

New Ships on the Horizon



More Options Beyond 'Bigger is Better' Syndrome

Norwegian Pearl

By Cindy Bertram

Not one to remain stagnant, the cruise industry continues to grow aggressively with new ships on the horizon. The expansion slated to occur over the next few years is not just within the mass and premium market cruise lines, nor is it just a test to see who can build the largest ship. Instead, cruise passengers are going to see growth in all areas, from new classes of ships to enhancements and additions to existing ones.

Additions and Enhancements

Princess Cruises' 3,100-passenger Emerald Princess and the 710-passenger Royal Princess will be launched together in an unprecedented dual christening ceremony on May 17, 2007. The Royal Princess is a sister ship to the more intimate Tahitian Princess and Pacific Princess, while the 116,000-GRT Emerald Princess is a sister ship to the Caribbean Princess as well as the Crown Princess, which debuted in 2006. These ships introduced new features, including an adult-only retreat called The Sanctuary, as well as a dramatic piazza-style atrium. Princess hallmark features such as "Movies Under the Stars" and the Lotus Spa fitness center continue to be part of the experience.

Norwegian Cruise Lines' Norwegian Pearl, which began sailing December 2006, offers the industry's first

bowling alley at sea and also includes another first for NCL – a climbing wall. The Norwegian Pearl is a Freestyle Cruising-designed vessel and includes Garden Villas as well as the Courtyard Villa suite complex. Something new to NCL is the inclusion of two Deluxe Owners suites.

In the summer of 2006, MSC Cruises launched the first of their "Musica" class ships, which accommodate 2,550 passengers and are 90,000 GRT. The MSC Orchestra joins their fleet in spring 2007, and the third ship, the MSC Poesia, debuts in 2008.

Cunard Line's Queen Victoria, scheduled to debut this December, is 90,000 GRT and accommodates 2,014 guests, smaller than the QM2 which launched in 2004. Like the QM2, the Queen Victoria offers dramatic elegance with her 3-tiered lobby and now standard Cunard Line features like the Todd English Restaurant.

New Classes of Ships and Designs

Shipbuilding is not just adding more capacity to new and existing types of ships. Instead, new classes of ships with more amenities and special design features are being added.

When Costa Cruise Lines introduced the Costa Concordia in July 2006, she became the largest ship in the Costa fleet. The Costa Serena enters service this spring

with a third "Concordia" ship slated for 2009. The Costa Concordia introduced not only the largest spa at sea, Samsara Spa, but also has specially designated staterooms (55) and suites (12) as Samsara accommodations. These special accommodations have fares about 20% above comparable accommodations, but are located inside the spa center, with direct access to the spa facilities via private elevator. The price includes treatments, classes and the private Samsara restaurant.

The debut of the Eurodam in 2008 will represent the first Signature-class ship and the largest ever built for Holland America Line, yet will still be a midsize ship, which works well for this premium cruise line. At 85,000 gross registered tons and accommodating 2,044 passengers, the "Signature class" Eurodam and her subsequent sister ship scheduled for delivery in 2010 will incorporate some new design concepts, including an innovative 144-seat topside restaurant, as well as a new style of stateroom with ceiling-to-floor and wall-to-wall panoramic windows. The Signature of Excellence program features offered on the other Holland America Line ships will also be included.

Celebrity Cruises also is introducing a new class of ships, beginning with the Solstice in fall 2008 and followed by the Equinox in 2009. A third "Solstice" class ship has also been ordered. At 118,000 GRT and 2,850 passengers, the "Solstice" class will be the largest ships ever built by Celebrity. These will also feature the largest standard sized staterooms in the industry, at 215 square feet.

Not standing still, Carnival Cruise Lines also has a new class of ship on the books with the Carnival Splendor, entering service in 2008. Part of the Carnival Splendor's design will include a 17,800-square-foot spa, complete with a winter garden encircling the upper level of the spa that includes a ceremonial tea house. Another Carnival ship set to debut in March, the Carnival Freedom, will offer the line's first-ever visits to Turkey and the Greek Islands. Finally, an as yet unnamed 130,000-GRT Carnival Superliner is scheduled to debut in 2009.

MSC Cruises' fleet, which offers extensive European itineraries as well as seasonal sailings to the Caribbean, has their new "Post Panamax"-class ships debuting in fall 2008 with the Fantasia and the Serenata in spring of 2009. These two ships, the largest cruise liners ever commissioned by a European ship owner, are 133,500 GRT, with 1650 staterooms. A unique feature with the Fantasia and the Serenata will be their private VIP stateroom section. These will also offer butler service.

When Norwegian Cruise Line launched their "Freestyle Cruising" concept in 2000, they began building new ships

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specifically designed for extensive choices. Currently NCL has a three-ship project in the works, known as "F3" which will take the "Freestyle Cruising" to new levels. Although details about the "F3" project are limited, these reportedly will be 150,000-GRT ships carrying 4,200 passengers, and 100% of the outside staterooms will have private balconies.

Royal Caribbean International is moving forward with their Genesis project. In February 2006 they announced a new ship order which, at 220,000 GRT and 5,400 guests, will take on the distinction of being the largest cruise passenger ship ever constructed, and is scheduled for fall 2009.

Luxury Ship Additions

As a leader in the luxury cruise industry, Seabourn Cruise Line's announced in late 2006 their intent to build two new 520-passenger ships. These 32,000-GRT ships, to be introduced in 2009 and 2010, will more than double Seabourn's fleet capacity, yet will continue to offer the signature elements that Seabourn is known for. As Bruce Good, Director of Public Relations notes, "These ships will have the same hotel staff to passenger staff ratio Seabourn is known for, which is nearly one to one. And our guests will still experience that yacht, intimate feeling." Each ship will have 225 luxury suites, and 90% of those will have private verandahs.

With Seabourn's lead, other luxury cruise lines might follow with their own announcements of new shipbuilds.

European Riverboat Additions

A relative newcomer to European river cruises, Avalon Waterways began its first operating season in 2004, and its fleet included new ships – the MS Artistry and the MS Symphony. Since then, they have expanded with the MS Poetry and the MS Tapestry. In April 2007, Avalon Waterways introduces two new ships, the MS Tranquility and the MS Imagery, sister ships to the MS Tapestry, but with some expanded features and new design elements. One interesting design feature has the wheelhouse and engine at the rear of these ships. As Patrick Clark, Managing Director notes, "this makes a quieter experience for our guests but also offers unobstructed views as well from the lounge and restaurant areas."

Over the next few years, even though some cruise lines continue to introduce new ship styles that are competing on "bigger is better," others are focused on differentiating their ship experiences by offering unique features. The ultimate winner is the cruise guest, who has more selections and a wider variety of itineraries to choose from. ■