

Britannia B515 Review

We are just back from this cruise and had a great time apart from the journey to and from Southampton. I thought that I would attempt a review so here goes...

Background: My wife and I went on our first cruise in 2001 with Carnival, took another in 2003 with NCL and have cruised at least once a year exclusively with P&O since 2004 (20+ cruises). We always used to pick our cruises solely based on places we wanted to visit, but for the last 3 years our choices have been tailored to our son (now aged 5).

25/07/2015: Pre-cruise we were allocated a boarding time 3pm and we also received an email asking us to abide by this. The email also advised that our cabins would be ready on arrival and that there would be a reception for Caribbean Tier members (which we are) in the Live Lounge from 1:30 to 3:30pm. We usually set-off from Leeds around 7:30am so we knew that we would arrive before our allocated time but decided to stick to our usual routine. We also didn't want to miss out on the reception!

Unfortunately multiple speed restrictions on the M1 and a complete halt for over an hour following a caravan crash meant that we didn't arrive at the Ocean Terminal until 2:30pm, so effectively we were pretty much in line with P&O's allocated time slot and with priority embarkation we still hoped to catch the last bit of that reception. However, it soon became clear that CPS were way behind with the car parking and I eventually handed over the car keys at 3:45pm. (Later someone advised that there were 4 cruise ships in port that day so maybe this was a factor). There was a huge crowd waiting in the terminal but with our priority embarkation we were on board in 20 minutes and in our cabin with our cases (amazing that they were on board before we were).

Our cabin was G516 (upgraded from G616) "obstructed view balcony" on deck 8 and my first impression was that it was considerably smaller than our last cabin (outside cabin with sofa bed on Aurora). The décor reminded me of a Hilton hotel room.

Not long after embarkation we were called to the muster drill in Sindhu. We got there very easily using a crew staircase, but the start was delayed so in all we were in there around 45 minutes. Getting out of Sindhu and back up to deck 8 was very difficult with huge queues for the lifts and at both the forward and aft staircases (yes, we even walked the length of the ship forward to try get up just one floor). With hindsight we should have just queued but it was pretty chaotic at the time and we didn't yet really know our way around. We didn't attend the sailaway party and instead got ready for dinner.

We had chosen freedom dining and were allocated places in the Meridian restaurant. We arrived around 6:45pm and were allocated a table (five in our party) straight away. The waiters were excellent and friendly (especially with our son) but the table position was pretty lousy being next to the entrance/corridor and having a constant stream of people traffic next to it throughout our meal.

After dinner we returned to the cabin to settle our son for bed and the steward had already made up the sofa bed for him. The quality of the sofa bed was a vast improvement on what we have had previously on Oceana and Aurora. However there was no curtain in the cabin to shut-off the sofa

bed from the rest of the sleeping area and we found that the TV screen on the wall was so huge and bright that it lit up the cabin on its own. As such our plan to get our son to sleep then watch a bit of TV had to be abandoned and we all had a very early night.

Unfortunately we were woken up at 11:30pm by an emergency signal and announcement for crew to standby at their muster stations. This was followed by an announcement from the Captain (broadcast all over the ship including in the cabins) that a smoke alarm had sounded in the engine room and that they were monitoring the situation via CCTV. The Captain naturally tried to make the announcement in a very calm manner and reassured passengers that we were in no danger and did not need to take any action.

A few minutes later another signal sounded and a fire team was called. The captain made further announcements over the next 30 minutes or so reassuring passengers and explaining the minimum crew levels in the various venues throughout the ship. The final announcement (I think it was the seventh) was made around 12:30am and the Captain advised that there had been a small fire in the engine room resulting in two engines being temporarily switched off. Again he was reassuring and advised that there had never been any danger to passengers or crew, and that the cruise would continue albeit at a slightly reduced speed. He also advised that we would be a little late arriving at the first port (Vigo) but that this would be offset by a slightly later departure time.

My wife and I never felt in danger although initially it was a shock to be woken up by a safety signal. Naturally it took a long time to get back to sleep after all the announcements, but fortunately our son slept through it all.

