

# DIAMOND QUARANTINE

## A cruise wrecked by Covid-19

By  
Elaine Spencer

Published by:  
The Endless Bookcase

71 Castle Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire,  
England UK, AL1 5DQ

Available from:  
[www.theendlessbookcase.com](http://www.theendlessbookcase.com)

Paperback Edition  
Also available as an eBook.

Copyright © 2020 Elaine Spencer  
All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-914151-05-7

Disclaimer: The accounts of events and information stated are based upon the actual experiences of the author and sometimes limited information available to her at the time. Any views expressed are solely those of the author in her personal capacity and are not intended to malign any other entities or individuals.



## About the author



Elaine Spencer by profession is a Health and Social Care Assessor and Trainer. She is also in her first year of a counselling course.

This is her first published work and was written in diary form as a self-help tool while on the Diamond Princess.

The Diamond Princess was the first cruise ship to be hit by coronavirus in February 2020.

The diaries also include the difficult journey from Japan to Liverpool, Arrowe Park Hospital, which was mandatory, and then her homecoming.

She lives on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent with her family close by.

She is professional, and dedicated in her work life, and in her personal life loves her family, children, and grandchildren.

## Dedication

This is dedicated to my husband John who supported me while confined on the diamond princess and at Arrowse Park, and my children Daniel and Samantha who supported us both from afar in a very difficult situation. To our family and friends that kept our spirits up, and the staff of the diamond princess and the Wirral hospital, who supported us during our confinement.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family who inspired and continued to support me while writing this book, and Carl at The Endless Bookcase who made it happen.

Thank you!

## Foreword

It is the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, and I am sitting at home when I should be out working. I am watching daytime TV, which on a Monday and a weekday would be unheard of.

I am bored and fed up, and I just want to get back to normal life. Also, John and I went for a walk on our local beach at the weekend, and I fell over and cracked my head open, and fractured my right wrist. So I am feeling very sorry for myself.

I also question what I just thought: will we ever get back to normal? I am starting to doubt it.

We have only arrived back from the Wirral hospital in Liverpool within the last two weeks and my mind now drifts back to those events - some of them good, and some upsetting, and some of those events still unfolding. We went from a holiday of a lifetime, to being confined, repatriated, and then mandatorily quarantined.

But let me tell you my story...

# Contents

<b>About the author.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Foreword .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>The Beginning.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>My Quarantine Diary .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>The Long Journey Home.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Home at last .....</b>	<b>155</b>





## The Beginning

January and February were the time of the year that we would leave the UK to escape the cold. In American terms we are called snow birds, we chase the warm weather. We save each month throughout the year, with the intention of leaving the country to visit other destinations.

For the last 20 years we have enjoyed travelling, and for the last 10 years, we have been away for the earlier part of the year. This normally includes Christmas and New Year. But as more grandchildren have come along, and their ages now range from one to eight years, we spend Christmas with the family and travel New Year onwards.

For the last two years we had travelled in the USA, ticking off some of the places on our bucket list: San Francisco, Dallas, New Orleans, and many different locations, but when we visited those places, and in those particular months, the locations were cold. So last year when planning, we discussed trying something new, and chasing the warm weather.

In March 2019 I asked my travel agent, who is a good friend, and whom we have known for over 20 years, to plan an itinerary with our suggestions of possible places to visit, for the following year. John had always wanted to travel to Japan, and I Singapore, Dubai, and Australia. So I mentioned those places, and she went away planned and sent us two possible holiday packages.

The first being Far East, flying to Singapore, then a cruise for 29 days, which included Vietnam, Hong Kong, Japan, and the list went on, then flying on to Thailand and then on to Dubai, this was for nine weeks. Or the alternative was fly to Hawaii then a cruise which would take in Australia and New Zealand.

Now we had already visited Hawaii for our honeymoon, which was in 2000, and the Far East sounded exotic and exciting. I was a little apprehensive about the length of time on-board a ship for the cruise, and this was a consideration when deciding on which holiday. But we made a joint decision on the Far East, and as we were going to visit places we had not seen before, it all sounded very exciting!

Now do not get me wrong as it was expensive, but it was a trip of a lifetime, and being on the ship meant we could visit the places we had only heard about in small chunks, and in a way, we felt protected and safer, than if we had travelled there ourselves. We also said that once we had finished this trip, it would be back to our favourite places, like the USA and Mexico.

So last March (March 2019) we paid the deposit and started to plan, but who was to know what would happen the following year!

