

ON THE WATCH



END OF THE ROAD: The "Flamenco I" seen laid up off Singapore in 2009

Photo: Jonathan Boonzaler

It's curtains for P&O cruise veterans

Two veteran cruiseships that helped propel P&O into the big league of the cruise industry are heading for the afterlife.

The 17,400-gt *Flamenco I* (built 1972) has been mothballed in various Asian layup anchorages for the past three years, a far cry from the days when it made its debut as the *Spirit of London*, a stylish, modern ship that P&O used to break into the North American cruise trades.

The *Flamenco I* spent most of its time under P&O ownership as the *Sun Princess*, one of the pioneer vessels of its Princess Cruises subsidiary. It was sold off in the 1980s and has since had a somewhat nomadic life, last operating

for Dutch owner Club Cruise.

That company went bust in 2008 and the ship was arrested in Singapore, where it had been anchored for many months looking for a new charter. In March 2009, it was sold at auction to Singapore Star Shipping, the shipowning arm of Salgaocar Group, for \$3.4m.

The company was said to have bought it on a speculative basis in the hope of flipping it to another cruise operator at a profit. No buyers emerged and the ship was subsequently moved to an anchorage off Port Klang, Malaysia, where it has remained ever since. It is now said to have been sold to Indian breakers for about \$3m.

Another former P&O vessel heading off into obscurity is the 28,900-gt *Mona Lisa* (built 1966). Built by the historic John Brown Shipyard in Scotland as Swedish America Line's elegant twin-funnelled *Kungsholm*, it joined the P&O fleet as *Sea Princess* in 1978. P&O hacked off the forward funnel in an attempt to modernise its profile and then used the ship as a replacement for older tonnage in the UK cruise markets.

The ship was finally sold in 2001 to Greek owner Paris Katsoufis, who through his Kyma Shipmanagement put it on a number of ad-hoc charters to various cruise lines and tour groups. It was finally withdrawn from service late last month after new Safety of Life at Sea (Solas) regulations kicked in.

This week, the *Mona Lisa* was observed departing its Greek layup mooring and was last reported heading to the Suez Canal. Industry insiders say it will be used as an accommodation ship for workers building an industrial complex in Oman, and subsequently will likely make a short journey across to the demolition beaches of Alang.



OFF TO OMAN: The "Mona Lisa"

Photo: TradeWinds archive

Stag prank sparks one-sock shock in Shanghai

It took veteran broker Richard Fulford-Smith a lifetime to cement a reputation in London that is known across the shipping industry.

His son, Tom, is year-by-year carving out a name for himself in Hong Kong within the marine-insurance sector.

However, *On the Watch* hears that Fulford-Smith junior took only a weekend to achieve celebrity status in Shanghai — particularly among guests enjoying a romantic dinner at the city's plush Hyatt on the Bund hotel.

This was, of course, not in relation to an astute business deal or a sharp investment but instead the climax of that very British event that makes fiances shudder: the stag weekend.

Across Shanghai, young Chinese men who are preparing to marry their sweethearts bury themselves in work as they strive to raise funds to buy the new marital home that will win over not only the future wife but also curry favour with prospective in-laws.

Young Tom, however, prepared for his nuptials by rounding up 15 of his mates from Hong Kong and taking them north to the bars and clubs of a city that is fast reclaiming its seedy repu-

tation of the 1920s.

On the Watch hears, however, that much of the weekend was spent in the more reputable establishments of Shanghai.

Indeed, the groom-to-be might have imagined for a moment he was experiencing all the pampering of his fiancée's hen weekend when he relaxed with his pals in a jacuzzi in the Vue Bar on the top floor of the Hyatt on the Bund.

In fact, the stag was so relaxed that he did not notice a few faces missing through the bubbles and mist.

Of course, no stag weekend is complete without the obligatory practical joke, so while the ill-fated groom was slurping his cocktail and recounting stories of the moment he proposed, some of his pals were busy pilfering his clothes.

Young Tom returned to the changing room to find a solitary sock, which was subsequently used to cover his modesty as he made his way to the ground floor of the huge building past surprised diners and hotel guests.

While many stag nights finish in a rather hazy manner, Tom certainly had one he will remember.



'SOCK-A-DOODLE-DO': The jacuzzi on the Vue Bar terrace — minus skylad groom-to-be and mischievous stag companions

Photo: Hyatt on the Bund