26/07/2015: Sea day. Prior to becoming parents my wife and I would avoid the buffet restaurants as much as possible by using seated dining or places such as "Al Fresco" on Oriana for breakfast or lunch. The main reason is that we just don't enjoy the hustle and bustle of the buffet (or "free for all" as we call it). However now that we have a son we pretty much have to use the buffet as the other venues just would not suit him. As such we were pleasantly surprised with the Horizon Restaurant which was busy but never overcrowded and quite spacious. Definitely the best we have experienced on a P&O ship. We particularly thought that the hand wash area at both entrances is a good idea, although not surprisingly we often saw ignorant passengers bypassing it. We were also keen to try the "Grab & Go" option for breakfast and found it okay but thought that the sandwiches were quite small (made from the mini bread rolls that they serve at evening dinner).

We spent most of the morning in the Crow's Nest (which was surprisingly quiet) then my son and I returned to the cabin to watch the F1 Grand Prix. This was another pleasant surprise (being able to watch it in the cabin) as I am not really keen on sitting in the pub to watch sporting events on board. My wife meanwhile returned to the Grab & Go and brought us some vegetable samosas which were excellent and some sandwiches which were very good. We passed the rest of the day alternating between the cabin and the lido area where our son wanted to try the pool. We did not get a sunbed but they were plenty of sofas and seats in the shaded area to the side. From our perspective we were restricted to one side of the ship as the other was being used by smokers and was quite unpleasant.

We went to dinner again around 6:45pm and this time we were allocated a better table towards the rear of the restaurant on the port side near some windows. The waiters were good as usual and one of them in particular made a fuss of our son. After dinner we decided to try our son in the pub (suggested by his grandparents who had been there the night before) and to our surprise he coped with the noise very well. A decent duet (Joe and Megan) performed various hits and then there was a typical P&O quiz. We retired around 10:30pm and all-in-all it had been a good day.

27/07/2015: Vigo. Although we arrived just after 9:30am we held back from disembarking too early to avoid the crowds. We got off very easily around 11am and as always there were passengers getting back on (something we always laugh about, they've clearly been off early, seen it all and done it all). We took a taxi to Praya de Samil and the fare was just €12 in total for 5 of us (very favourable compared to P&O's excursion cost to the same resort). We've been to Vigo a few times but never to the beach/seaside part and would thoroughly recommend it to anyone. It is around 8km from the port, has a very large paddling and play area, a nice beach, promenade and several restaurants. There is also a bus from and to the port for an even cheaper journey.

We returned to the port area mid-afternoon and it is so much more developed than on our first visit 10 years ago. We did a bit of shopping and then enjoyed a drink in the marina. Some passengers in the marina bars looked like they'd been sat there all day and were a bit worse for wear but there was no trouble and it still had a good atmosphere. We strolled back to the ship late afternoon and an excursion bus pulled up just in front of us but we were not delayed getting back on.

In the evening at freedom dining we asked for the same table as last night (number 101) and it was available. I actually think it is easier for the restaurant manager if you can specify a table number as it means they don't have to choose for you. We enjoyed dinner and our son was fussed over again in a nice but unobtrusive way. Our wine waiter also seemed pleased to see us and made more of an effort to chat with us. After dinner our son insisted that we go to the pub again (routine means so much to him) and we had another pleasant evening.

28/07/2015: Lisbon. We took a taxi from the port to Oceanario and the driver originally said it would be €20, however having been before we knew that this was far too much and eventually we settled at €15. We toured the oceanarium then after a quick lunch took the short walk to the nearby shopping centre Centro Vasco de Gama. From here we caught a taxi back to the ship and with the meter on it was just €6.85! We attended the sailaway party and our departure was slightly delayed, apparently by crew coming on to the ship very late. Later we were told that some flights were delayed coming into Lisbon airport and the late arrivals were new crew and entertainers.

In the evening we asked for table 101 again and also advised the restaurant manager that I had ordered a birthday cake and requested singing waiters for our son's 5th birthday. Once our son was seated one of the waiters attached some balloons to the ceiling above him and after the main course he brought out the birthday cake, complete with the number 5 candle we had given the restaurant manager. The candle was lit, a load of waiters and a restaurant manager gathered round and we all sang "Happy Birthday" in true P&O style (including a staccato second verse interspersed with

handclaps). A photographer also came over and took some photos, one of which we later bought as a souvenir. Every waiter shook our son's hand, and several remembered him on subsequent meetings and would say hello, both in the buffet and the restaurant. It really was a lovely occasion, followed by the pub as usual.

