

## Cruising to the Melbourne Cup



My husband has always wanted to cruise to the cup – so for his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday we went to the 157<sup>th</sup> running of the great race. It was fantastic and I highly recommend it.



Be you a dedicated punter or if you don't know one end of a horse from another, Carnival makes the experience FUN ☺

Our voyage was 6 nights on board Carnival Spirit – just the right length, with 2 nights in Melbourne, that's 3 full days, which meant we arrived early on MEL Cup day and didn't cruise off until after the last race on Ladies Oaks Day (Thursday). Cruise includes general admission entry to Mel Cup and Oaks Day at Flemington. Free transfers are included for Mel Cup day only. (Oaks Day transfers can be purchased on board AUD\$49pp). Upgrade packages can be purchased for Lawn Stand or Sainly Place and private marquees, either online or through Aim Holidays. Be quick though – as these sell out early!!

The ship sailed from Circular Quay in Sydney, which is so easy to get to. We just got Opal cards at the airport and jumped the train. Normal train ticket from Airport to Circular Quay is AU\$18 pp with the Opal card was closer to AU\$14 pp and I used my card to get down to Southern Highlands afterwards & back (only paid AU\$40 for everything). Train ride is about 25mins. From the train to the ship is a very easy 10min walk.

Our allocated check in time was 1:30pm – 2pm, so we had some time spare to enjoy a few beers at the "Cruise Bar". This is a great spot to view the ship with beer in hand and suck up some pre-cruise excitement with fellow guests.

Luggage storage is available for cruise guests at Sydney Visitors Centre (5mins walk from Circular Quay) cnr Argyle & Playfair streets. Just walk towards the ship, & turn left at the end of the Museum of Contemporary Art (white end of the building) and walk up Argyle street. Costs are per day A\$20 per suitcase medium/large & A\$12 per carry on bag. Must be collected by 5pm.

The Fun started as soon as we entered the check in area. In true Carnival style there was lots of loud music, crew dressed as jockeys and others wearing fascinators with bright red T-shirts which said "Cruising to the Melbourne Cup". One crew member was even dressed as Elvis! The whole process took us 30-35 minutes, queues moved pretty well really. I think the earlier time slots had been busier than ours.



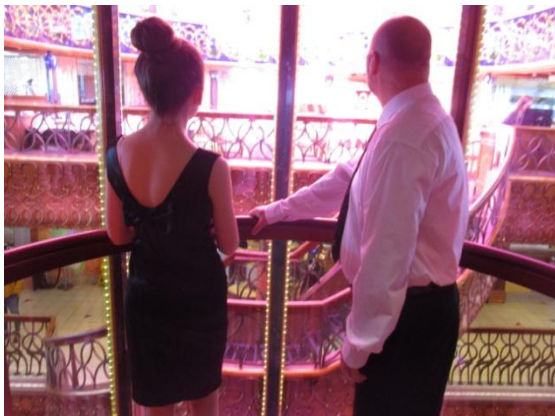
Cabins weren't available for access until 3pm – another chance for a few drinks on deck 9, and our daughter grabbed a burger.

We were in cabin 6279 – Premium Balcony on deck 6 right beside the elevators. Didn't hear a thing – fellow passengers weren't noisy at all. There is more noise near the Atrium bar area. We actually loved being handy to the lift and stairs, very convenient. Plenty of space for the 3 of us – Waimarie slept on the sofa bed and there was a 4<sup>th</sup> pull down bed in the roof if required. Shower only with only a tiny lip to get into the shower. No bath tub to negotiate.



Carnival Spirit was built in 2001. Interior design is a bit garish really. Kind of a Greek meets Las Vegas theme going on with lots of fake brass/cooper, and very pink at the top of the Atrium. Definitely not like the more contemporary designs of new ships Carnival Vista and Horizon. But this is Spirit and she's fun. And we were a ship full of gamblers, so Las Vegas style kind of worked for us 😊

Cup Eve on board was a great day



Everyone dressed up for formal evening that night. Earlier in the day Melbourne Fashion stylist Trish G was on board with the Sydney Weekender's Erica Davis, with a fashion show on the field and lots of amazing giveaways.



