

Ship Review: Allure of the Seas

When I decided to move forward with the fundraising cruise aboard Royal Caribbean's Allure of the Seas, I decided to actually sail aboard Allure myself before the fundraising cruise. This way I could provide the best service to clients as to which specific cabins would best meet their needs, and I would be able to give them a sense of what they would experience during the cruise. Jeff and I made that cruise this past January and this cruise review will share with you what we found aboard Allure. My first thoughts about Allure were that it was huge. I was unsure if I would find a ship that big appealing, or if the size would put me off. After all, the cruises I most enjoyed were aboard small ships, not a behemoth like Allure. I needn't have been worried...I loved it! If Royal Caribbean knows anything, they know how to design ships that are packed with their WOW factor. Allure is the largest passenger ship at sea by virtue of the fact that it is about an inch or two longer than sister ship Oasis of the Seas, but the layouts are almost identical.



Royal Caribbean designed a ship that can pack 6,000 passengers into a confined space yet make it feel roomy. I don't know how they did it...they must have hired David Copperfield as a consultant because it is pure magic if you ask me. They started the magic by building the ship around the concept of neighborhoods. There are seven distinct neighborhoods aboard Allure of the Seas and if you plan to sail aboard Oasis or Allure, learn the neighborhoods and what makes them distinct. That one thing will help you stay anchored and you'll never feel lost on your cruise.

The Neighborhoods

Entrance to Allure of the Seas puts you squarely in the middle of the first neighborhood you'll encounter, the Royal Promenade. This area continues the promenade theme Royal Caribbean pioneered on the Voyager class ships only with more style. The Royal Promenade neighborhood offers a wide central promenade dotted with shops, restaurants and bars on either side of the soaring Rising Tide bar. Guests step onto the Rising Tide bar and enjoy a cocktail while the entire bar is smoothly hoisted three decks high, only to linger briefly before returning back down on a cushion of water. The water is just for looks but it makes for a spectacular image as the bar at its peak seems to float high above the promenade. The rest of the Royal Promenade is fairly standard Royal Caribbean but with a flair only possible on a ship as big as Allure or Oasis. Whether you are looking for a craft microbrew beer or one of those Starbucks specialty drink creations, you'll find it in the Royal Promenade. Casual eating includes Sorrentos pizza parlor, and Café Promenade for small sandwiches and snacks. The Bow and Stern pub offers a wide range of microbrewery concoctions in a gastropub setting. If you just want to cut loose and let your hips do the talking with some Latin inspired dancing, Boleros is the club for you with live music nightly.



Rounding things out you'll find a range of retail shops as well as the On Air Club, headquarters for the ship's nightly Karaoke sessions.

Royal Caribbean put their best imaginations at work in the next neighborhood we'll discuss, the Boardwalk. Found at the aft of deck six, Boardwalk is home to the only full sized working Carousel at sea



where kids and adults alike can enjoy a ride throughout the day. The Boardwalk is a great place for family mealtime with options including Johnny Rockets, or the Boardwalk Dog House if you prefer hot dogs. Morning strolls around the deck will often draw cruisers to the Boardwalk to sample the many offerings of the Boardwalk Donut shop. And for more serious diners, Sabor Mexican restaurant offers authentic Mexican cooking for a modest premium. After dinner you'll want to be sure to stick around for Oceanair in the Aqua Theater. This is Allure's breathtaking high dive show which offers great comedy with incredible diving performances that will have you laughing in delight while you ooh and ahh at the pure athletics of the divers. After the show you can burn off any lingering adrenaline by making your way up to deck seven for a try at one of two challenging rock climbing walls.

If you crave nightlife, head to deck four and Entertainment Place. This neighborhood is all about fun, featuring a live comedy club in an intimate setting for headline comedy acts direct from Vegas. After the comedy show you'll be able to dance the night away in the Blaze nightclub with a DJ spinning tunes from a state-of-the-art mixing center. Royal Caribbean's Studio B offers two levels of the most exciting entertainment at sea on ice. If you think the ice capades are exciting, how about the same quality of skating in half the space? Don't forget the casino which is an island of intense gaming in the middle of the ship but so well placed you barely know it exists. From the perspective of gamers, Allure's casino is so well designed it will leave you thinking you are in Monte Carlo rather than on a cruise ship in the middle of the ocean.