29/07/2015: Cadiz. We've been here a few times before and tried to be clever cutting through the streets to get to the beach. However it can be a bit of a maze and after getting a little disorientated we eventually got there later than expected and found it to be full of holidaymakers, something we've not seen here before. After some playtime we headed off to find our favourite tapas bar only to find it had been closed down. We chose another venue instead and enjoyed some surprise tapas because a) they did not have English menus, b) my A-Level Spanish is quite rusty and c) crucially I'd forgotten the phrasebook! We still enjoyed our meal and best of all was the very fair prices with six tapas, one ración, one small and one large beer, 4 glasses of wine and a soft drink amounting to just €19. I cannot imagine what that would have totalled in a UK service station! Our evening went much the same way as before, same table and our son chose the pub again (though I suggested pretty much every other venue on the ship as an alternative!).

30/07/2015: Sea day. In the past we would have sat anywhere except near the lido/pool area and it appeared that Britannia has plenty of alternative seating space and loungers. However with our son wanting to use the pool we did find some space in the lido area although as ever there were plenty of towel reservations. We had good weather and smooth sailing. For lunch we left our son with his grandparents and tried The Glasshouse for the first time. Having read so much about it we were very excited about this but perhaps our expectations were too high as our waiter was no help at all trying to match wine to our food choices (we thought that this is what they did). She could identify the wine (e.g. "dry white" or "full bodied red") but we really thought that she would give us some pointers to match the food. Anyway we got there in the end and had a lovely meal with six glasses of wine to sample between us. Whilst sat in the Glasshouse we noticed a small and very quiet seating area to the outside, somewhat like a mini promenade deck area. Had we been on our own I think that this would have been an ideal seating area for us on sea days, but clearly it was not suitable for our son. We spent the rest of the day alternating between the cabin and the lido area again followed by the same evening routine we were now accustomed to.

31/07/2015: Arrecife, Lanzarote. We had a bit of a delay getting off as the gangway had to be changed from deck 5 to deck 4 just as we arrived. Once off we took a taxi to the adventure park "Rancho Texas" for just €22 (the driver put the meter on and advised us up front that he thought it would be about €24 which seemed very fair for five of us). It was our first visit and it is a fantastic place with animals, displays, shows, a family water park and fairly priced food. We didn't arrange a return taxi and thought that we may have to take two cars but fortunately another party of five were in the same position as us and asked the shopkeeper at the park to telephone for two minibuses. Very helpful of the other family and the shopkeeper and we were soon heading back to the ship, again for €22. There was a bit of a queue to get back on board but as this port is quite remote

everyone returns via either a bus or taxi so grouping is inevitable. Our evening was the same as before, though this time one of our waiters “Costa” made an Origami bird from a menu for our son.

01/08/2015: Las Palmas, Gran Canaria. We strolled off the ship around 11am (yes, there were passengers getting back on) and headed to the nearby beach. Again we had hot weather and it was very crowded but we easily rented some sunbeds and our son enjoyed splashing around in the crashing waves. For lunch we headed away from the beach to Parque Santa Catalina, not far from the port area. We had another fine lunch (at Gran Terraza Lolita Pluma) including a bottle of wine and lots of drinks for less than €40. They also had free Wi-Fi which was useful. We did some shopping in the “Hiperdino” supermarket in the port area then returned on board. Needless to say our evening was much the same as before, and Costa made another Origami bird for our son.

02/08/2015: Santa Cruz, Tenerife. We disembarked late morning as usual and took a taxi to Parque Maritimo Cesar Manrique which is a fantastic water park not far from the centre. We’d previously walked there when our son was in a buggy but the taxi was only €6.80. The driver did not speak English but we got by with my broken Spanish and he told me this is not a “tourist place” being more of a “family place for locals”. I told him that was good and he laughed. Entry for two adults and one child plus hire of two sunbeds and an umbrella cost just €14.50. It soon filled up with families (being Sunday) and had a really nice atmosphere. It has various fairly priced bars and food outlets and most importantly it felt very safe for our son. When we’d had enough we strolled back to the centre and headed to our favourite restaurant only to find that tapas were off the menu just for that specific day due to some refurbishments. Ah well, there’s always next year! We had a quick drink then caught the shuttle bus back to the ship. Boarding was reasonably quick and our son was soon heading back to the pool on board.

In the evening we followed the same routine as previously though this time the restaurant manager greeted our son by his name and automatically allocated us table 101. Costa made an Origami boat. Before retiring my wife read in the Horizon newsletter that from tomorrow passengers could choose their disembarkation slot on a first come first served basis via reception and I made a note to do this first thing in the morning.

