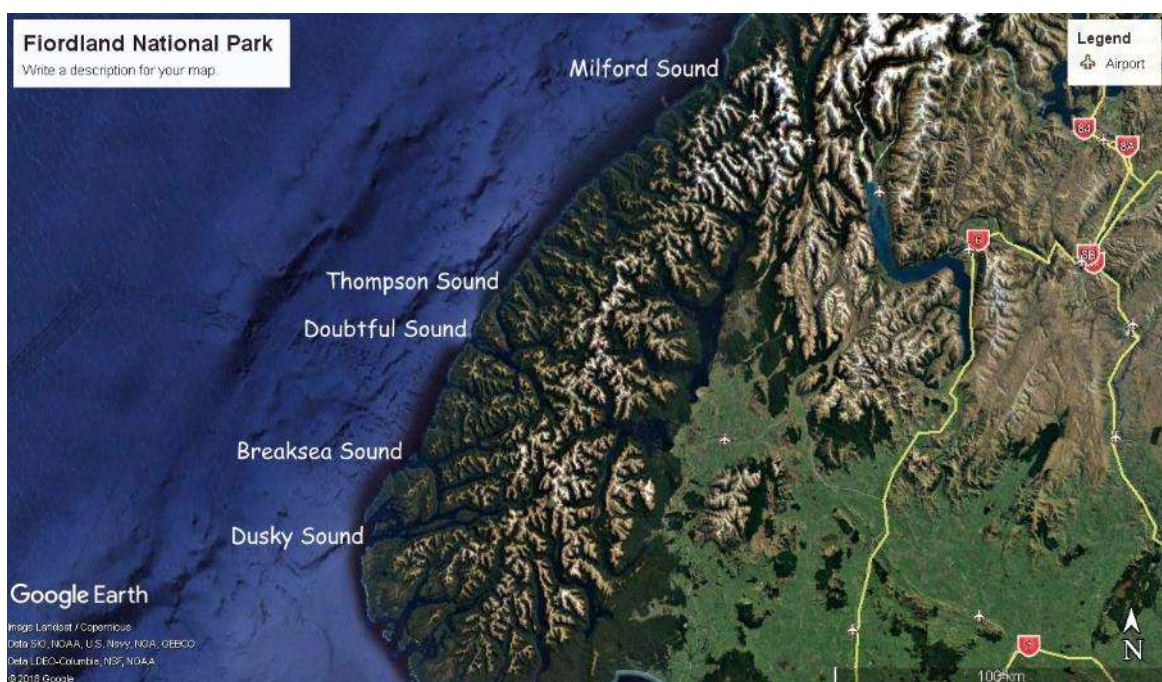
Day 11 – 13 December 2018

Fiordland National Park

This proved to be the highlight of the cruise and the best cruise day of any of our cruises thus far. Perfect weather, gobsmacking scenery and more wildlife than you could poke several sticks at.

We passed the southern tip of the South Island at first light. As we changed to a more northerly heading a stiff breeze dropped away entirely and the sea flattened, becoming glassy.

We entered Dusky Sound, noting pods of bottlenose dolphins, our first Fiordland crested penguins and many New Zealand fur seals. I hadn't read the itinerary and had only a vague idea of what to expect. The reason for this is that I can't possibly influence any changes – so just sit back and relax and admire the scenery. We exited from Breaksea Sound. I didn't think that scenery from a cruise ship could get any better than this so I was in for a surprise....





A curious thing happened. As we went back to sea, the throngs of excited punters all disappeared from the decks. It became obvious throughout the cruise that experiences could only be gained when passengers were alerted about them in advance. Earlier the captain announced that he had once seen killer whales at a harbour mouth. There was a rush to see if they were still there (after two years).

So it was that Mayette and I and just three others had stupendous views of a pair of Arnoux's beaked whales surfacing first in front of the ship and then a few times as we motored slowly past. Yippee!

