

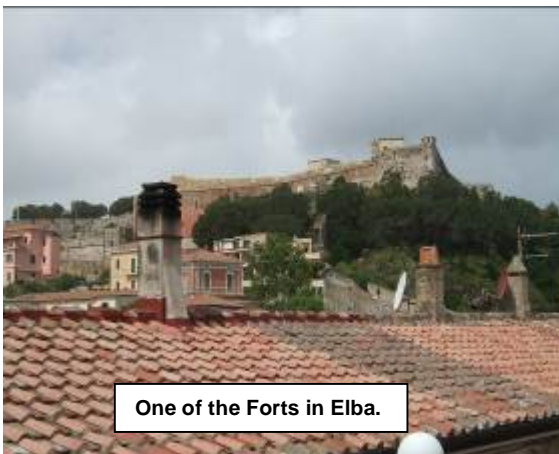
FRED OLSEN TRIP 15-20 MAY 2013 – by Beccy Gallop.

15th May

An early start to day one of this trip, up at 3am for a meeting time at Gatwick Airport of 5.15am. We were flying out to Rome to board the Braemar for five of the eighteen nights itinerary. Our flight with Easyjet arrived in Rome on time and we transferred to Civitavecchia, where the Braemar was moored. As we entered the port the Braemar was dwarfed by three much bigger ships moored up along side, which really put into perspective that Fred Olsen cruising is all about the small ship experience.

Once on board, it was a quick dash to the cabin to drop my luggage so that we could catch the end of lunch service in the buffet restaurant, as I had not fancied any breakfast at 3am! (Normally your baggage is delivered to your cabin but as we boarded mid itinerary normal procedures did not apply.) We then had a couple of free hours to explore the ship and unpack before our 5pm business session started. Business session completed it was back to the cabin to change for pre dinner drinks, before heading to the Thistle restaurant for our evening meal. (We were booked on second sitting at 8.15pm.) It had been a long first day so the group opted for a couple of after dinner drinks in the bar, rather than heading off to the after dinner show. At midnight, having been up for 21 hours, it was time to find my duvet!

16th May



One of the Forts in Elba.

This morning we awoke at the port of Portoferraio in Elba to the sight of strong winds and heavy rain, not the sort of weather you would expect in the Med in the middle of May, but by the time breakfast has been consumed it had stopped raining and the sun was beginning to fight its way through the clouds. As we were only in Elba till 1pm we were soon off the ship and exploring. Portoferraio is a town on the edge of the natural harbour of the island of Elba. Due to the terrain, many of the buildings are situated on the slopes of a hill surrounded on three sides by the sea and overlooked by three forts, the line of these fort walls are still visible today. The views are well worth

the uphill trek! We departed Elba at 1pm, so we had an afternoon of cruising to sample some of the ships facilities and as we now had beautiful blue skies the sundeck, pool, and Jacuzzis were a must, until we had to drag ourselves away at 4pm for our next business session. The evening was a formal night so we met up before dinner in our posh frocks and dinner jackets for our group photo with the captain and senior staff. It was so nice to see everybody dressed up and enjoying the formal night. After dinner two of the group fancied a game of Blackjack and as I had never played I needed a quick run down of the rules, after which the three of us had a go, it was great fun but we did limit ourselves to £10 worth of chips, we all lost needless to say, but at least I only ended up £3 down instead of £10, beginners luck!



17th May



Our port today was the town of Sete, in Southern France, known as the Venice of Languedoc. It is a port and seaside resort on the Mediterranean with its own very strong cultural identity and traditions. We were booked on a half-day excursion “Discover Montpellier”, a walking tour taking in the main points of interest around the town, three quarters of the way through the tour the heavens opened (why had I worn a thin skirt and flip flops and left my umbrella at home!). Bedraggled and with our excursion complete it was back to the ship to enjoy some of the organised activities and events such as talks/bingo/quizzes or book into the spa for some

pampering. After another fabulous evening meal had been consumed, we went off to the after dinner show which was a comedian, very enjoyable and a giggle.

18th May



Today’s port is Barcelona, its location on the Mediterranean Sea accounts for its temperate climate and yes the sun was shining. Barcelona became the centre of world attraction when it hosted the 1992 Olympics and since then has established itself as one of Europe’s most sophisticated and cosmopolitan cities.

The morning was spent on an excursion, taking in the main sights including the Olympic stadium, Segrada Fanilia, the Columbus monument and Casa Batillo (one of the works of Gaudi.) I then spent the afternoon wandering around Las Ramblas window shopping and enjoying the vibrant colours and sounds of the large indoor market.



Barcelona Market in Las Ramblas.

19th May

No port today, because we were at sea en route to Gibraltar. The morning was taken up with our final business session, followed by a couple of free hours before meeting the ships captain at 2.30pm for a talk. From there we were off to the Observation lounge for afternoon tea served at 3.30pm, the cost is £6.95 per person for tea, sandwiches, cakes and scones which I thought was very good value. Then one last game of bingo, (still did not win), before heading back to the cabin to pack and change for our last evening on board. Lobster for dinner (as if I needed any more food!) was a fabulous last evening meal followed by the evening entertainment.

20th May

We arrive in Gibraltar and after breakfast disembarked to head for the airport and our flight home at the end of a very enjoyable cruise experience.

(cont)

Additional Information:

Sample costs on board: Glass of wine £3.85, Gin & Tonic £3.80, Cocktails range from £4.25 - £5.50, Bottle of wine from £16.50, Bingo card £2.00, Gaming tables, £1.00 bets on Blackjack, 25p per chip on Roulette, Fitness classes £5.00

Cabin

I was in a Superior twin outside cabin with an obstructed view; the cabin had a TV, tea & coffee making facilities, hairdryer, plenty of wardrobe and draw space.

Room service is available to all cabins.

As the five nights I did was part of the longer 18 night Cultural Italian Voyage, I feel Fred Olsen cruises are best suited to the 50 plus market on their longer cruises and the 40 plus market on their shorter cruises, and to couples or singles rather than families. They cater well for the single traveller with welcome meetings for singles, dance hosts, and organise single people to be able go ashore together if they wish.

The dress code on board for the evenings is smart casual with the occasional formal and themed nights, on a typical 18 nights itinerary there might be three formal and three themed nights.

The advantage of cruising with Fred Olsen is that all their ships are much smaller than most other cruise lines so they can take you right to the heart of your destination. The ships are able to navigate further into the fjords, dock more centrally in certain ports rather than anchoring at sea and having to use the tenders to get ashore, and if anyone's sense of direction is anything like mine, finding your cabin and way around onboard is definitely easier on a small ship!

I was very impressed with how friendly and helpful the staff were.