

TRAVEL

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‘Queen’ leaves the colonies for the last time

After four decades of sailing the world’s oceans the ‘Queen Elizabeth 2’ will be converted into a five-star hotel in Dubai

BY RALPH BLUMENTHAL
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK



Above: The *Queen Elizabeth 2* moves down the Hudson River as seen from Weehawken, New Jersey, after its final visit to New York on Thursday of last week.

PHOTO: AP

Below: A woman waves her Union Jack umbrella as the *Queen Elizabeth 2* crosses through New York Harbor last Thursday.

PHOTOS: AFP



It was one last rendezvous in the harbor, one last salute to the Statue of Liberty, one last ceremonial escort by spraying fireboats and pleasure boaters.

And then, about 6pm on Thursday, 12 hours after arriving in the predawn darkness, the *Queen Elizabeth 2* was gone in the twilight, steaming out of New York Harbor on its 806th — and last — trans-Atlantic crossing after nearly 40 years as the fastest passenger ocean liner in service.

“So she knows the way,” said Carol Marlow, president of the Cunard Line, who was among the well-wishers paying tribute to the ship earlier in farewell festivities on Thursday at Pier 90 in the Hudson River at 50th Street.

The ship’s captain for the last five years, Ian McNaught, 54, was also nostalgic. “When we leave tonight I’m sure there will be a few tears shed on shore and in the ship itself,” he said. But next year, he said, he will take command of Cunard’s newest liner, the *Queen Victoria*. A new *Queen Elizabeth* is being built, with plans to launch in 2010.

For its final visit to New York — the 710th — the venerable liner, which was sold last year for eventual use as a floating hotel in Dubai, was joined, from its American home port in Brooklyn, by the four-year-old *Queen Mary 2*, the latest flagship of the Cunard fleet and a throwback to a golden age of ocean travel before jets, when, as the company slogan had it, getting there was half the fun. The two queens — the grander new one dwarfing the old, just half its size — are staging an unusual tandem six-day crossing to Southampton, England.

“She looks gorgeous, beginning to light up under a Wizard of Oz sky,” gushed Bill Miller, a marine historian and adjunct curator at the South Street Seaport Museum, shouting into a cellphone as he monitored the departure of the *Queen Elizabeth 2* from a small boat nearby.

The goodbye was signaled by three short, mournful blasts from the *Queen Elizabeth 2*’s whistles — “I’m moving astern” — as the ship backed out, streaming a 39-foot-long (12m-long) red paying-off pennant — a foot for each year at sea — a tradition marking the end of a ship’s commission. A duplicate of the pennant was presented on Thursday to Grover Sanaschagrin, 88, who as a harbor docking pilot guided liners to their berths from 1944 until his retirement in 1996.

At Battery Park City, as bagpipers wheezed a musical tribute, several hundred people, some waving small Union Jacks, cheered as the *Queen Elizabeth 2*, trailed by the *Queen Mary 2*, passed Lady Liberty.

Next month, the *Queen Elizabeth 2* sails to a final resting place in Dubai, the oil-rich Persian Gulf sheikdom. Investors there bought the ship for US\$100 million and intend to make it a permanently moored hotel, entertainment complex and museum at the Palm Jumeirah, billed as the world’s largest man-made island and beach resort.

Some marine preservationists and buffs have criticized reported plans to replace the ship’s distinctive funnel and staterooms with luxury suites, saying they would prefer to see the *Queen Elizabeth 2* scrapped or even scavenged for its metal in India.

But Nancy Brookes, a former Cunard sales agent, said she wanted the ship intact. “At least it won’t be cufflinks and razor blades in Bangladesh,” she said.

The decommissioning of the *Queen Elizabeth 2* leaves only the *Queen Mary 2* in regular trans-Atlantic service, making some 20 crossings a year.

On its final crossing, Cunard said, the *Queen Elizabeth 2* is sailing full, with about 1,800 passengers paying fares ranging from US\$25,445, for a duplex grand suite with veranda, to US\$2,992, for a plain inside single room.

The ship collected superlatives. It is still the fastest passenger liner in service, now powered by a diesel system that turns out 130,000 horsepower and can propel the ship to 32.5 knots.

It is the longest-serving vessel in Cunard’s nearly 170-year history. It has a tennis court, a golf driving range, a 13-car garage, a Harrods department store, a theater and a synagogue.

Its crew of 1,016 includes 107 cooks, four fitness instructors, a disc jockey and 10 “gentlemen hosts” to escort unaccompanied women. (There are no female escorts for unaccompanied men.)



[BICYCLING]

J’adore la bicyclette

Parisians may have gone Velib mad, but cycling in the city can be scary. One local resident finds a quiet route via the best bistros and markets

BY AGNES POIRIER
THE GUARDIAN, PARIS



Above: Cyclists stop at a Velib station in Paris. The city launched the bicycle initiative in 2007, with more than 10,600 bicycles posted at 750 stations across the city. The service is named after a combination of the words *velo*, “bike,” and *liberte*, “liberty.”