On the lead up to the holiday we had a great Christmas day spending time with all our family, including my daughter-in-law's parents. It was a mad day with all the grandchildren, but we had a lovely meal and karaoke in the evening. New Year's Eve we went to a family party, it was the first time we had been in the UK for New Year's Eve for years. It was lovely but very cold, and we were both looking forward to going on holiday and leaving the UK's cold weather behind.

Our flight date was the 2<sup>nd</sup> January. Our flight from Heathrow to Singapore was a night flight, so my daughter drove us to the airport in the afternoon. It was always a wrench to leave the family and had been getting harder over the years especially with the grandchildren. My daughter always felt it the hardest, and I knew she was trying to be brave. The journey to the airport was emotional; John and I were excited about going away, whilst knowing that my daughter and family would miss us. But, as this was our life for the last 20 years, it was something we just did, and with "WhatsApp" and "video calling" we always kept in contact. I also missed birthdays in those months,

my son's, daughter's and my daughter in law's. But, I always made sure presents and cards were written and left and always videoed and called on those dates.

After my daughter said her goodbyes to John and I, we then made our way through the airport check in. We called her to say we were through check in, and she continued her journey back to Kent. All was well, no problems, and we were looking forward to the journey ahead. I started to get excited. It normally took a while, what with the build-up and Christmas, but I then started to relax.

At the airport John and I shopped and had dinner. Before we knew it our flight was being announced, and then we were boarding. Once on the plane I thought about our journey and where we were going. I did feel a little uneasy, but that was not unusual for me. Probably being away for so long, or maybe leaving the family. I also thought about everywhere we were going, and how it was unknown to us... being on a cruise for 29 days... All these thoughts were going around in my head, but as we started to fly, I started to feel a lot calmer.

On arriving at Singapore airport we were both tired. Even though it was a good flight, it was long. But we had both watched films, had drinks and meals, and the time had flown by. The airport was well organised but I still managed to miss filling in the custom forms properly and had to do them again, but this was only a small hiccup. I was used to US customs, not Singapore's. I re-did them, and we managed to get through.

I had already researched places to visit before we left and downloaded an app for grub taxi in Singapore. So once through customs, I ordered a cab. We managed to find the cab and driver and once he loaded our cases he drove us to the hotel.

It was now dark, 20:30 in Singapore time, but the driver was friendly and gave us a running commentary on the way to the hotel. He

advised us of some of the places to visit. I already had the gardens at the bay in mind, and we also wanted to do some other sightseeing.

We both started to get excited, and I hoped that our hotel was going to be nice. Over the years we had stayed in all types of hotels and motels, some good, some not so good, so on arriving at the hotel we were both pleasantly surprised. The hotel and room were lovely, and we both agreed that our tour operator had booked somewhere great.

We did not have a meal package included in our booking, but we were happy with that, as John being a vegetarian was sometimes hard to accommodate. So we would just find our feet and get ourselves something to eat. We called my son and daughter, letting them know we had arrived safely, sent some pictures of the room, and started our three day stop off. We were excited, and looking forward to it. The UK and the cold were starting to fade.

We had three lovely days in Singapore. We visited the gardens at the bay, china town, shopping centres, and the area around our hotel. We walked to most places, apart from china town as it was too far, and instead got a taxi. China town were celebrating Chinese New Year, it was hectic and there were a lot of people, but we did the sightseeing we wanted to do.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> January it was time to board the Diamond Princess. That morning I thought about all the times I had joked to my family and friends on the lead up to us leaving the UK, saying that if John did not return or went missing on the cruise, I may have strangled him, or thrown him overboard. Now, we had taken three other cruises in the past, first one around the Bay of Biscay, which was very rough, and John was sick for three days, but the next two were both great: both from port Canaveral Florida. Four days and nine days, very pleasant, great weather. We visited hot locations in the Caribbean, but with this cruise we had jumped straight into 29 days. Now we do have a strong marriage and this year we are celebrating our 20 year

anniversary, and we are used to being together for long periods of time, anything from 9-15 weeks. So we find ways not to argue, and where possible do our own hobbies, but there was something still niggling me, and I could not put my finger on it.

We had already checked out of our hotel room online, so we left our room, explained to the front staff that we had a great stay and ordered a taxi on my app.

The taxi arrived within minutes and we confirmed with the driver that we needed to go to the port terminal. As he drove we all chatted, and he asked what cruise we were going on. He was very surprised when we said 29 days and where we were going. I think he thought we were rich, and I had not thought about that side of it as we are not. Yes, the whole trip had been expensive, and one of the biggest expenses ever for us, but it also contained a lot of destinations, and we had saved hard for it.