If you prefer a more serene approach to the day or night, try Central Park on Deck 8. This is perhaps the most unique venue at sea with an indoor park complete with live grass, trees and shrubbery reminiscent of its famous namesake in New York City. Allure's Central Park venue is covered with some 12,000 live plants which includes 60 trees lining rambling paths through the ship. You can enjoy casual eating at Park Café, or if upscale dining is your preference try either 150 Central Park or Royal Caribbean staple specialty restaurants Giovanni's and Chops Grille. If you like a before dinner drink, why not start your evening out at Vintages wine bar and enjoy nightly live music in a soothingly soft jazz style which compliments the setting nightly.



A cruise ship would not be complete with a neighborhood dedicated to health and fitness, and Allure brings its own unique take on both on Deck 15. The Solarium spans two decks which include a multi-level pool, infinity pool, and multiple Jacuzzis. In addition to the usual fitness and at sea spa services, Allure's Vitality Spa neighborhood has dedicated space to refill following your workout in the Samba Brazilian restaurant where you will be served a variety of tasty meats throughout the evening until you hit the stop sign.

The kids have their own neighborhood on Deck 14 forward with the Adventure Ocean program. This area includes rooms dedicated to each age group with age appropriate amenities and activities sure to tickle the imaginations of all with entertaining and fun activities. Kids are encouraged and supervised by the ship's trained staff who also see to the safety and security of the venues.

No cruise would be complete without a trip to the Sports Deck, which you will find on Allure's decks 15 and 16. You can enjoy pools, whirlpools, mini-golf, basketball and table tennis. For the really daring you can even try your hand at a zip line soaring over the heads of the open air Boardwalk neighborhood 10 decks below. Allure also offers wanna-be and experienced surfers alike the challenge of hanging ten in not one but two FlowRider surf simulators.

Entertainment

With all that activity, it is hard to imagine having any time or energy for entertainment, but Allure offers that as well. You can enjoy watching a first-run DreamWorks movie in 3D, tap along to some Broadway show tunes in the main theater, or enjoy several custom designed production shows. And don't forget the full length production of Mamma Mia which takes the stage for two showings on each cruise. Allure offers an amazing production show labeled Blue Planet that includes some amazing acrobatic and



cirque-de-soleil style performances in the main theater. Families will enjoy the daily DreamWorks character parades through the Royal Promenade or the scheduled photo ops throughout the ship. You can even schedule breakfast with Shrek, Fiona or another character from the DreamWorks cast. These are opportunities that present fun-filled family time packed full of memories precious enough to last a lifetime. Allure also offers the full range of standard cruise ship shows, from headliners to comedians, jugglers and magicians. There

is so much night time entertainment aboard Allure you will find yourself deciding to book another cruise to catch what you miss the first time aboard.

Cabins

Allure of the Seas doesn't limit its creativity to the public areas. They put the best ship designers to work coming up with an even broader range of cabin layouts and amenities. Allure offers more than 20 different cabin categories to include the inward facing Boardwalk and Central Park balcony cabins. All of Allure's cabins are appropriate for access to standard wheelchair and mobility scooters and for the more seriously disabled Allure offers over 40 accessible cabins of all categories, including balconies and suites. Speaking of suites, Allure takes full advantage of Royal Caribbean's new emphasis on the Suite Life with a range of suite experiences that include more spacious cabins, some even multi-level, a range of luxury amenities, and special services such as reserved seating in the best areas of all of the ship's key entertainment venues, and a personal Genie!

Dining

There is no doubt you will work up quite an appetite with all there is to do on the Allure of the Seas. In addition to the specialty restaurants scattered throughout the neighborhoods, Allure takes a unique approach to cruise ship dining, Royal Caribbean's engineers decided to reconfigure the Oasis class ships, to include Allure, along similar lines as the Quantum Class ships. The redesign resulted in Allure's dining room being reconfigured into three distinctly separate dining rooms, each themed after dining rooms aboard the Quantum class ships. The result is a more quiet and intimate dining environment. To keep things simple for the galley staff, Allure's three complimentary dining rooms offer the same menu which changes nightly throughout the cruise. Allure's dining program offers a choice of traditional, fixed early and late seatings, as well as My Time Dining at the time most convenient to the cruiser. The three complimentary dining rooms are open for My Time Dining between 5:30PM and 9:30PM nightly, but the wait can be long so reservations should be considered.



Wrap-up

There is no doubt Allure of the Seas offers a truly unique cruising experience. Like Oasis of the Seas before, Allure offers the largest passenger ship experience with amenities and activities available on no other ship. At the same time, you will find the intimacy of a small ship experience throughout Allure's neighborhoods if that is your preferred style of cruising. Allure of the Seas was a memorable cruising experience for me and Jeff, and I hope you'll try it for yourself.