PHOTOS: AP



The novelty factor may have worn off but the romance between Parisians and le Velib continues. Back from their long summer holidays, 215,000 of my fellow Parisians have renewed their annual subscription to the citywide bicycle scheme. These, together with other occasional cyclists, such as tourists, make up the 100,000 daily rentals. Needless to say, the scheme is a “*succes formidable*.”

Young entrepreneurs have turned the Velib into businesses, organizing paid-for Velib tours for American tourists in the Latin quarter. You can spot the riding hordes with their red jackets on, led by a lean Parisian student in a yellow vest. For those who prefer to go at their own pace, we thought the time right to devise a *Guardian* Velib tour. One that takes in the world’s oldest and biggest flea markets of St-Ouen to those of Vanves. This three-hour “mini tour de Paris” with its ups (to Montmartre) and downs (from Montmartre it’s downhill all the way) includes, *bien-sur*, bistro and cafe stops. It’s a north-south 15km ride that is best enjoyed on the weekend when the flea markets are lively with jazz bands, and the Paris street traffic is at its quietest.

In a few weeks, St-Ouen, like another 30 surrounding suburbs of Paris, will be equipped with Velib stations, but until then, the journey begins at the Velib dock station at Porte de Montmartre. Always choose a bike with a straight saddle (a saddle tilted backwards means it needs repairing), check your tires, light and brakes, and adjust the saddle to your height, making sure it’s not loose: I remember one epic ride with the saddle turning on its base like a weather vane.

My favorite route starts with a cycling *flanerie* through the streets of St-Ouen that bear revolutionaries’ names (the area has had communist mayors for a century). In St-Ouen, the urban landscape changes drastically from that of bourgeois Paris: low-rise 19th-century red brick factories and typical tiny 1930s workers’ houses. St-Ouen wouldn’t be the same, of course, without its many flea markets spread either side of rue des Rosiers: marches Paul Bert, Biron, Dauphine and Vernaison, to name but a few, have attracted junk fetishists like me since 1885. And the great thing about the Velib is that it has a basket that can hold anything up to the size of a cabin suitcase: very useful for that 1930s Bakelite hairdryer.

At the weekend, I often stop at La Chope des Fuces for live jazz (122 rue des Rosiers, 1-40-11-02-49; jazz every Saturday and Sunday, 2pm to 7pm) and the bistro Paul Bert for a pate sandwich (20 rue Paul Bert, 1-40-11-90-28). The waiter there is always grumpy; it’s part of the folklore.

From St-Ouen, I usually cycle through Porte de Clignancourt, with its French West Indies locals living in 1930s council estates, and ride up, up, up rue Hermel where the view over the Sacre Coeur gives me just enough strength to keep going. My favorite 18th-arondissement street is rue Lamarck, a winding road of blond stone Haussmannian buildings encasing the Montmartre hill like a snake. I always think of the chanteuse Edith Piaf, who often stopped at Le Relais Bistro (48 rue Lamarck, 1-42-64-04-17). As a child I couldn’t understand why people preferred Notre Dame to Sacre Coeur — to me there was nothing more beautiful than this big *choux a la creme*.

In Montmartre, the best bit comes when you suddenly realize that from there on, it’s all downhill. Among my favorite stops in the descent is the leafy square sheltering the artists’ cafe, Le Botak (1 rue Paul Albert, 1-46-06-98-30). At the bottom of the hill, boulevard Rochechouart reminds the innocent cyclist that in Paris, the sex industry and romance are often intertwined: throngs of tourists come here to ogle Pigalle’s sex shops and buy a ticket to Le Moulin Rouge’s evening spectacles.

Time to leave the 18th arrondissement and cycle through the aristocratic 9th with its private cul-de-sacs and art nouveau squares such as place St Georges, a wonder of architecture best admired from the cafe A la Place St Georges (60 rue St Georges, 1-42-80-39-32). In comparison, the 10th arrondissement feels very industrious, with its narrow streets and delivery vans. I always marvel at 48 rue des Petites-Ecuries, which displays some of the most beautiful cariatids to be seen in Paris. The ride through rue St-Denis (the street may be one-way but cyclists are allowed to ride southward) is the best advert for little-known multicultural Paris with Asian, Vietnamese, Algerian and Turkish street vendors cohabiting with madames waiting for clients on their buildings’ doorsteps. St-Denis is, after all, the original haunt of Parisian prostitutes.

Across the Seine lies the Latin quarter and its bookish feel. No delivery vans, no prostitutes, just handsome students and their professors. These days, I stop at the Cafe Le Rostand (6 place Edmond-Rostand, 1-43-54-61-58), just to check on the last French intellectuals. The final leg of the journey is a very pleasant affair, cycling through the 14th arrondissement and its many colorful markets. And here you are, in Porte de Vanves, where antique and vintage clothes dealers have set up their stalls along avenue Marc Sangnier. Let’s find ourselves another classy bargain — using the money saved on the guided tour.