03/08/2015: Funchal, Madeira. Around 9am I went to reception and it was fully manned so I was immediately attended to. I asked for the earliest disembarkation time possible and was offered 8:15am or 8:45am. I chose the former, requested the same for my wife’s parents and it was all very simple. We disembarked late morning as usual and caught the shuttle bus round the dock to the outskirts of the town centre. From there we found a taxi rank and asked a driver to take us to Aquaparque near the airport at Santa Cruz. He advised that this would be a long way (we expected around 20 minutes) and that he would take us then collect us later for €80. This seemed a lot for two 20 minute drives so I said “No thank you, too much” and made as if to get out of the car. He then offered the same journey for €70 and assured us that this was a good price. We decided to go ahead and it was a longer drive than we thought, skirting round the coast of the island and even at high

speed it still took 25 minutes. Once there I offered him some money but he would not take anything and said he would collect us in 3 hours. Once again we found it to be a fantastic family place, fairly priced, safe and with a good atmosphere. Our son loved the waterslides and insisted that I have a go as well though it is really not my thing. Whilst there it occurred to me that we would have struggled to get back on our own as we only saw one bus (but no obvious bus stop) and no taxis or taxi rank.

We exited a little over our agreed 3 hour time allowance but our smiling taxi driver was there to greet us and even helped us find our way out (the exit was not exactly obvious to us non-Portuguese speaking tourists). He then drove us back (again at high speed) and dropped us off right next to Britannia's berth. All in all the expense of the taxi ride had been worth it for the convenience and seeing our son's enjoyment of all those water slides. There were two huge queues on the quayside and it took over 20 minutes to get back on the ship.

Our evening was much the same as previously and Costa made an Origami aeroplane. Personally I was by now a little fed up of doing the same thing after dinner every night, however as my wife reminded me, it was better than sitting in the cabin as we had done on our previous two cruises with our son!

04/08/2015: Funchal, Madeira. We had stayed overnight and hadn't really planned much for this last port day. Eventually we decided to catch the shuttle bus and take our son to a toy shop in the Dolce Vita shopping centre (near the shuttle bus stop) to buy him a final present, followed by lunch with the last of our Euros. We chose to dine at Restaurante Marina Terrace with the harbour view and Britannia in sight just on the other side of the port. It was our most expensive meal at €73.65 for five of us but still fair value considering that it included a bottle of wine, two beers and a lobster dish. The waiters were amused at my son's request for a pizza without cheese but he was readily accommodated and they all made a fuss of him. They also had free Wi-Fi and it was a lovely way to finish our shore adventures.

Back on board we went to the "Great British Sailaway" and it is the biggest we've ever seen. The Cruise Director Neil Oliver is a real showman and was at the forefront of everything, and his team were highly energetic, fully taking part rather than just going through the motions as sometimes happens. The Captain announced that an estimated 2000+ passengers had attended. Sadly it all got a bit too noisy and too much for our son so we headed back to the cabin for some quiet time.

Our evening was the same again, table 101, Costa made another Origami aeroplane and after dinner we went to the pub. We retired around 10:15pm and the ship was clearly moving faster than it had done to date as we were a tiny bit unstable walking down our corridor on deck 8. Once in bed the movement became more noticeable (though by no means dramatic and not enough to make me seasick which sometimes happens) and we were kept awake for a while by creaking noises. We've experienced this before but were surprised that it happened on such a new ship.

05/08/2015: Sea day. We were now faced with three sea days on the journey home and were concerned about our creaking cabin. In the morning after breakfast we identified the source of the creaking and I sprayed a little suntan cream on the appropriate joint then wiped away the excess. (I

once saw an engineer cure a similar creaking sound by spraying WD40 on the joint). Our quick fix seemed to work and we headed out to the lido area to meet up with my wife's parents.

We had invites to the Caribbean Tier Luncheon so after making sure our son was okay with his grandparents we returned to the cabin to get ready then headed for the Oriental Restaurant. We found it to be far nicer than the Meridian Restaurant and we were on a lovely table laid out for nine hosted by Hotel Trainer Emma who told us that she had been on board for the final weeks of the ship's build and was due to remain on board until Christmas. As ever the lunch was fantastic, we had nice company and the eager waiters were forever refilling our glasses! For us this is one of the major treats of our cruises and the best reward for our loyalty to P&O.

