



In bed with Rock Hudson

As unlikely a scenario as it is, **Shirley Sinclair** discovers anything can happen aboard the MV Athena

AT THE end of a night filled with Hollywood-style glamour, I went to bed with Rock Hudson. And not many, if any, women can say that.

Back in the day, before his real sexual preferences were known, generations of women the world over lusted after the tall, dark and handsome leading man of the silver screen.

And apparently they still do.

But what's that got to do with the fun and games aboard Classic International Cruises' MV Athena as she sailed home to Fremantle on her Summer Nights voyage?

Well, to answer that, we might need to take a step back to our final day at sea.

The morning after a big night begun slowly with a hearty omelette from the Lotus Grill, eaten with a lazy cappuccino amid the fresh air of the open Calypso Deck at the ship's stern.

But after a glorious couple of days cruising Western Australia's southern coast and visiting the ports of Esperance and Albany, the ship named after the 16,000-tonne Goddess of Wisdom still had a few surprises up her sleeve.

This cruise had a get-up-and-dance rock'n'roll theme, with social jive clubs from around Australia among the 500 passengers, and the Deadliners band resurrecting the classics from the 50s onwards each night until the wee hours.

That helped set the happy tone to forge friendships and bond with strangers quickly on the intimate-size cruise ship.

So the progression of party games throughout the final morning's program drew enthusiastic participation and filled the deck with laughter.

With comedian Benny Hill's television show theme blaring from the speakers, competitive team spirit reigned during the Mega-Olympics, with its whacky versions of golf putting, darts, and quoits.

The spider web game – in which teams had to squeeze, push, shove, carry and throw each other through tiny spaces in a vertical rope maze – proved a little sticky for those who were carrying a little too much baggage or who had over-indulged on the lashings of food over the five days.

The afternoon's entertainment card included a sports trivia competition, Around The Colours human board game, mini-golf tournament, bingo, and rock'n'roll dance lessons among the choices.

That left just enough time to shower and dress before what had become almost compulsory cocktails in the Sirenes Bar, listening to the magnificent note-perfect voices of Ines and Silvio, followed by sultry Ika and pianist Jose.

The black and white dress code brought out plenty of lace and finery, which was surpassed only by the Las Vegas-style costuming at Showtime with the explosive energy of the Sofystic' Chic Dancers in Tango In Paris.

And the Farewell Gala dinner menu ensured the tempo of the final day didn't miss a beat.

My smoked salmon platter appetiser was a great lead-up to the main attraction: a medium-

rare grilled tenderloin of beef with green peppercorn sauce, finely sliced, and accompanied by Duchess potato, parsley Parisian carrots and fine green beans.

There was no way I could have fitted in a soup, salad or international cheese platter, though I did lust after my dining companions' duck a l'orange.

The flaming Baked Alaska on Parade, Athena-style – brought out by a procession of white-gloved waiters in a triumphant culinary spectacle – had us all waving and twirling our napkins in the air for more.

No one wanted this night to end. So the Calypso Show Lounge was packed for the crowning of Miss Athena.

But this was no ordinary beauty pageant.

An extensive line of Miss Athena wannabes of all ages, marital status, shapes and sizes had to muster their charms to woo the judges and the audience to take their place in the final four.

Once selected, a series of scenarios put the finalists' acting ability under the spotlight and brought out their melodramatic best (and worst!).

After next naming their favourite actor, the houselights came up and they were asked to scout the audience for their Hollywood star's look-alike.

Now, previous experience has shown many times that no matter how low my husband sinks into his chair, how much he tries to hide behind a program/newspaper/menu, and how disinterested he looks in the proceedings, he



seems to have that kind of face people want to give 15 minutes of fame to on stage.

This was no different.

The loudest, most extroverted finalist literally jumped over two show lounge armchairs to thrust her "Rock Hudson" into the lime-light.

My hubbie wasn't quite sure how to take being compared with one of Hollywood's most desired sex symbols of his time, who turned out to be gay.

But he still whooped it up with the other Hollywood hunks and their on-stage partners in a series of compromising balloon-

busting positions.

The title of "Miss Athena" went to a very deserving "Mrs Athena" whose balloon-busting "misfires" had us all in stitches.

And it goes without saying that this Rock Hudson's pillow talk was reserved for his wife ... now known as Doris Day.



MOUTHWATERINGLY GOOD: Athena restaurant. *PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED*



WEB OF INTRIGUE: Games such as the spider web can get you caught in sticky situations. *PHOTO: SHIRLEY SINCLAIR*



SWEET TEMPTATION: No shortage of sugar fixes on board. *PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED*



PIECING IT TOGETHER: Games aplenty on board ensure passengers are never short of activities. *PHOTO: SHIRLEY SINCLAIR*



SEA GODDESS: The Athena offers various cruises.



THE PROMENADE: There's plenty of room to stretch your legs on deck.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED



GOOD TO KNOW ABOUT ATHENA

ATHENA cruises from Perth and Adelaide this summer from \$450pp for two nights. A five-night cruise from Perth to Albany and Esperance is from \$1095 per person, twin-share. Children under-18 travel free on several cruises, paying only taxes.

Book through travel agents. For more information, see www.classicintcruises.com or phone (02) 9908 7877.

Athena has 276 cabins, including 42 suites on eight passenger decks and can take a maximum of 600 guests. Eight of the top suites have private balconies and jacuzzis.

The 2011-2012 cruising season – with 15 cruises lasting from two to 40 nights – is CIC's eighth successive summer cruising season in Australia and the longest ever here, extending more than six months from to May 24 next year.

Calls to Sydney, Darwin, Japan and South Africa are among a season of firsts for Athena during the new program, which includes a return to cruises from Adelaide as well as from Fremantle and Perth.

Facilities:

Spa and beauty salon, sauna and fitness room (Observation Deck), Aeolos Bar (Navigator's Deck), Muses Night Club, Cyclope's Auditorium/Cinema and the outdoor walking track (all on Promenade Deck), Lotus Pool Grill, Sirenes' Bar, Emporio Boutique, photo shop, Calypso Show Lounge, the Captain's Club and Elpinor Bar by the pool, Ithaca Library, internet café, Tychon Card Room and Circe's Casino (all on Calypso Deck), interdenominational chapel, reception desk and shore excursion desk (all on Mediterranean Deck) Olissipo Restaurant (two sittings nightly) and the kids' room (both on Atlantic Deck), medical centre (Pacific Deck).

Circe's Casino on Calypso Deck includes a roulette table, blackjack table and slot machines but is open under customs regulations only when at sea on international cruises.

All onboard prices for the Australian program are in Australian dollars. But as a cashless ship, passengers can pay for all their purchases using their cruise card.

The Spa offers traditional Balinese massage, traditional Asian facial massage, aromatherapy massage, foot massage, reflexology, lomi-lomi, body scrub, manicures and pedicures. Bookings are essential.