Trish was really down to earth, very warm and positive, everyone loved her. Mel Cup sweepstakes were running in the casino and there was roll of the dice race called the Melbourne Mug which you could bet on too. Then after lunch – Australian racing legends and Sky Racing presenters – Johnny Tapp (ex Race caller) and Larry Olsen (ex Jockey) were giving race day tips to a packed audience in the main show lounge. This was excellent, especially when Johnny Tapp did a pretend call of tomorrow's race. Some in the audience had grown up listening to Johnny on the radio every Saturday, it was like hearing from an uncle.





Mel Cup day was an early start, everyone looked fantastic. As we left the ship musicians were playing and champagne was flowing. Two P & O ships were docked beside us at Port Melbourne. There was an army of buses to take us all out to Flemington. This was a 30min drive and about another 30mins standing in the queue to get in! But we always knew it would be busy.



Flemington is just a beautiful venue. The roses were all out, and the facilities are really good. Beers are virtually A\$10 per can, and you have to queue for everything. Everyone's in good spirits. We were in general admission with our 14 year old. The crowd were really good. We got to know the people around us and had lots of laughs. I backed the winner of the Melbourne cup (Rekindling No.22 – which was one of Larry Olsen's tips), so was pretty happy 😊

It is a massive day, we still had to queue to get out of Flemington and on to our bus back to the ship. I was grateful for changing at the last minute to more comfortable shoes, as we had been standing all day. There isn't any allocated seating for general admission and at times it was standing room only on the grass. However if you got there earlier you could get a spot at the tables behind the reserved seating inside Saintly place or up on

the James Boag's celebration deck



– good view, Boags, live music and free entry

Another Free area to check out is The Park. On the hill above Fisher Parade. It's cool, food, drinks and music & fashion.

I suggest for Melbourne Cup getting off the ship on one of the first buses – we were on bus 21 and missed the first race, stuck in the queue to get in. Getting to Flemington earlier means you can get your spot sorted for the day.



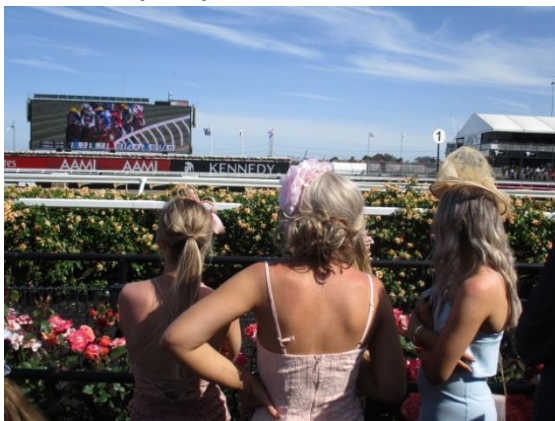
Don't bother paying extra for the inside track enclosure – it's boring over there, all the "action" is amongst the crowd on our side of the track 😊 - yeah baby!

The next day was Wednesday – our free day in Melbourne and the shops were open!



We just caught the tram from opposite the entry to the port – A\$8 took us anywhere, all day, easy as! Melbourne is fun.

Thursday was Oaks Day at Flemington – this was my favourite day. Most of the ship didn't bother going – too tired still from Mel Cup and had done their money. But we were up for it and SO glad we went. Oaks Day is Ladies Day – so Myer Fashions on the Field is a big feature. Everyone dresses up still but it is way less crowded. You can put down your blanket on the grass and relax in the sun. No queues to get in, for the toilets, beer or food it's all really easy. Great vibe too.



Less crowd means you can enjoy wandering around more – watch the horses in the parading yard and still be able to get your

bets on with the bookies or the TAB



On Oaks Day it was so much easier to get close to the racing action – if you are coming down to Melbourne, take the option of getting Oaks Day passes as well. We paid A\$49pp for the ship's return transfer to Flemington on Oaks Day – worth every cent. We so rate Oaks Day 😊

Carnival Spirit set sail for Sydney that night. Back on board – it was party time! 80's night. Lots of great dress ups by the passengers. All the bars were pumping and the 80's show was excellent. Heaps stayed up till midnight waiting for the international waters when the casino opened.

Everyone took it easy on the last sea day – William went for a spa/massage treatment to really soak up the chill out vibe. Then the next morning at 730am we docked back at Circular Quay. I was off the ship within 10 mins – I did self-assist option wheeling my own bag off. Thanks for a great Holiday!



220 volt – NZ style power plugs and US standard 110V on Carnival Spirit.