

Ship Review: Odyssey of the Seas



Last month Janet and I were invited to participate in Royal Caribbean's inaugural 2-night sailing of the Odyssey of the Seas from her new home port of Fort Lauderdale. Odyssey is the second ship in the Quantum Ultra class joining sister ship Spectrum of the Seas. If you follow us on social media, you may recall we were able to stick around for a follow-on 2-night sailing that included the naming ceremony, giving us a total of 4 nights to fully explore Odyssey. For that we thank the diligent efforts of our Royal Caribbean Strategic Account Manager, Laura Schwerzler. We put the time to good use, exploring every nook and cranny of the ship and I'm eager to share what we found.

By the Numbers

Launched: 2021

Last Refurbished: N/A

Length: 1138 feet

Width: 135 feet

Displacement: 167,704 tons

Draft: 28 feet

Passenger Capacity: 4,198 Double Occupancy (5,510 total)

Crew: 1,663

Cabins: 2105 staterooms

Odyssey of the Seas is the second ship to sail in Royal Caribbean's Quantum Ultra class. I see Odyssey as representing something of a reboot of the Quantum class ships which were originally designed for two markets: Asia, and Millennials. The former has worked exceedingly

well and Royal Caribbean has two Quantum class ships sailing Asian itineraries year-round. The approach to Millennials didn't work out so well, and that's what it looks to me like much of this reboot is intended to address. Whether that's the case or not, I think it does so rather well.

If you have sailed on any Quantum class ship, you'll feel right at home on Odyssey. The ship's design and layout are virtually identical to the rest in the class. I love the features of the Quantum class ships, and I've already described them in past blog posts and [newsletters](#), so I won't rehash that ground here. This ship review is all about what puts the "Ultra" in the Quantum Ultra class ship Odyssey of the Seas.

The Decor

I still remember walking aboard Quantum of the Seas for the first time on one of her early inaugural season sailings in late 2014 and thinking she was too elegant to be a Royal Caribbean ship. Odyssey of the Seas still conveys that sense of elegance, but with a decidedly beach themed vibe to it. Cabins are neutrally decorated but continue to offer at least the illusion of more room than most cruise ships and loads of storage space. Once you get out into the public spaces you notice the beach theme straight away...think Jimmy Buffet, Margaritaville, and the lime and the coconut, and you'll have a sense of the décor aboard Odyssey of the Seas. It is an approach that broadens the demographic appeal of the ship to encompass the Millennial's Royal Caribbean originally targeted with the Quantum class ships, as well as Gen X, Gen Z, and active early retirement Boomers. Odyssey offers something for each of those groups, and plenty of cross-over potential as well for multi-generational families.



The one thing Odyssey of the Seas does not have, and it is something Royal Caribbean has yet to build into any of their ships, is a high-end enclave for the most affluent guests. It is the ship within a ship concept that has become popular with other mass market cruise lines. It caters to cruisers that want the best of both worlds, giving them the rich entertainment options, large casino, multiple activity options of a large cruise ship, and at the same time a exclusive place they can to escape to and feel like they are on a small luxury cruise ship. That is not to say Odyssey of the Seas doesn't appeal to multi-generational families...it absolutely does. As much as anything it is a difference in presentation and labeling. And through amenities that expand the higher your suite category, there is plenty of pampering for the big spenders.

The Elephant in the (Dining) Room

Odyssey of the Seas offers the same impressive range of dining experiences as the rest of the Quantum class ships with a mix of 18 complimentary and specialty dining venues, plus room service. Of these venues, 9 are complimentary and 9 require an upcharge. The latter includes all the specialty restaurants you'll find on any Quantum class ship, with some minor changes that I'll cover in a bit. Room service is available anytime for a small charge...as I've noted in past Royal Caribbean ship reviews, the room service charge is an effort on Royal Caribbean's part to ensure guests don't order a late-night snack only to fall asleep before the service staff can deliver the meal.

The most significant physical change to the design of Odyssey of the Seas, at least that I noticed, involves the dining venues. Quantum class ships have four small main dining rooms, each with a dedicated galley and service staff. The design was originally to support Royal Caribbean's revolutionary Dynamic Dining concept, but that was a miserable failure for reasons I won't go into here. With the Quantum Ultra reboot on Odyssey, the walls and ceilings between the four dining rooms have been removed, turning the space into one large, open area, two-level main dining room. Janet and I prefer the smaller, more intimate venues of the original Quantum class dining rooms, but we see how the approach taken with Odyssey fixes everything that was wrong with Dynamic Dining.



