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**Cruise Review**

**By Marty Trencher**

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The newest of Voyager class vessels, Royal Caribbean has introduced in December 2002 the Navigator of the Seas. One of four ships that can claim to be "the world's largest", complete with a roller blade track, ice skating rink, and rock climbing wall. Plus a boulevard full of shops, bars and cafes known as the Royal Promenade, and a 1950's style diner: Johnny Rocket's, great for burgers, dogs and shakes and a nickel jukebox. Plus a Latin jazz bar and a Ben & Jerry's ice cream parlor.

We sailed on a 2 day special Inaugural cruise. Navigator will alternate between 7 day Eastern and Western Caribbean cruises. Our observations are limited to the time we spent onboard.

If you have sailed on the Voyager of the Seas you will notice that the steel oval framings of balconies are gone, replaced with full-length glass and teak railings.

As big as it is, Navigator never felt over crowded and we were able to experience a variety of activities without the long lines one would of expected for a cruise ship that houses 3800 + guests.

Three main dining rooms, Swan Lake, Coppelia and The Nutcracker, which are actually all part of one three-story venue offer traditional assigned seating dining. For breakfast and lunch, it's open seating. Windjammer and Jade offer a sumptuous buffet, with Jade featured some very innovative Asian/Fusion cuisine that would delight anyone's palate with the subtle flavors of the Orient. At dinner time, Windjammer and Jade are a casual alternative to the dining room. We thought the wait staff service was good and the food was well prepared, the presentation consistent and the choices plentiful. All consistent with what you find at a fine-dining establishment back home. If you visit the Royal Promenade, you will find pastries in the morning, sandwiches, pizza and deserts at night as well as Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream and Berringer Wines. At Johnny Rockets, the 50's themed diner style restaurant features red naugahyde booths, Formica counters, a jukebox, signature burgers, hot dogs, chili, french fries and onion rings. The food here is included. All you pay for are Cokes, and ice cream shakes.

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For an upcharge of \$20.00 per person you can dine at either Portofino, an Italian specialty restaurant or choose Chops Grille, A New York style restaurant featuring a high quality steakhouse menu. Make your reservations as soon as you get onboard cruise or you may never get the opportunity to enjoy it. If you get a sweet-tooth or hunger pains ( How could you? ) at 2:00AM, no problem. Navigator offers a limited room service menu available round-the-clock.

Visit the Connoisseur's Club where you can enjoy aperitifs and fine cigars or stop by the Champagne Bar, An elegant but cozy atmosphere to share a glass of wine or champagne. As wine lover's we enjoyed Vintages, the first totally dedicated wine bar afloat. Here you can savor wines from the world's finest wine producing regions featuring Robert Mondavi and Beringer, with wine appreciation programs. The staff is well versed in the history and education of wines. Wine tasting can highlighted the essences of wine and the staff helped pick the right kind of wine for us. On the Royal Promenade you'll find the Two Poet's British style pub and Cafe' Promenade that features Seattle's Best Coffee.

Then there is Schooner Piano Bar, and Bolero's an upscale 'Latin Lounge" featuring composers of Bolero's and other popular rhythms of the 50's and 60's. Plus there are a number of Bars scattered throughout the ship.

The Navigator of the Seas' Library has one of the largest collection of books I have ever seen on a cruise ship. We were able to surf the net and check our e-mail at Royal Caribbean Online. ( 20 work stations available at an extra charge )

On the upper decks you will find two main pools and an adults-only pool at the Solarium. Workout at the Shipshape Fitness center or the Spa. Here you will find spinning bikes and free weights, treadmills, cross trainers, bicycles, weight machines and a thalassotherapy pool. The ShipShape Spa has an ocean-view salon, massage rooms, and a relaxation area with ocean view.

Send the kids to Club Ocean with what Royal Caribbean calls the world's largest youth facility afloat. There is Navigator Dunes, a nine-hole miniature golf course, roller blade course, Jogging track, full-size basketball court, golf simulator and towering 200 feet above the sea a rock climbing wall designed to challenge experts and beginners alike. ( Too scary for us- no guts, no glory )

In the Viking Crown Lounge, we found the Cosmopolitan Jazz Club, a great cosy lounge for drinks and good vibes. There is also a Card Room, 19th Hole Golf Bar and Navigator has a Wedding Chapel that can accommodate 60 guests.

