

"Bound for the Black Sea". 36 Days aboard the Prinsendam

We thought you might like to know how it went. The downside is that the jet lag was severe coming home, although all flights and flight connections went perfectly, just those 9 time zones and 15 hours of flying.

Also we wanted to thank you for all the nice perks. Everything you wrote in your card was taken care of. The little notes were all there and we got your champagne, wine package, Pinnacle package and so on (even the picture coupon) not a thing was missing.

We describe the cruise under 6 sections.

1. The Trans-Atlantic Crossing was WONDERFUL! We had great weather right across and though we got some rolling, Prinsendam is a well designed ship (not like some of the larger mega-cruisers) and we were comfortable throughout. We had an unplanned detour to Bermuda to drop off an injured crewman (fell in the galley and was in a coma) so we saw the lights of Bermuda!

We were across to Portugal in 10 days total and were 100% happy. We would do a re-position (long sea run) in a heart beat. It was so relaxing and calming. Saw whales and flying fish and although hard to imagine, we ran for 5 days without seeing any other ships. That is a big ocean! The crossing was "magical" for us and no seasickness for us at all.

2. The Prinsendam is great! We enjoyed her much smaller size. She was full for all legs of the cruise but there was never an issue of line-ups or finding a deck chair. Our pictures show largely empty decks and sun areas and that was sooooo nice.

The cabin was fine. The high points were the location (great choice midships and low). Well done Myrna! The cabin was nicely appointed but looking her age. It was very clean and the cabin service was excellent. There is a walk-in closet and this is a God-send on a longer trip like this. We hardly used the dresser. The walk-in had plenty of rack space to hang clothes up and slider drawers for everything else. It left the cabin uncluttered and tidy.

The bathroom was nice. It had a full size tub (old fashioned size), nice sink and toilet and tiled floors. A small repair was needed to the tub surround but was spotted by the steward and repaired without asking him to.

The Public spaces were more than lovely. The Prinsendam has the beautiful woods that the new ships are not allowed to have due to the fire regulations. Gorgeous woods in different colours in different areas, gorgeous bars and lounges, the library is to die for with great leather chairs and a fireplace with the portrait of their Queen. It was very classy.

3. The Dining experience was the usual standard for HAL (compared with the Veendam just as good) but a much smaller buffet. The Pinnacle Grill on this trip was MUCH better than on Veendaam. It was a magnificent small dining room with curved wooden walls in places and the food was just amazing! We ate there 5 times for dinner and 3 for lunch. A definite WOW for service in the Pinnacle. The head guy there was just on-the-ball and gave us extra perks. The Best!

We had originally reserved for the 8:00 pm seating at a table for two. The first night was not good. Tables for two (except those that were reserved for the suites (concierge service)) might as well be tables for four or six. Tables for two set within an inch or two of each other. So we changed the next day to "Anytime seating." IT WAS GREAT and it works very well.

If you want to sit with someone else (we did this with a nice couple from Holland we met) you call in that morning and reserve a table and time. Otherwise (and this is what we did) you just walk up to the counter and say "hi, two from cabin 358." He looks at his screen and says "large or small table?" We usually said large and within seconds a slip of paper pops out of a machine and he gives it to a waiter and you go straight to the table zero waiting.

The advantage was we could eat when we were ready (any time between 5.45 and 8.00). We got to sit in different places and they were all good. We got to meet new folks most nights and even got to meet new waiters and wine stewards and there were never any problems with retrieving our half left-over bottle of wine from the night before.

4. The Special events were great. We did three wine classes (extra charge) that were more than worth it. A Murder Mystery Dinner in the Pinnacle that was pricey but worth every penny. There was amazing special food and wine pairings that knocked our socks off and unlimited wine and champagne (the good stuff).

5. The Entertainment was fine but we are not into shows at all. We went to a few, one very good but the rest very "cruise ship". They seemed very well attended and appreciated by the other passengers. A minor issue and they did do a survey about this was the smoking policy. The Crow'snest had a smoking corner and it did cause us to leave or avoid it altogether. It was the same in the outdoor buffet eating area on the stern.

6. The Ports of Call and tours were for the most part great. The Mediterranean portion was really fun. Of course some stops we liked better than others. Lisbon was good, Portamao was missed because it was too rough for tenders, the Gibraltar run was quite rough for two hours but we never had a single queazy on the trip anywhere. Cadiz was exceptional. We had soooo many stops that we started to look forward to the sea days.

The Ports of Call surprise favourites were Cadiz, Elba (very special), Katakolon, Navplion, Santorini (we expected that), Kuschadashi and then Istanbul for the wow factor. The Black Sea stops in Turkey were amazing. They get very few cruise ships down as far as Trabzon and Sinop and the people were so sweet and interested in us. Families were coming up to us to have a photo taken, the kids wanting hugs (and to try out their English) and one little girl wanted to share popcorn with us. We felt welcomed and appreciated everywhere.

If we were to go anywhere to see the country again it would be Turkey for sure and it was SO CHEAP ASHORE! I could not believe how inexpensive Trabzon was! We ate ashore in little hole-in-the-walls and that was super. We had wonderful food and encountered very friendly people.

Sebastopol was disappointing. We had a very cool reception, no eye contact anywhere no hello's nothing. The city was full of drinking in the am and broken bottles all over the place. We were tied up right next to a Russian (they share the base) military vessel and we looked

at them and they looked at us but no waves returned all day. It was a very odd and unfriendly place but very, very cheap! Cheapest place we saw and worst food ashore. The people who went on tour out of the city had a good time but we walked the port and parks.

Athens was amazing but very crowded (as was Ephesus) but we sure loved going to those spots. Shore tours to Mycenae, Corinth, Ephesus, Sumela, Parthenon were super-duper and we had an amazing tour of Sorrento and Pompei. As an aside, on one of our tours we booked a "Medallion Edition" tour (at higher cost) and it was really worth it. Group of 14 in smaller bus with an exceptional guide and entry into places not open to others, like the Terrace Houses, and it was worth every penny on this tour!

We thought the tours were well done and most of good value. Meals on tour were often exceptionally well done in neat places!

As to a cruise on HAL again YES but we would for sure want a sea passage as part of it or at least a lot of sea days. We would not go for 36 days again (but are glad we did this time). It was a bit long for the homesickness part. Probably 2-3 weeks is our best target. If we can find something that we fly to and then sail back to Vancouver or Seattle or San Diego to get short air on the end that would be great. Long flight out, short flight or no flight home would be perfection!

So we are very happy cruisers. We had an excellent time and your arrangements were perfect. We want to thank you for all your very hard work on our behalf and for getting our great price and for the gifts!

Oh, tell Perry we took the "basic," "advanced" and "premium" wine classes and my life has been ruined! Last class they brought out the really good stuff, in the last instance champagne, I got a glass of "ordinary French champagne" and then a glass of "Vieuv Cliquo" oh my, I now want only that which I cannot afford and am depressed about it!

**Happy Cruisers, of Cruise Holidays of Port Coquitlam and Holland America
Dave and Sharon**