Our fellow diners were very critical of the ship and Emma fielded all the comments and questions with good grace and honesty. Yes, the cabins are generally smaller. Yes, it is more like a floating hotel than an ocean liner. Yes, it is mostly about the numbers and profit per passenger. We found her responses to be sympathetic but not patronising and she clearly understood that she had a party that mostly preferred the older style ships. One lady in particular was very vocal, slating the design, the lack of central staircases, the lack of promenade deck etc. She advised how cramped her daughter's cabin was for a family of four. One very interesting point she made was that she felt that the designers "were pushing everyone upwards away from the sea" referring to the lack of promenade deck and the fact that the majority of the outdoor seating was on deck 16 (lido) or higher. I guess that she hadn't discovered the four small outside seating areas midship and aft on deck 7.

Another diner spoke of being unable to get a seat in any entertainment venue after second seating dining. To cap it all one chap would not eat anything on the 3 course (3 choices per course) menu and insisted on creating his own meal and accompaniments. We thought that this was quite ungracious but the waiters managed to accommodate him with a smile and even managed to provide some cheddar cheese for him after he rejected all the other (cheese) choices for the third course. Despite my description making our fellow diners sound like a grumpy bunch we all got on very well and had a lovely time.

On returning to the cabin we found that our son had taken a tumble in the lido area and grazed his side. He had been quickly patched up by a pool attendant and seemed okay though a little shaken and we subsequently spent the afternoon entertaining him in the cabin. At this point we would have really appreciated a bigger cabin similar to what we previously had on Aurora and Oceana but this was the best that we could afford and there was nothing we could do about it. Later on I took my son to the children's tea for a snack and was frankly disgusted to see an adult in there loading up her plate (and no, it was not on behalf of a child, she was just getting food to go with her cup of coffee).

Our evening followed the same pattern as before and when we retired our cabin was no longer creaking (though we also felt that the ship had slowed down again).

06/08/2015: Sea day. We had hot weather and smooth sailing so spent most of the day around the lido pool. We used the Grab & Go again but this time we both tried salads and were quite disappointed as they both felt very much like leftovers. We understand that it is common to use

leftovers for all ship meals and that it is important to recycle food as much as possible, however the ingredients in our salads looked and tasted past their best and we would not choose them again.

We were a little late heading out to dinner and arrived around 7pm. The restaurant manager saw us and looked a bit upset, saying that he was really sorry and hadn't been able "to hold our table for us" but we could have a pager if we wanted to wait for it. We assured him that we had no such expectations and would happily take another table. We were then ushered to another table on the starboard side, closed off from the windows by multiple partitions and appearing to be in a busy place. At this point we realised how vast the Meridian Restaurant is, and we presume that the multiple partitions are intended to make it feel smaller and more intimate. For us this does not work and having had a taste of the Oriental Restaurant we were in no doubt that we were dining in a far poorer venue.

We were also used to our regular waiters and though our new fellows were pleasant and polite the service was just not the same. They forgot to bring out a children's menu for our son and the whole experience was just less fun. We were in a noisier area and we ended up having a lot quieter meal than usual. It was also the evening for the chef's parade but all we saw was a line of chef's walking past with no view of the group as a whole or the senior staff. It ended up being one of our quicker meals and we ended up in the pub at more or less the same time despite dining later. When we returned to the cabin there was an A4 size piece of paper (looking like a photocopy) confirming our disembarkation time at 8:15am.

07/08/2015: Sea day. It was a bit cloudy but warm enough to be outside and still smooth sailing so we spent most of the day on the lido deck again. We had sandwiches from the Grab & Go for lunch and were pleased to see samosas available again. My mother-in-law also tried a Cornish pasty but didn't enjoy it. At one point there was some kind of confrontation between 2 male adult passengers. I've no idea what happened or why, and don't really want to know though my wife's parents advised that they were separated by the pool attendants who then took statements. Later on I took my son to the children's tea and once again saw an adult helping themselves. Really, it's not as if there isn't food available 24 hours a day elsewhere is it?

When we went to dinner the restaurant manager was apologising again at not being able to hold "our table" and once again we re-assured him that we did not expect him to. This time he placed us near to table 101 and Costa immediately came over to say hello and ask how we all are. The service was better than the previous night but still a bit lacking as the waiters forgot to offer bread and got my son's main course wrong (quickly rectified of course). At the end of the meal Costa came over and presented us with souvenir menus with handwritten messages signed by him and his colleague Jackson. We know that it is a P&O tradition to do this but for them to make the extra effort for us (especially with freedom dining) was something special and appreciated.

After dinner we went to the pub one last time, failed miserably at the James Bond quiz and then returned to our cabin earlier than usual to put our cases out and retire.

