



Ship to shore: An active vacation on the Voyager of the Seas

By Judy Koutsky | Jul 18, 2006



As Royal Caribbeans Voyager of the Seas left the French Riviera and the towns of Nice and Cannes faded into the salmon-colored sunset, I sat on my balcony taking in the scene, resting after a long day of sightseeing. However, I was not to rest for long. After all, there was a rock wall to climb and an ice rink to explore, and my boyfriend wanted to check out the basketball court, which seemed to be home to never-ending pick-up games.

Royal Caribbeans Voyager-class ships were definitely built for travelers who like to stay active on their vacations.

The vessel houses an ice skating rink, a basketball court, a 30-foot rock-climbing wall, a casino, a miniature golf course and a

Cruise facts: Voyager of the Seas

Line: Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines

Phone: (800) 327-2056

Web: www.royalcaribbean.com

Commission: 10%

Tonnage: 142,000 gross tons

Complement: 3,114 guests

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Main Street lined with cafes and shopping. It was hard to find time to pursue it all.

This was the first time a Voyager-class ship had sailed Europe's Mediterranean coast.

Destinations included Monaco, the romantic Italian town of Positano and the ruined Roman city of Pompeii, which was buried under ash when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 A.D.

But on an itinerary that offered so many sights and experiences on land, was it really possible to fully enjoy the destinations and the ship's many amenities?

The answer was yes.

How much of each is experienced depends on the type of traveler. And what I found most interesting on my voyage was the diversity in demographics. There were honeymooners, families (lots and lots of families), experienced cruisers and first-timers onboard.

As an energetic traveler who tries to cram as much as possible into each day, I felt that I managed to enjoy both the ship and the destinations, even though the shore excursions I chose turned out to be long, averaging about 10 hours per day.

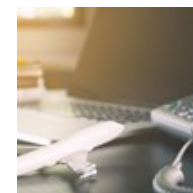
To get the most out of the destinations, I chose the more expensive exclusive tours whenever possible.

The exclusive tours accepted a limited number of passengers so that travel could be done in minivans as opposed to large tour buses. This allowed drivers and passengers to go where big buses could not.

Facilities: Gym, spa, salon, three pools, six whirlpools, basketball court; rock-climbing wall, ice rink; mini-golf course, jogging and in-line skating tracks, dive shop, wedding chapel, casino



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For example, Positano, one of the highlights of the cruise, can only be explored on the exclusive tours, as the towns streets are simply too narrow for large buses to navigate.

Driving along Italys Amalfi Coast, our little minivan was able to stop for bathroom breaks or shopping since our group was small and manageable.

In Pompeii, we were able to cover much more ground and explore more ruins because we were able to navigate the sites much quicker than a tour of 50 could.

The exclusive tours also allowed for more free time in the ports of call.

Sure, we saw Michelangelos David in Florence and the Sistine Chapel in Rome, but we also had free time to explore the piazzas, the local cafes and the museums along the way.

Our lunches were always at small restaurants with great views and delicious cuisine, places that often could not cater to the large groups.

The exclusive tours were perfect for couples, honeymooners and seasoned travelers who wanted delve deeper into each port of call. Exclusive tours were about \$345 per excursion.

For families, the shorter tours and those that offered flexibility were the bigger hit.

For example, Rome on Your Own provided transfers to and from the city with a few hours of alone time in between.

Shorter excursions also allowed families time to explore each port then return to the ship at their leisure to enjoy the amenities on the Voyager of the Seas.



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The ship had a good youth program, which was broken down into five age groups: Aquanauts, ages 3 to 5; Explorers, 6 to 8; Voyagers, 9 to 11; Navigators, 12 to 14; and Guests, 15 to 17.

Age-dependent activities ranged from finger painting to teen karaoke.

Royal Caribbean has also teamed up with Fisher-Price to develop play groups Aqua Babies and Aqua Tots for parents with children ages 6 months to 3 years.

In short, there was no shortage of activities for the youngsters aboard the ship. Meanwhile, adults and kids alike flocked to the rock-climbing wall, one of the highlights of the ship.

In fact, the number of adults scaling the wall to ring the I-reached-the-top bell outnumbered the kids two to one. But really, isn't that what a vacation is all about -- bringing out the inner child in adults?

The ice rink was another favorite activity. It was crowded with kids of all ages. The ice shows were a hit with both adults and kids.

Main Street, a reproduction of a typical central thoroughfare consisting of a pub, cafe, ice cream stand and shops, was also quite popular with both kids and parents.

The World Cup soccer tournament was going on during my cruise, and some guests choose to stay in Main Street to watch the matches instead of going ashore.

What made this cruise a success was the combination of amenities onboard the Voyager of the Seas and the shore excursions, which enabled cruisers to experience the culture and history of destinations.

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Families could spend a few hours touring Marseille in the morning and be back in time to eat lunch at the Johnny Rockets restaurant on board. The kids could then get their faces painted or go in-line skating in the afternoon.

To contact the reporter who wrote this article, send e-mail to twdestinations@ntmlc.com.

Hotel Arts ideal for post-cruise Barcelona stays

Royal Caribbeans seven-day Mediterranean cruise aboard the Voyager of the Seas starts and ends in Barcelona, and most passengers on my sailing extended their trip to include a day or two in that famed Spanish city.

The Hotel Arts Barcelona is an ideal place to stay; I met many fellow cruisers at the hotel. Located steps away from Barcelonas beaches, the hotel is walking distance from many of the citys top sights, including the old quarter.

For those who are simply looking to relax at the end of their vacation, the hotel is a perfect respite. From the award-winning spa to the outdoor pool and terrace, this Ritz-Carlton property offers great service in a prime locale.

For reservations or information, call (800) 241-3333 or visit www.ritzcarlton.com. --
J.K.



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