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BRANT WARD / The Chronicle

The Queen Mary 2 heads for the Pacific in a blaze of lights, past the city's night skyline, in this photo taken from Treasure Island.

SAN FRANCISCO

Bon voyage, Queen Mary 2

Liner slips under the bridge, heads for Hawaii

By Carl Nolte and Erin Allday
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITERS

With a mighty blast of her queenly horn, the grand ocean liner Queen Mary 2 bade farewell to San Francisco Monday night and — after playing limbo one last time with the Golden Gate Bridge — sailed off to points west.

Thousands of admirers gathered near the bridge and along the northern waterfront to see her off.

"Oh man, she's an elegant lady," said Carlos Chavez of Concord, while he videotaped her stately procession across the bay. "We forget all about politics and Barry Bonds and everything. We're just here for this beautiful lady."

In Business and on SFGate

- ▶ The visit of the Queen Mary 2 was part of the Port of San Francisco's effort to build its cruise ship business. **01**
- ▶ For more photos of the Queen Mary 2, go to sfgate.com.

As the ship passed beneath the bridge at 9:22 p.m., hundreds of camera flashes from the shore were joined by scores of flashes from passengers aboard her 14 illuminated decks.

Spectators were well aware that

the greatest nautical minds had calculated that the top of the ship would easily clear the bottom of the bridge, but there was a great deal of finger-pointing and oooh-ing as her funnel

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The queen of the seas' next stop is Honolulu

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squeaked beneath the span by what appeared to be the thinnest of margins.

"It's history," said David Misconish of San Francisco. "It's not the space shuttle but it's pretty cool anyway."

The largest vessel ever to enter San Francisco Bay spent the day tied up to Pier 27 in San Francisco, admired by thousands of visitors, before setting sail for Honolulu, the South Seas and Australia on the next leg of her around-the-world cruise.

While docked, the liner drew thousands of people to the Embarcadero just to look at the ship and take each other's picture in front of its sleek bow.

"It's a wonderful thing to see," said Chris Sellers, who used to work in Bay Area shipyards as a welder. He brought his dog, Lucky, with him from Alamo.

Katie Weber, a caterer, came to San Francisco from San Anselmo with her 3-year-old son, Will, to see the ship docked at Pier 27. "He's a big ship fan," she said. "He said he wanted to sail on that boat."

"He wanted to see it sail, but that's past his bedtime."

Families, ship admirers, historians and even a nun came to see the Queen Mary 2. Traffic backed up along the waterfront all day.

The 115,000-ton ship dwarfed the Dawn Princess, a 77,499-ton cruise ship berthed for the day a few piers away.

Only a couple of hundred specially invited guests were allowed on board Monday. Security reasons, the shipping company said. The ship's security was enforced by the Queen Mary 2's complement of 90 Gurka guards.

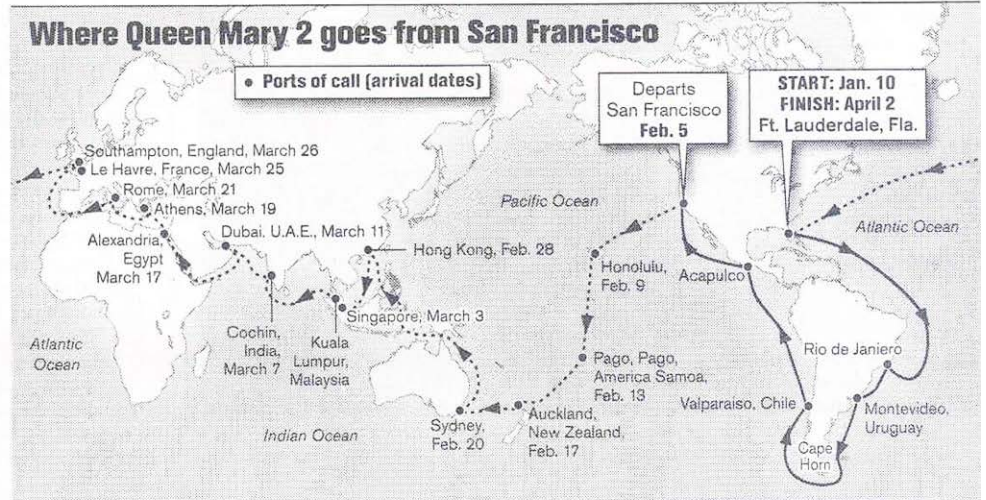
Mayor Gavin Newsom, who presented the ship's captain, Christopher Rynd, with a commemorative plaque, said his office had been deluged with requests to get aboard. "This is the hottest ticket in town," he said.

Newsom praised the ship to the skies. Queen Mary 2, he said, was "extraordinary," a word he used eight times to describe the ship, its officers, its crew and its accommodations.



LEA SUZUKI / The Chronicle

People take pictures of the Queen Mary 2 through the bars on the gate in front of Pier 27.



Source: Cunard.com

JOHN BLANCHARD / The Chronicle

The Queen Mary 2 received a huge welcome from crowds on shore and boats in the bay when it sailed under the Golden Gate just before 4 p.m. Sunday.

The reception surprised even the ship's officers and crew.

"When we came in from seaward and first saw the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge rising out of the mist, we were impressed," said Rynd, master of the Queen

Mary 2.

"And then we saw all those thousands of people lining the bridge deck and the hillsides on the shore and in the city. And we were able to exchange whistle salutes with many other vessels. It was a most outstanding welcome."

About 2,000 passengers who sailed with the ship around Cape Horn on a 26-day voyage from Fort Lauderdale got off in San

Francisco.

Another 2,000 boarded Monday evening for the next leg — first Honolulu, then Pago Pago, then Auckland, New Zealand, then Sydney, and so around the world, arriving back in Florida in April.

"Just as spring is breaking," said Rynd.

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