

Death Railway

T O U R S

Queen Mary Hotel – Longbeach California

The Queen Mary was a cruise ship built in 1930 by the Cunard/White Star Line and Builder John Brown Limited. It was known as job number 534 and because of the Great Depression and lack of bank loans – work stopped on her by 1931. After 28 months of stalled activity, construction recommenced. In 1935 the installation of engines and funnels were completed where seaworthy trials dominated the following year.



Her maiden voyage departed Southampton 27 May 1936 arriving in Cherbourg, France. She later arrived on the 1st of June 1936 in New York – with a crossing time of 5 days, 5 hours and 13 minutes.

She has carried many luminaries over her illustrious cruising career. Her last voyage in peacetime before WW2, she carried 2,552 passengers including Mr and Mrs Bob Hope and millions in gold Bullion. In 1943 Winston Churchill travelled on her to New York to meet with President Roosevelt which also included some 5,000 German POWs.

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During WW2 she was converted to a troop ship where at her peak carried a whole division of men; including the US First Armoured Infantry Division. She visited Sydney several times as a troop ship, the Philippines, Africa, America and other parts of SE Asia. She carried my dad and his mates of the 8th Division to Singapore – to help fortify the doomed Singapore fortress.



In 1942 the Queen Mary collided with her escort, the British Ship 'Curacoa' where over 338 sailors perished on the Cruiser. A big beast to manoeuvre, at full tilt she takes over 16 kilometres to stop. Seventy tons of cement were used to patch her bow in Gourock Scotland as a result of the run in with Curacoa.

In 1946 she transported six war-brides voyages and some 12,886 European brides and children to the United States and Canada and in 1949 ran aground at Cherbourg.

In 1954 the Queen Mother and Queen Elizabeth travelled on board after returning from the US and in 1966, Cunard announced the ship was for sale for US\$3.5 million. Her final voyage from Southampton was in 1967 and that same year she arrived in Long Beach, California; where she has been ever since.

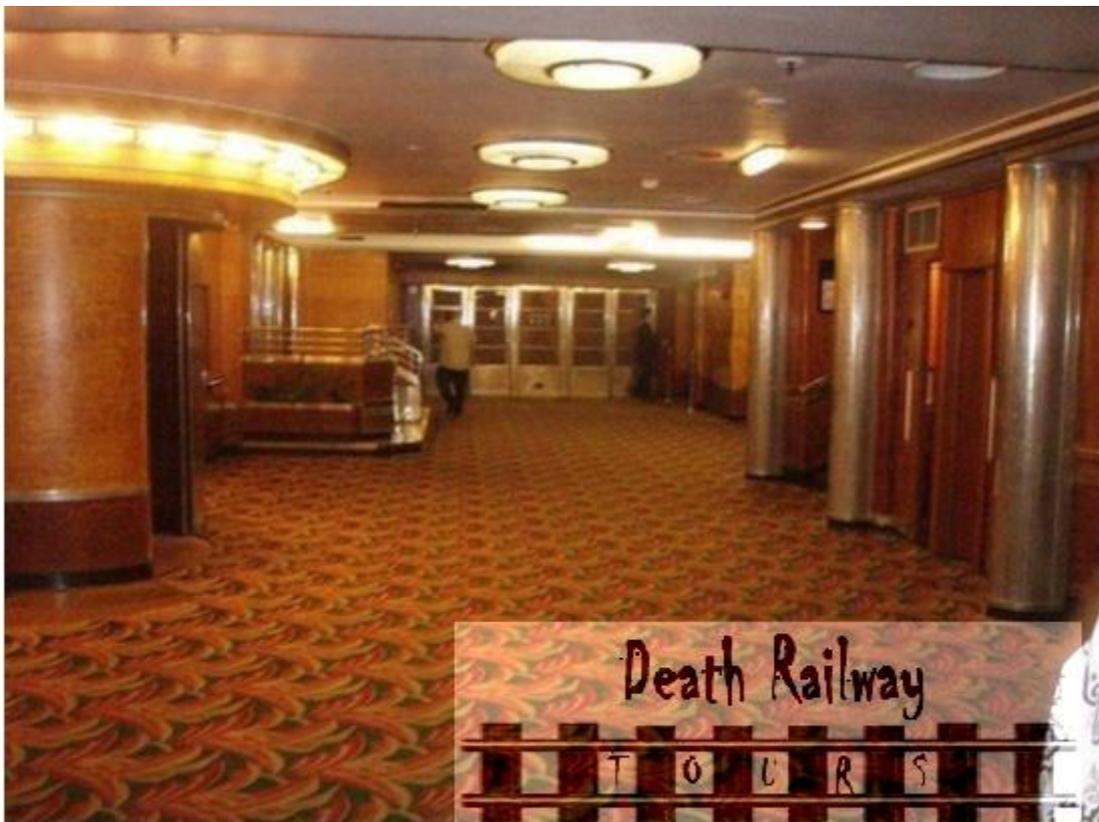
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Our cabin room in the Queen Mary Hotel was quaint with two single beds and original wood panelling; they have done a remarkable job in keeping with the period style of ship in all its glamour and irresistible allure. One tour guide told us that many of the 'long shots' of the hallways were used by the film makers of Titanic – have a walk down many of the hallways and you'll see the bend as the hallway horizon dips in the middle.

