

THE FAIRBURN SINGERS “ON TOUR” – NORWEGIAN FJORD CRUISE (25 – 30 May 2017)

On Thursday 25 May, 31 members of Fairburn Singers, along with 60 family and friends gathered in Fairburn to begin a trip which had been 10 months in the planning. We were going on a cruise to the Norwegian Fjords on the MS Balmoral, pride of the Fred Olsen fleet, and not only that, we were going to be performing on board, as part of the entertainment, not once but twice! To say we were excited was an understatement!



We arrived at the Port of Tyne to join our ship and quickly acclimatised ourselves with our cabins, the decks, the restaurants and, most importantly, the Neptune Lounge, our concert arena. After the obligatory muster and emergency evacuation procedure, there was just time for a quick pre-dinner drink before we assembled in the Ballindalloch Restaurant on Deck 6 to be shown to our table and meet our fellow diners for the next 5 days. All of our group had been allocated adjacent tables and so began our first meal on board. The dinner menu was extensive with a potential 5 courses to choose from, an endless supply of wine (courtesy of the All-inclusive package most of us had pre-purchased), and some friendly banter between the tables! Throughout the cruise, the food was superb. Beautifully presented meals, a huge variety of choice at both breakfast and lunch and the bonus of a Supper club in the Palm Café at 11pm (which several of us made use of on more than one occasion – nothing like macaroni cheese and chips at 11.30pm to aid our sleep!)



Our first concert was scheduled for 3.45pm on Friday (day 2), so following a short rehearsal earlier in the day, we assembled in the Neptune Lounge to entertain not only our own 60 followers, but approximately another 200 passengers, along with several members of the on board entertainments team who came along to check out the competition. We sang our hearts out, we did ourselves proud and the sheer adrenalin rush we got from performing in such an amazing setting, set us up nicely for “formal night” later that evening. We re-assembled in the restaurant, dolled up to the nines in our formal attire, for an extra special dinner (posher dinner plates and all!), accompanied by our first glimpse of the fjords. We sailed serenely down the Lysefjord, to the end, where we were

confronted by majestic mountains and beautiful scenery. Everyone was on deck, camera's were clicking all around as we took in the sheer beauty of our surroundings. And the sun shone brightly the whole time and it was still light at 10.45pm, absolutely stunning.

Saturday (day 3) found us docking at Bergen at 6am, one of five cruise liners lined up along the quayside. There were a number of options for tours in and around Bergen, and whilst some people took advantage of these, others just left the ship to explore Bergen for themselves. One of the main attractions in the town was the Floibanen funicular railway. A trip up here promised panoramic views across Bergen and way into the distance on a 360deg vista of the beauty which surrounds the place. At the top there were plenty of photo opportunities,



the option to walk back down to the town through beautiful woodland paths or just a chance to sit and enjoy our surroundings. And once again the sun shone brightly and the temperature reached 22deg C. Fabulous!

Back on board, we left Bergen and travelled up the fjords en route to Eidfjord, passing yet more spectacular scenery. By Saturday, most of our group had found the nightly 10pm quiz in the Observatory Lounge, a quick half hour foray into general knowledge, with the promise of a bottle of Cava for the winning team. This was always a loud and noisy half hour with much banter between the teams, and generally at least one of the Fairburn teams claiming the prize!



Sunday morning (day 4) found us docking at the very beautiful, and very tiny town of Eidfjord, at the very head of Hardangerfjord. This time we were the only ship there, and we awoke to being completely surrounded by snow capped mountains with waterfalls streaming down the hillsides. A short step onto shore brought us to the Tourist Information centre where they had, joy of joys, FREE wifi!! Much uploading of photos and a quick catch up with family and friends via facebook and whatsapp, before setting off to explore the area. Once again there were tours on offer and I later learnt that one such tour headed up to the mountain tops where a snowball fight ensued, while the rest of us basked in 21deg sunshine at sea level! Several of our group also took a ride on the 'Trolltrain' which wound its way up the hillside onto the grassy plateaux above the town and back, giving us yet more photo opportunities.



Back on board once again we left Eidfjord to begin our journey back up the Hardangerfjord to the promised spectacle of the Fureberg Waterfall on Maurangerfjord. And what a spectacular sight it was too! Once again, everyone was out on deck as we sailed as close as our Captain dared so that we could all get the best shots to add to our photo albums. And all this still in beautiful sunshine and daylight until 10.45pm. Magnificent!

As we started our return to Newcastle that evening, we had

another day at sea to look forward to. The weather was not quite so kind to us as we awoke on Monday morning and the sea had taken on a bit of a swell and you definitely knew you were at sea! People were walking a little more carefully around the decks and whilst we had no sun, the temperature was still clement enough to sit outside.

But the highlight of Day 4 (Monday) was our second concert, scheduled to take place at 7.45pm. We appeared in the "Daily News" as a "Highlight of the Day" so, after another short rehearsal, we once again donned our "uniform" and presented our second concert. This time, word had obviously got round our fellow passengers, as our audience had swelled to at least 350. I could feel the slight nervousness of the choir as we began singing to our largest audience ever. But once again we nailed it! Note perfect, timing spot on and a standing ovation. It was a perfect and fitting end to what was an absolutely fabulous trip. The evening ended once again in the Palm Café for supper, which was, it's fair to say, dominated mostly by the Fairburn Singers and our group, and the overwhelming thought that 'we must do this again'.

The icing on the cake has been an email from the Cruise Director of the MS Balmoral which said

"A well polished and professional sounding choir. The Fairburn Singers were a lively, enthusiastic group who performed two varied sets of songs from films and musicals. They were well presented and well organised, performance plans and rehearsals all ran very smoothly".

The Fairburn Singers 'on tour' has been a resounding success.

Goodbye Norwegian Fjords, goodbye MS Balmoral, you were amazing, fantastic, majestic, brilliant!!

Sally Whittingham