We had a balcony stateroom with twin beds that can be converted to queen size bed, private bathroom, phone, closed-circuit television, mini bar and a hair dryer. No complaints here. The cabin was a good size, though not huge and the balcony really added to the spacious feeling. Nothing beats a view of the sea and the stars at 1:00AM. Very romantic.

There are 1,500+ staterooms of which over 900 are ocean view and of those, Over 700 have a balcony/verandah. There are also interior cabins, with over a hundred of those with a window that overlooks the Promenade. The cabins have twin beds that can be converted to queen-size. If you bring your own laptop you can hook-up right in your cabin to internet access at an extra charge. If you are

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looking to go over the top, check out the Royal Suite: a separate bedroom with king-size bed, private balcony with a hot tub, whirlpool bath, living room, wet bar, dining area, tv/dvd entertainment system and a baby grand piano.

Broadway style show productions are held at Metropolis. In "Now & Forever", the cast performs music and dance from such shows as Dreamgirls, The Producers, and Mamma Mia. An ice extravaganza in Studio B on Deck 3, "Ice Dancin'," features an international cast including Russian, Canadian and American skaters. Great show. You will need a ticket to see the show as space is limited. At other times, there is open skating for guests. There is singing and dancing in The Ixtapa Lounge, and a variety of musical choices at venues throughout the ship ranging from classical, rock, country western, and jazz.

A really fun to watch experience is the Mardi-Gras Parade where -- jugglers, comics, costumed characters and other performers parade through the Royal Promenade and perform for you.

Adventure Ocean, Royal Caribbean's youth program is a great experience for your kids. There is a 22,000 sq.ft. area that includes computer stations with activities divided into age groups: (1) three to five year olds, (2) six to eight year olds, (3) nine to eleven year olds, and (4) teens; twelve to fourteen and

fifteen and seventeen. You will find an art studio, large play area, themed events, and science programs. Adventure Art by Crayola projects...and a lot more activities, too numerous to mention here.

Navigator has an outdoor area for teen parties with music and food service. Fuel is the teen disco, complete with dance floor and Internet Café. Teens also can hang out at The Living Room...or play games in the video arcade.

Baby-sitting is available.

Overall, we give Navigator of the Seas an 8 ( out of a possible perfect 10 ). We think Navigator is a great for honeymooners, couples and families and especially for groups. There's plenty of room and lots to do for everyone.

Travel Professional

### **Plan Your Cruise For Convenience And Fun**

#### **By Barney Garcia**

In order to ensure that you have fun and relax on your cruise, it is essential that you plan your cruise meticulously. You go on a cruise to have fun on water. The cool sea breeze and the spectacular view of the vast expanse of water in front of you can really intoxicate you with pleasure. Since you spend so much on a cruise, you should ensure that you enjoy every minute of it. Planning is the first thing you should focus on if you are going on a cruise.

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**Pick the Best Cruise Liner** The first step in planning a cruise is to choose the best cruise line and the destination. Study the offerings of the various cruise lines and base your decision on what you really want from the cruise. It is also important to decide the duration of your cruise.

You can choose from any of the world famous cruises such as the panama cruise, Mediterranean cruise, carnival cruise, Caribbean cruise, Europe cruise, Alaska cruise, and Norwegian cruise.

**Check with People Who Have Gone On Cruise** Check out with other people who have experience in such cruises and then decide on the cruise line. You should also check the facilities being offered by them and whether these are in consonance with your aspirations. The next step is to check if the cruise that you select operates to the destination that you want to visit.

**Booking the Cruise** Having selected the cruise line and the cruise, you should make the booking for the cruise either through a travel agent, or through online sources. You should also select the type of room that you would like to have and book the same with the cruise booking. If you want to avail of shore excursions or other off-ship activities you should also book these early.

A good planning will really stand you in good stead and you can have all the fun in the world on your cruise. A good planning will ensure that you come rejuvenated from the cruise and ready to face the realities of life once again.

Barney Garcia writes about many different topics. He is a proud contributing author and invites you to his websites.

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