Another double act – Doubtful and Thompson sounds, once more strikingly beautiful, before again motoring seaward. The water is very deep close to shore, more than 500m at the head of Milford Sound, so pelagic birds and sea monsters normally seen well out at sea can be seen from shore. En route to Milford we passed the Majestic Princess, 15 or so long-finned pilot whales, a Cuvier's beaked whale, two or more Antarctic minke whales, what may have been Bryde's whales and a fishing boat that had more than a thousand seabirds sitting in a long line that stretched for more than a kilometre. About 750 of the birds were albatrosses and around 60-70 were giant petrels.

Milford Sound was the last and most spectacular of our "sounds". By the time we arrived, the mountains – some of which being over 2000m high – were creating their own weather so we had a few spots of rain. Unlike the other sounds, Milford is connected to the rest of the island by road so we passed a dozen or so pleasure craft. Some on board these must have done a double-take when they saw 77,000 tons bearing down on them.



Many cruise ships find that they cannot enter the sounds due to bad weather – sometimes for weeks on end. Flat seas are a rarity in this part of the Tasman so we were exceedingly lucky. The day will live long in my memory.

Mayette enjoyed the company of Peg and Mike Smith. In 2016 they had undertaken a very similar world cruise on Sea Princess to our upcoming one, so they had some good tips and put Mayette's mind at ease on a few matters.

The ship set forth for Sydney. Surprisingly no more whales were seen although I later heard that a whale and calf were seen from the buffet, so they must have been very close to the ship – and big!

Fat Yak'o'clock was in the company of Chris, who writes websites for US Democrat politicians. He had some interesting thoughts on Mr Trump, including one that suggested he has a mental illness or two, or three.

After twelve hours staring at rocks and sea I called it a day and retired to our stateroom for a glass of wine. Apparently some in the buffet had seen me sitting for hours on the bow and wondered if I was contemplating suicide. Nobody came to check...



Day 12 – 14 December 2018

Back in what was fast becoming one of my favourite places – the open Tasman Sea! It started as a very quiet day with the occasional wandering and white-capped albatross. Tassie Mike joined me - and what's this!? A pod of 7-8 Cuvier's beaked whales! A couple of big males lifted their heads out of the water. Spy-hopping beaked whales? I managed to grab the camera and snap a photo or two as we passed them on the port side.

At noon there was an 8kn southerly with 4800m of water under the keel.

Lunch in the buffet included king prawns, oysters and crabs. The lack of observable wildlife caused an early start to drinks. Dinner in the restaurant was rack-of-lamb. A magician was the main act in the Princess Theatre and whilst he was entertaining he certainly wasn't the best I've seen.

Day 13 – 15 December 2018

The first really windy day. At dawn it was blowing 20kn from the north-east building to gale force by the evening with a heavy swell. Sea-watching proved entertaining. Pods of common and striped dolphins attempted to foot it with the ship. Several hundred black-winged petrels were seen. There wasn't a time when they weren't in view. Some made spectacular and rapid ascents to 100m or more into the air. They looked like small flocks of needletails. A hundred or so grey-faced petrels, a red-tailed tropicbird, a pair of white terns and a white-necked petrel were also observed.

A turbulent series of laps completed my on-board swimming without once ramming my head into the end of the pool.

A Filipino carved a block of ice into a dolphin. I made a transcription of the cruise's bird and mammal list for the cruise director (who said he wanted it, but I don't know...). Then it was last drinks at the Riviera Bar.





Mayette almost made it to the end of the cruise without getting seasick. She wasn't alone – there were far fewer punters at the buffet....

As the gale pushed 45 knots the ship made some disturbing sounds. The captain made an unscheduled announcement about the likelihood, or lack thereof, of good news with the weather. We were in for a

rough night....

Day 14 – 16 December 2018

We docked at Circular Quay a little after sunrise. Sydney had earlier been drenched with rain during a series of thunderstorms that had crash-tackled our craft during the night.

We had breakfast and did the rounds of saying goodbye to all our new friends. A magpie landed and warbled from the top of the forward mast. The countdown to our next cruise began.....



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