



P&O Cruises Australia's "Pacific Explorer" passes under Sydney's Harbour Bridge; the stern of Royal Caribbean International's "Ovation of the Seas" is at left

Bob Hoelscher

Published February 19, 2018

Welcome! Every so often I like to remind readers why I do not provide information on the cruise industry's numerous "best" rewards touted by various publications, organizations and recipients. There are so many of these erstwhile plaudits floating around, frequently praising different operators for the same "bests," that it is virtually impossible for the average traveler to figure out which companies *really* excel in one category or another. Why? First, it is an undeniable fact that all such awards are highly subjective, simply depending upon who is doing the voting, so if those who have (ostensibly) voted happen to have different standards or objectives that you or I do, they are *sure* to arrive at different conclusions than we would have. There are also distinct possibilities that ever-present but "under the radar" considerations of a political nature or of advertising revenues have paid a role in selecting 'winners,' or the ballot box has simply been "stuffed" by those standing to gain in one way or another from anointing their favorites as the 'best.'

I still remember when the (failing) TWA under the administration of a notorious corporate raider received a nationally-promoted award for "best service," when virtually everyone in my home city of St. Louis, where TWA was the primary air carrier, *knew* that their service was just this side of awful. My guess was that "stuffing" the ballot box was the last ditch effort of TWA's employees to keep their jobs. When some organization actually insures that the voting for its awards have been conducted in a manner that is *statistically* significant, I might actually take some stock in the results, but I'm not holding my breath. Please be assured, however, that I not only believe that there are a *lot* of good, well-run companies to choose from in the marketplace, but also that *some* of them surely *do* deserve the highest accolades. Nevertheless, there are just too many industry awards out there that are apparently based more on fluff than substance, thus making it virtually impossible to use an enumeration of such plaudits as a real, reliable indicator of excellence.

Incidentally, this time around I had planned to review an Asian cruise which I took last month, but the trip unfortunately turned out to be a significant disappointment, so that subject will have to wait until I return to the region on a different ship in the future. Nevertheless, I definitely found some fascinating places to visit there, including Singapore, Bangkok, Hanoi and Hong Kong. This week I'm heading to Florida for Western Caribbean cruises on both *Costa Deliziosa* and *Norwegian Jade*, with half a dozen Grapefruit League spring training baseball games in between.

CroisiEurope is introducing three original Mediterranean cruises on board the newly renovated *La Belle de l'Adriatique*. Guests will be treated to the sights and flavors on three, eight to 10-day itineraries visiting Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Sicily and Israel: "The Best of the Mediterranean," "Mediterranean Colors" and "Cyprus & The Holy Land." Each itinerary will make stops in the major coastal cities and historical towns of the Eastern Med, and feature excursions to natural sites filled with rich cultural heritage. Cruise departures will begin in November with prices starting at \$2,375 per person. www.croisieuropevercruises.com/