

# THE SS NEVASA CRUISE IN 1965

By **Steve Griffiths** [KGS 1963-1968]

Recently I came across this photo online of the Nevasa, sitting in dry dock in Falmouth sometime in the 1960s. It looks exactly as it did when I and many others of the 1963 KGS intake set sail from Southampton one autumn day in 1965, along with what seemed like a thousand other children mainly from London and the home counties. This was one of the British India Line's famous school cruises (No 126 in fact) on a ship which had actually been built as a troopship, first seeing service in 1956 in the Suez campaign. It was quickly redundant in that role, as the number of troops serving overseas began to run down and the sun set on the old empire ever faster, *post debacle*.

The owners laid up the ship in reinvented as a schools cruise- probably one of the first groups. It's worth remembering that this many of us went abroad at all. of my parents had ever done never before been away from

Walking up the gangplank on to ship was an adventure. Also fun claustrophobic dormitories with iron bunks and featuring just one or two tiny portholes, with rather basic communal facilities somewhere along the corridor.



Falmouth before it was liner in 1965. We were to enjoy its new role. was in the days before. For example, neither that. Even at 14, I'd family.

what seemed a huge were the below deck, crowded

We sailed to the Mediterranean and eventually arrived in Malta's magnificent Valetta harbour for a day. Then it was on to the eastern Med calling in at Piraeus (for Athens), Ephesus in Turkey, and Delphi in the Aegean, before ending the trip at Venice about 10 days later. I think, mooring pretty close to a flooded St Mark's Square. Standout moments were of course not the great sights and sites (though I do remember them all), but things like the walk to the station in Piraeus, encountering street life in Greece, and the ride on the Turkish local service bus to the great ruined city, through villages full of donkey carts and goats, grizzled old scodgers, and local women dressed entirely in black. From Venice we took a Bristol Britannia home to GB and then came the interminable coach journey back to Salusbury Road. Somehow, in the days before everyone had phones, many parents seemed to be waiting there on cue.

I discovered recently that British India had an SS Nevasa previous to our one. This too had been a troopship, and it too had been put to good use as a schools' cruise ship in the 1930s. I daresay some of our predecessors had the pleasure of sailing in it.

I recall that **Mr Brearley** and **Mr Fogwill** were masters on the 1965 trip, possibly with others. This was a combined classical history and geography experience! As we left the ship's cinema on the first evening (*Goldfinger*\*, with Shirley Eaton covered in gold paint), a rather different experience began as the Isle of Wight was left far behind. Some of us began to feel queasy. Some of us did not stop vomiting until we had got safely past Gibraltar and we are still reminded of this annually or whenever two or more of our vintage are gathered together.

\*There is a story attached to Ian Fleming's choice of name for his villain, not unconnected with his one-time neighbour over in NW3.