On arriving at the port, he helped us unload our cases and we said our goodbyes. The departure of the ship was very well organised by the Princess Cruises. Cases were taken, which would be sent to our state room as we went through customs, immigration and our hand luggage was scanned. We then collected our folio card. These were linked to our bank cards, because the ship was cashless, these would be used for any purchases. It was also the key to our state room. We were then given a group number to board and sat in a group area with other passengers.

There were about 75 passengers in each group, all nationalities, and when our group was called we were allowed on the ship. As we walked through the entrance to the boarding of the ship we climbed the different layers and got a clearer picture of the ship, and it was huge! It was white and shining, very clean, with big funnels coming out of the top. There were in total 13 floors starting with deck 4 Gala

deck, right up to Sky deck on floor 17/18. Our stateroom was on deck 12, Aloha.

On entering the ship and showing our folio cards and passports, we were informed our state room was ready, so made our way to our deck, and room. From arriving at the port to being in our stateroom it took about two and a half hours.



The room was small but contained a large bed, and enough space for cases. There was also a small desk and a large television, and a shower in the small bathroom. There was no window or balcony, but as we had no intention of staying too long in our room it was not a

problem. We were just looking forward to the trip, and enjoying being on the ship.

Playing on the television was a mandatory screening. It was about the ship and hygiene, washing hands and how to keep safe on the ship and what places we were going to visit. We decided to have a look around the ship with our map that was given to us when we first boarded. We went to visit the lounges, theatre, nightclub, then we checked out the pool where the hot tubs were. We also noted the shops. Some sold liquor, clothing, jewellery, fragrance and cosmetics, but they would not be open until we left the port. We checked out the casino and generally tried to find our bearings.

It was like a very large hotel that had everything you needed. It also included a library, wedding chapel and internet café. We had 29 days to do everything we wanted, and the first two days would be spent at sea.

We then went to the Princess Theatre on deck 6, where we had the mandatory briefing. This is mandatory on all cruises, it explained where and what to do if there was an emergency evacuation. It included where the lifeboats were, muster points, where our life jackets were in our rooms. They also again reminded us about being hygienic, only using our own toilet where possible. On all the other cruises I had been on, washing hands and being hygienically clean was never reinforced, and as an infection control trainer this is a good idea, but it had been ten years since we travelled on a cruise last, so I just thought that good improvements had been made.

Once the briefing was finished we went back to our state room, where our cases were waiting outside our room. We took these in and unpacked, called the family and were ready for our journey.

We had our set dining time if we wanted to go to our named restaurant, which was on our folio cards, or we could use the buffet

area as and when we wanted. On previous cruises this normally worked well for us, especially as John is vegetarian, and it is easier for him to make his choices. That evening we went to the buffet areas and walking through we washed our hands at the sink and found a table. We had a lovely meal and listened to the music as the ship was leaving the port.

From the 6<sup>th</sup> January to the 4<sup>th</sup> February we had a really nice time. We went on some excursions that we had booked late last year, one in Vietnam and one in Osaka Japan.



### **Excursion in Vietnam**

We always got off the ship when in port and walked most places, just taking in the atmosphere, visiting souvenir shops. A few of the ports had markets ready as they wanted us, the tourists, to buy from them. I bought some nice souvenirs for ourselves and family, for some of



those ports we had to disembark the ship anyway because of customs, and have our passports checked.

The cruise was separated into two halves, which we did not know when it was booked, but we realised this when some guests got off at the end of the first 14 days.

The first half of the cruise was Singapore, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan and different stops in those locations. The second half was relatively similar so in some ports we stopped twice over the 29 days.

In the first two weeks we did two of the scheduled excursions, pedicab at Nha Trang Vietnam, which was really good, where John and I went in a converted chair and biked around the town. A little scary in some parts, as the drivers battled with cars and coaches to be on the road, but we survived and really enjoyed it.

We also did a tour in Japan listed as highlights of Osaka (Kyoto) where we went with a tour guide and toured the castle and bought some souvenirs. Again it was a really nice experience, and I still have those great memories.

I have since reflected on those tours and wondered if we could have contracted the coronavirus if we had done tours in the second two weeks. Initially when we booked those, we had also considered a tour of Hong Kong, but we decided against it before leaving Britain, because of the trouble between students and authorities. We were advised when leaving the ship at the Hong Kong ports both times not to wear black or white as we may be misidentified as protestors. On those occasions we actually only went to the malls, and did not venture too far, and, because we docked for 48 hours, we went to those malls in total three times: two the first 14 days, and one on the second. The second time most shops were closed because of the Chinese New Year, which at the time was disappointing.

