

Jeremy's World: The long-haul cruise

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Clark compares luxurious ocean liners to modern day air travel

Have you ever been on a cruise? You know, on one of those Nightmare Of The Seas type mega ships. I have not. Mostly because I am not over 75, nor own a pair of checkered trousers and Mrs. C does not own a microfiber pink track suit.

Moreover, the idea of being encased in a floating shopping-mall-cum-bingo-hall with four thousand other similarly attired folks with nothing other than each other, or the sea, to look at fills me with horror.

I mention this because long journeys in a restricted environment are in the news again that Qantas' plans for non-stop flights from Sydney, London and New York have suffered a setback. Travelers to or from Australia now have to wait until 2027 for the ambitious plan. Qantas has announced Airbus' aircraft will be delayed by a further four months at least.

Under the plan "Project Sunrise," the airline aims to cut the travel time to New York or London using the custom made A350-1000URL aircraft which carries an additional 20,000 liters in the rear center fuel tank. But the release of it has been delayed until April 2027.

This got me thinking, how one endures such an experience and should it not be looked at in the same

way as a cruise?

Now, despite what we know about cruise ships, it is staggering to see how successful they are. Cruises persuade millions of people that going back to where you started very slowly, indeed with nothing to see but the sea, and not much to do but eat, play bingo and watch Englebert Humperdink impersonators may, in fact, be fun.

The Mantra in that business is, "The journey is the destination." (Which to me does not say a lot for the actual destination, but I get the point.)

I understand that with ships, as opposed to aircraft, when interim destinations are reached there is usually only enough time to don the straw hat, hop off, buy T-shirt proving you were there, re-board Ocean Nightmare to head off to the next identical port-side town. And after two weeks of this, you are back where you began with nothing to show but some trinkets and possibly Legionnaires disease.

The modern day cruise resulted when the old liners that sailed the globe with jazz and cocktails and real style became obsolete when air travel took over. There had to be a way of using these huge ships and thus, the "cruise" was born. Journeys were long and so effort was made to make them as enjoyable and as comfortable as possible.

At first, the airliners (a word derived from ocean liners) tried to mimic the ships with full-on luxury and aircraft called "Clipper" or "Luxury Liner." Which it was not.

Then the bean-counters moved in deciding that everyone was entitled to this experience and therefore it had to be super cheap.

It then became all about passenger/kilometer yield and seat/miles/revenue and cutting cost. Now, with rare exceptions, is it no longer about caviar and cocktails and the race to the bottom is on.

I am sure there are some who would happily anesthetize boarding passengers and then wake them on arrival to save on service costs.

But now it gets interesting because we have come full circle with long-haul travel and Qantas' "Project Sunrise" with its 22+ hour flights. These are journeys so long that it really is an event, not just a means to an end.

So should we started thinking about making the journey part of the destination?

When Concorde flew it almost re-created this magic where people were prepared to pay money to not go anywhere but just experience the journey. With aircraft such as the A350-1000URL and the long delayed 777X capable of flying non-stop halfway around the world, and large enough to play deck-quoits in the aisles, perhaps there is an opportunity to make more of the journey than just time to kill and, dare I say it, a cruise.

If the cruise lines can lure us into a world of floating fun (I use that term advisedly), what opportunity is there for airlines to do similar? Many would argue they already do, but in my view, and the view of many of you as I hear, there is much, much more that could be done. No one is going to book a 20+ hour flight purely for the experience, but if non-stop journeys really are now this long, we have to remind some of these carriers that they are in the hospitality business, not package couriers.

I am not sure I am ready for this just yet but soon I think it will be time to rummage for the checked pants. Although getting Mrs. C into a pink track-suit will require a little more persuasion.