Sir Winston's Restaurant is the place to dine; it's on the first class level. We indulged in a bottle of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough and paid a first class price for our imported tippie; it was \$US60; but went very well with the elegantly served seafood.

After dinner we participated in the Queen Mary Ghost Tour. We were shown all over the ship and visited places where the general public doesn't normally get to wander. The area where the first class pool once thrived with the rich and famous, is empty and spooky at night. A young girl of seven drowned in the pool and we found out later down in the boiler room, an attendant died when he was crushed by the water tight doors. Our Ghost Whisperer tried to 'contact' these Queen Mary spirits but we didn't feel, hear or experience any type of presence or apparition. A light hearted tour where you explore all differing nooks and crannies of the massive Queen.



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TOURISTS

The next day we did the full audio tour of the ship which is a great way to stretch the legs and get accustomed to all the shops, decks and offerings on board the ship; including many dioramas of history explaining the relevant timelines, tragedies, records and successes.

Rates to stay in the hotel in the 314 cabins and suites start at USD\$111 for a Stateroom with twin beds up to USD\$344 for a first class suite. The location is sensational if you have a car, as you can hop on the expressway and get to Disneyland, Venice Beach, Santa Monica Pier (with lunch at Bubba Gump's Restaurant); Downtown Los Angeles, Beverley Hills and Hollywood Boulevard with ease.



(Picture from the Queen Mary Hotel website)

Out the front of the Queen Mary is the Cold War Warrior, the 'Scorpion' Russian Submarine. Quite small inside, not much room for the crew of 78 to work within and very claustrophobic for XL tourists like me. Known as the Foxtrot Class she was built in 1972 and decommissioned in 1994. The Scorpion saw active duty in the Cold War, is 91 metres long, submerged she is 2,475 tonnes with a maximum diving depth of 300 metres. Her cruising speed underwater is a speedy 15 knots. To come aboard for a tour will cost USD\$11.

Both of these tourist attractions are worthy of a visit to Long Beach in sunny California. Staying at the hotel is an event in itself; not often is a hotel the actual attraction.



Queen Mary Facts:

- Maiden Voyage: 26 September 1934;
- Over 2,000 portholes;
- Over 10 million rivets;
- 12 decks;
- Passenger Capacity: 1,957;
- Officers and Crew: 1,194
- Cruising speed: 28.5 knots (55.17 KPH);
- 27 Boilers;
- Weight of anchor chain: 45 tonnes.

For more information visit:

<http://www.queenmary.com/>