08/08/2015: Disembarkation. Our disembarkation paper stated that we should go to the Meridian Restaurant for 8am and we set off around 7:55am. However despite it being only two floors down we could not get a lift (they all kept going past full) so eventually we went to the aft staircase, down one floor then on to the Atrium to go down another floor. There we found a huge queue to get in the restaurant but at least it was moving. Once in the restaurant we found that no-one was sitting down and the queue was simply snaking its way out of the other door on the starboard side. We had not heard any of the usual disembarkation announcements and there was just one staff member in the restaurant taking flak from various annoyed passengers.

We found that a lady stood in front of us in the queue had a disembarkation notice stating her time as 10:30am but she said that she saw the queue and just decided to join it (typical British I guess). Eventually she found someone to ask and was advised to sit and wait. Anyway the queue led directly to the gangway where our passes were scanned and we were checked out. At no stage were our disembarkation notices examined so the lady with the 10:30am time slot could have easily got off with the rest of us. We quickly picked up our luggage and car keys and were on the road for 8:45am which I thought was pretty good going.

Overview: We chose this cruise because it was at the right time and at a price we could afford. We are loyal to P&O but given that we are now restricted to peak time travel (i.e. school holidays) we are open to trying other cruise lines. However when shopping around last year this was the cheapest option and we have found the same thing next year having already booked a cruise on Azura (we looked at Princess, Celebrity, NCL and even Royal Caribbean but none could match P&O in terms of price). We know what we are getting with P&O and are happy to keep booking with them.

Generally we prefer smaller ships but approached Britannia with open minds and it has been exciting to be on a ship in its maiden season. It did surprise me to see some of the wear and tear already visible after less than six months in service but in no way would I let something like this spoil our holiday (we are definitely not ones for walking round tut-tutting at every stain or worn-out item). There's plenty we don't like about this ship but equally it has several things that are unique and we really do like (e.g. Grab & Go, the Horizon buffet and the outdoor seating areas on deck 7 though we didn't get to use them). We also used the launderette on our deck several times and it was excellent (just once I found all the machines in use). Overall I think any real issues we had with this ship (or disappointments) were generally due to the high number of passengers which is inevitable.

Reading other reviews I thought that the lack of central staircases would not bother me and I'd just use those forward and aft. Our original cabin was aft but after being upgraded we were more central and I did find myself using the lifts more often than I usually would. With so many passengers there's bound to be a lack of etiquette from some and we often saw people jumping queues to get in lifts, or bypassing wheelchair users to get in, or simply just pushing into already crowded lifts with a jokey "room for a little'un!" We also found that plenty of people are prepared to go down several floors to go back up (and vice-versa) just to get a place in the lift.

I'm not generally claustrophobic but one time I really started to feel it in a lift with 17 of us crammed in (and it stopped at every deck from 7 up to 16). So overall I'm afraid to say that with so many

people on board then yes, the lack of central staircases is a problem (especially if your cabin is centrally located on a lower deck).

The cabin was okay but nothing more. The facilities on the TV are very impressive and the shower was fantastic, but having said that I would sacrifice both for a bit more cabin space. Our cabin steward was great (as they always are) and provided various decorations for our son's birthday (including a birthday cake made from towels and sweets).

We enjoyed the Glasshouse and would have loved to try Sindhu but that will have to wait until our son is a bit older. I'm not sure that the Limelight Club would have been our cup of tea. We were twice given tickets for "Strictly Come Dancing" but returned them as our son was not included (and it wouldn't have been for him anyway). My wife's parents went along and said that the first show with two couples was enjoyable but the second show with just one couple not as good (naturally there were more breaks to allow them to recover and change between dances).

Disembarkation could have been better handled but ultimately we got off fairly quickly which is all that matters to us.

Would we go on Britannia again? Yes we would, we always enjoy our cruises and second time round I think that we would enjoy it more knowing what to expect and how to get the most out of it. We would certainly reconsider club dining to get in the Oriental Restaurant and would look to see if we could afford a superior deluxe cabin for the extra space. However, it would be bottom of my list of ships simply due to passenger volume.

Next year in August we are trying Azura, another new ship to us. It is bigger than we prefer but we have been on Ventura twice so we have a good idea what to expect. Ultimately it is the right itinerary at the right time and at an affordable price. We really hope that the M1 roadworks have been completed by then and are already considering breaking up the journey with an overnight hotel stop somewhere halfway.