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A queen fit for the night

This floating hotel is rich with elegance, history and adventure worthy of a genuine ghost story.

With the best trips come the best stories. We returned from our stay aboard the Queen

Mary with many tall tales my children continue to tell and memories I sense they'll be sharing into their adult years. It was a rich few days of soaking in rare Art Deco style, exploring a beyond-imagination engine room, enjoying highfalutin' tea on the sea, experiencing the excitement of a real Russian spy sub, and, of course, thrilling to the mystique of ghosts and legends. A stay on the Queen Mary is truly one of those quintessential SoCal family experiences.

You might wonder how a retired ship from the '30s, docked and locked down in Long Beach, can have qualities compelling enough to allure today's well-traveled SoCal family. The answer is that it's a high-spirited getaway like no other.

Our getaway of grandeur began with our bags checked and a reservation at The Tea Room — a British-style experience new to the Queen Mary. My children ordered PB&J finger sandwiches and selected their tea. I opted for a crisp salad and glass of

chardonnay to toast our arrival. With manners in check, we all ate in civilized style ... till the dessert tower arrived.



The Lavdas family

From there we roamed deck after deck, giving our sea legs a workout. We hit the Promenade Deck, the Sun Deck, the M Deck, the A Deck and more. With each level we gained a remark-

able glimpse of what transatlantic travel was like during the '30s, '40s and '50s. History exudes from the small, unusual elevators; noble, winding staircases; and charming stylings of the preserved sitting rooms, salons and parlors. All the while, we were on guard for ghosts! Yes, the Queen Mary is definitely haunted if you ask me — or most whom we talked to.

In fact the ship is outfitted with Ghost Sighting signs about reported accounts such as pianos playing when no one is touching the keys, belongings moving about, and figures in '30s garb appearing in the night.

Such tales seemed to bring us all physically closer as we turned down each unfamiliar hallway on our tour. It was fun, funny, silly and harmless as we tried to out-frighten one other — perhaps to ease our own nerves.

After a sunset stroll in the ocean air, we headed to Sir Winston's for a decadent evening of five-star, award-winning, gourmet dining and impeccable service. Although there's no children's menu, Sir Winston's is happy to accommodate requests.

With full bellies and tired bodies, we retired to our room, wary of the creaks and bumps in the night. The kids and I

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE QUEEN MARY

slept like Velcro stuck to one another that night, and yes, I heard an unexplainable, remarkable bang with none of the surrounding footsteps or chatter you'd expect in a hotel. It was one sharp, decisive slam near the closet, and I kept my eyes shut as tight as I could.

The next day, we had a charming tour with Queen Mary Commodore Everette Hoard, who has been with the ship for 32 years. He is a legendary, walking storybook of the ship and happy to share nuggets of insider information. He confirmed that the Queen Mary is "a ship with a soul." A few personal ghost sightings that he shared still keep me up at night. In one such tale, a ghost rustled Hoard's sheets, saying how cold he was. Never mind Hoard's experiences of vertigo in the paranormal pool area or his own sightings on daily tours. My kids hung on his words as if we were around a campfire on Halloween.



The wheelhouse of the Queen Mary

Hoard said that the Queen Mary is among the most famous ships since Noah's Ark. He pointed out details about her remarkable décor, which includes 56 species of exotic wood veneers from all over the British Empire. He shared a quote from a former captain of the Queen: "She has character; she has personality; she even breathes, but above all else, she is the closest thing to a living being that I have ever commanded."

A highlight of the trip was the self-guided tour of the Queen Mary engine room. Children adore this, and you can see their imaginations go full-speed ahead. The intricate piping, contraptions and engine elements are mind-boggling and bigger than life.

Exploration of the Russian Foxtrot Sub adjacent to the Queen Mary perfectly complements the engine tour. You'll duck, crawl and creep through and pretend to command the spy sub with hands-on the controls.

Between available tours, dining, ghostly tales and the excitement of staying aboard such a legendary vessel, the adventure of the Queen Mary is truly an out-of-this-world thrill. ∞

WHAT TO KNOW

Fun Facts

- Maiden voyage: May 27, 1936
- Passenger list was a who's-who of Hollywood
- More than 2,000 portholes
- Acting war service vessel: 1940-1946
- Larger than the Titanic

Queen Mary style

She features some of the grandest, most intricate designs ever aboard an ocean liner influenced by the Art Deco movement of the '20s and '30s.

Past guests

Liz Taylor, Bob Hope, Audrey Hepburn, Clark Gable

Accommodations

Yes, it's an actual hotel. Choose from original staterooms and nine suites; all are above sea level, and no two are alike.

Haunted rooms

The front desk has a list of paranormal activity reported in more than 50 rooms.

Expectations

Don't expect luxe, 5-diamond style by today's measure. Expect preserved style rich in iconic history.

More at queenmary.com