Other than that, our days consisted of breakfast in the buffet area, swimming, using the hot tubs, dinner again in the buffet area and entertainment if we wanted to go. I was in the pop choir near the end of our four weeks and went to about five choir practices. I also went to activities organised by Princess, of making a box with paper (origami), indoor bowling and quizzes, all the events Princess put on. We dressed up for the formal nights, and went to some great comedian shows and musical shows staged by the Princess.

So overall it was an enjoyable experience, but I would say by the 4<sup>th</sup> week we were both ready to get off and go to our next part of the journey, which was a hotel in Tokyo and then a flight to Thailand for the next leg of our holiday, and finally on to Dubai.

Now thinking back, at the end of the first two weeks I did approach customer service desk and ask the Princess representative if there was any way we could change our room. I explained that because the room had no balcony or window, I was starting to feel claustrophobic. We explained we did not mind paying extra, even just a cabin with a window. The representative was very pleasant, but we were told that all the rooms were fully booked. She explained that they kept some free for guests to book during the stops we make. She took my cabin number saying if they had someone cancel, they would contact us.

The next day more passengers boarded at Hong Kong, the ship seemed empty, buffet areas were quiet, and not many passengers were there. So, I approached customer services again, asking if they had any spare rooms. She said that most of the guests that had boarded tended to stay in their rooms, and this time she never said they would let me know. So we accepted we would have another two weeks in the room with no balcony or window, but it was only a room and mostly we were only in there to sleep. Little did we know!

Now, the next day I realised that the customer representative was not kidding, the ship was busy, and it was very difficult to get a table

in the buffet areas. Princess would alternative the two buffet restaurants available on deck 14, closing one and asking guests to use the other. We in fact dined a few times in the empty one, as there was no room in the buffet restaurant.

Also, a lot of the passengers who got on at Hong Kong were wearing masks. I joked to John at the time, saying did they know something we did not! Little did we know.

Now in retrospect and having had time to process, I realised we have been very lucky, or are maybe immune.

I'm still thinking about being lucky because there was a town in Vietnam that was quarantined after the Princess Cruise left that port. In Osaka Japan, a recent case was shown on the media, where a tour guide from Osaka contracted the virus twice. First time she recovered at the end of January, now she had proved positive again. She is in her 40's. Is it the same tour guide that Princess used for our trip to Osaka castle?

For the Princess pop choir, I mixed with a lot of different nationalities during our practices. One passenger whom I got friendly with, who was retired and in her seventies, was an American. On the afternoon practice before the Princess pop show, she said she had a cold and a cough, and felt generally under the weather. I did not think twice about it, I just asked if she was okay. She said she was fine, but she never made it to the actual performance. To this day I do not know if she was just poorly, or removed from the ship regarding the virus. If it is the latter, I hope she is okay.

I am now thinking, reflecting to the actual time we heard about coronavirus. If John and I had heard of it, we never paid attention, and when getting on and off the ship in most ports which mostly was mandatory, it was never mentioned. I had viewed a notice about bird flu, and to be aware of norovirus on cruise ships, as I now know that

this is a cruise ship problem, hence the washing of hands, but not coronavirus.

We were now nearing the end of our cruise and we had had a great time, but were ready for the next stage of our journey. We were partially packed, I had travel documentation ready, and we had planned to get a taxi from the port to Tokyo, our next stop off, before heading to the airport for the flight to Thailand.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> February, the captain advised us by announcement *that he had been notified by Hong Kong Public Health authorities, that a Hong Kong resident, who travelled for five days on the Diamond Princess from Yokohama on January 20<sup>th</sup> to Hong Kong, disembarking on January 25<sup>th</sup>, had tested positive for the coronavirus on February 1<sup>st</sup>. This was six days after he had left the ship. He was reported to be in a stable condition and his family travelling companions remained symptom free.*

He explained that the ship had proactively shared all relevant health data for this voyage with the Japanese health authorities, as is standard practice with all coronavirus cases, and they informed us they will conduct a review of the vessel upon arrival.

He went on to say that *“please be assured that the safety, security and wellbeing of all guests and crew are our absolute priority.”* He also said that they were closely recording and monitoring all persons who have reported to the medical centre with cold and flu symptoms during the voyage. We also received this formally in letter to all our state rooms.

We were surprised but not worried, I did not think it would delay us disembarking the ship. I took a picture of the communication and sent it to my daughter, but was still not overly worried. I did phone my travel agent friend, and she said it was unusual but saw no reason why we could not disembark, and then we just waited. We had