## Cruise Control

Jeremy Clark. muses on the cruise industry

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HAVE vou ever been on a cruise? You know – on a hoat I haven't

Mostly because I am not called Hank and my wife isn't called Myrtle and I don't own a pair of checkered golf pants and Mrs C would not be seen in a pink track suit.

Plus, the idea of being encased in a floating shopping mall with a thousand other pink track-suited and checkered panted folks with nothing other than each other - or the sea - to look at for long stretches of time fills me with horror.

And yet it's staggering to see how successful the cruise ship industry is. They persuade millions of people that going somewhere very slowly indeed with nothing to see but the sea and not much to do but eat, shop and slide round wooden things along the deck with a stick can, in fact, be fun. As they point out in that business, the journey IS the destination. Which to me doesn't actually say a lot for the actual destination, but I get the point.

And when the destination is reached, there's usually only enough time to don the checkered pants and a silly hat, pop down the gangplank, buy another silly hat and a bottle of the local booze which is usually blue and has a petrified racoon



in it - and get back on board. In fact some of them don't even want to get off. Imagine that!

The modern day cruise was borne out of the old liners which transported folks across the globe with jazz and cocktails and real style. In those days they were actually going somewhere and the quality of transportation was a major part of the lure. Journeys were long and so effort was made to make them as enjoyable and as comfortable as

it was possible.

Then along came the Aeroplane. Journeys were short and the planes were cramped. The liners became cruise shops . . .sorry ships, and the airlines tried to mimic the old times, first with the flying boats then with jets called "Clipper" or "Luxury Liner" - which it wasn't.

Then the bean-counters took over the airlines and it was all about passenger/km yield and seat/miles/revenue and never

about Caviar and Cocktails.

I'm sure there are some executives who, to lower costs. would prefer to apply anaesthetic to boarding passengers and then wake them on arrival.

But now, we come full circle with long haul flights up to 22 hours and planes now so large you can go for a walk in the country or practice javelin throwing in the back. The pace of life is such that a 13 hour flight is deemed a long time. It's the modern day equivalent to a six week sail to Singapore.

So isn't it time we started thinking about making that journey part of the destination?

When Concorde flew - it almost re-created this magic where people were prepared to pay money to not actually go anywhere but just experience the journey.

With aeroplanes now capable of flying non-stop half way round the world and large enough to play deck-quoits, perhaps there is an opportunity to make air travel something more than just a means to an end. If cruise lines can lure us into a world of floating fun, what an opportunity there is for airlines to do similar and get you to your destination quickly too!

Perhaps it's time to rummage through my wardrobe for the checked pants. Although getting Mrs C into a pink track-suit will require a little more persuasion.