

featuring Valerie Cowan



Around the world in 46 days

P&O's Adonia left Southampton in January on the Grand Voyage – 100 days of luxury cruising through the Mediterranean, Middle and Far East to Australia. I flew to Melbourne at the end of February to join the ship half way through its itinerary and to sail home on the return journey. Along the way I visited the vineyards of Adelaide, Albany and Perth. If you know me from the wine courses at the Institute, you will realise this was all in a day's work – a tough life but someone's got to do it! I even stood in Jacob's Creek – yes, there really is one, although now it's the driveway to their new visitors' centre.

From Australia we headed for Singapore, where I sipped a Singapore Sling at the fabled Raffles Hotel, followed by Kuala Lumpur and the dazzling Blue Mosque. Sailing serenely through the Indian Ocean, we visited the Maldives and Seychelles on our way to South Africa and more vineyards. Cape Town is one of my favourite places and how nice of them to build a fantastic shopping and eating complex, The Waterfront, right where the ships berth. Table Mountain stood majestically against a blue sky as we set sail for Namibia and its desert landscape.

There were a lot of sea days on this cruise, eight of them on our way to Madeira. Personally, I love sea days but cabin fever was starting to set in, especially with the more senior passengers. If there was anything I would change about this cruise, it was the average age of the passengers. I heard the ship was nicknamed 'Deafonia' but there were times when 'Adonia Residential Home' was more appropriate. Boy, could they moan! However, we finally reached Madeira and there was just time to nip ashore for a quick swig of the island's famous wine before sailing home. I'm pleased to say that the Bay of Biscay was very well behaved.

I'm often asked what I love most about cruising. Firstly, I don't have to think. Once I've unpacked, my every need is catered for as I'm taken from port to port. It's much more than a floating hotel – it's a community. With crew and passengers, there were 3000 people on board and plenty of scope to make new friends. Next, there's food galore, pools, gym, hair salon, shops, hospital, library, casino and computer room. Not a domestic chore in sight bar the odd bit of washing. There are no mosquitoes or other creepy crawlies on board and, on this ship, bliss, no children. I like going out for dinner every night without getting my hair messed up or having to worry about drinking and driving. There are all sorts of entertainment ranging from comedians to musical shows and all for as little as £100 a day – it's amazing value.

Most days I could be found on the Lido sundeck, but for those who prefer less taxing activities, there were lectures (Murray Walker and Jenny Bond), art or dance classes, a sewing circle, origami, computer lessons, an art auction and films. For the energetic, there's shuffleboard, golf, tennis and table tennis. This is before you go ashore for any sightseeing. After all this, a short rest and time to get dolled up for the evening's festivities. No wonder six weeks vanished in a flash. I'll have to do the whole three months next time. Now, where did I put those brochures?

Suburb Style editor Deborah Warland, talks to residents about some of their favourite things



Deborah Warland

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SUBURB

Showbiz

featuring Beans Balawi



Readers of Suburb News may remember that a year ago we featured the promising acting career of Beans Balawi. Twelve months on we are delighted to report that Beans has hit 'the big time'. There cannot be many six year olds who have at that age already performed in three major film roles and two television series!

On the small screen this year we will be able to see him again in the light hearted series 'Life Begins' which stars Caroline Quentin as a 'forty something' woman trying to cope as a divorced mum. This summer he is starting work on another more serious drama project called 'Beneath the Skin' for London Weekend Television.

However, it is in his film parts that Beans has exceeded all his hopes and expectations. His first leading role has been in 'The Happiness Thief' which has just been shown at the Cannes Film Festival. Then he went to Romania to act another major part, this time in 'Chucky' which premieres in Hollywood

on Halloween night. Beans cannot believe his good fortune in being invited to Los Angeles for the screening!

The young actor's most exciting times so far though have been in the filming of 'King Arthur', shot in Wales, where he plays the part of Lancelot's younger brother. The film boasts a cast that includes Clive Owen, Ray Winstone and Keira Knightly who plays Guinevere. Apart from mingling with the stars, Beans also enjoyed wading in the mud up to his knees, learning to ride a horse and being taught how to shepherd sheep – and he's paid to do this! Incidentally, if you look up 'King Arthur' on the internet, there is an appetizing trailer to see.

Beans starts at the Garden Suburb Junior School this autumn and his younger sister, Katy joins the Infants. Katy was recently 'spotted' at an audition Beans was attending and may follow in her brother's footsteps. If she does, I'm sure that their mother, Mandy will need as much energy as any woman on the Suburb!