Quantum class ships have an interesting abstract sculpture on the deck just outside of the Italian specialty restaurant. Odyssey of the Seas does away with the sculpture and opens the deck space up to provide a look down into the main dining room. A waist-high railing surrounds the opening to ensure inattentive cruisers don't step into the void and fall two decks down to the bottom level of the main dining room. That wouldn't be good. Odyssey has a large abstract chandelier mounted on the ceiling outside of the Italian restaurant that hangs down into the open space above the main dining room. The effect is stunning and is further enhanced with soft blue accent lighting. From the first appearance of specialty restaurants Royal Caribbean has offered an Italian themed venue which they branded as Giovanni's Italian. When they envisioned the dining venues for their Quantum class ships, Royal Caribbean partnered with celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and rebranded Giovanni's as Jamie's Italian Kitchen by Jamie Oliver. The partnership included license to use Chef Oliver's signature recipes and the supply chain necessary to get the fresh ingredients that make the dishes unique. That relationship ended a few years ago and though existing Jamie's Italian Kitchens on Quantum class ships retain the name, it has reverted to the original branding on the Odyssey of the Seas and is known as Giovanni's Italian Kitchen.



Giovanni's Italian Kitchen offers the same Italian fare, for a premium charge, as Jamie's. In a smart move, Royal Caribbean extended the rebranding to bring the adjacent Vintages Wine Bar under the umbrella of Giovanni's. In addition to the same range of available wine labels, cruisers can now order food from Giovanni's to go along with their wine. It isn't a full-service menu, rather it is an extension of Giovanni's allowing cruisers to order charcuterie boards, antipasti, and tapas for a modest fee. It is the kind of move that seems so obvious now that you wonder why it took so long. It is sure to make the wine bar a more popular place.

The Quantum Ultra reboot gave Royal Caribbean an opportunity to refresh the eateries serving the pool deck. They removed the retro drive-in diner themed Johnny Rockets and replaced it with El Loco Fresh, taking advantage of the trend toward Mexican street food to satisfy those midafternoon munchies. Odyssey of the Seas has one additional specialty restaurant called Teppanyaki, a Japanese teppanyaki style steakhouse. The venue takes up space on the pool deck which on Quantum class ships is dedicated to the teen hangout called The Living Room. To make room for Teppanyaki, the teen space on Odyssey was relocated from the pool deck into the second level of SeaPlex and is now Social180.

The final change to Odyssey's dining venues was the addition of a dedicated sports bar and grill. I really like this change. I mean, *really* like it! Royal Caribbean took the Playmakers Sports Bar and Grill concept popular on the Oasis class ships and modified it to fit into the Quantum Ultra design in the upper level of Sea-Plex. Playmakers offers light bar fare allowing guests to snack while they enjoy their favorite drink and watch the game, or games, that interest them. There are tabletop games like billiards, shuffleboard, and foosball, and an exclusive area called the Owner's Box that offers a semi-private area to watch the game. The Owners Box is available to all cruisers on a first come basis, for a fee. I have to say the bit of time Janet and I spent in Odyssey's Playmakers, mostly so Janet could watch the Dolphins beat the Ravens, was fun. Having experienced Playmakers on Oasis class ships, it is a more natural fit on Odyssey and sure to be a popular spot.

The Food

If you saw some of the pictures I posted on social media of our lunch buffets, you were probably impressed by the spread of cold and hot lobster, shrimp, stone crab claws, and petit filets. The food was simply amazing, and we gorged ourselves if I'm being honest. BUT...I did note in a posting that such bounty is not the norm for Royal Caribbean's lunch buffets. We were treated extra special because we sailed on inaugural events along with the senior executives for Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines and parent brand Royal Caribbean International (includes Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines as well as Celebrity). While the lunch buffets on all Royal Caribbean ships are full of variety and the food is tasty, it isn't quite as high end as we enjoyed on our Odyssey of the Seas inaugural sailings.



When it comes to the food on Odyssey of the Seas, I have to be straight with you...it was just OK. Which is pretty much on par with every other ship in Royal Caribbean's fleet. That's not a dig...it is the reality of institutional style cooking for thousands of people. The specialty dining venues generally offer elevated cuisine, but since we didn't get the opportunity to try any, I



can't speak to it. I must note that Royal Caribbean's food program offers options for gluten free, vegetarian, and to a lesser extent, Vegan diners. The main dining room included entrees in each category every night, and the buffet even has dedicated areas for Gluten Free and Vegetarian dishes. The variety isn't quite as great as it could be, but the fact that they are even offering it as part of their regular food service is a major improvement.

The Rest of the Story

On the Sports Deck next to the Flow Rider, Royal Caribbean's ship designers managed to squeeze in a new attraction that debuted on Mariner of the Seas, the Sky Pad VR bungee/trampoline experience. This is a popular attraction for families and even I gave it a go. You get to bounce in a simulated low gravity environment, rather like Neil Armstrong walking on the moon, and shoot bad guys with lasers. There are multiple game themes to choose from that vary the VR world you visit as well as the nature of the bad guys you encounter. I went for the dragons, but as I noted in a Facebook post, at one point a character that look like Christopher Lloyd was taunting me to do better. It was great fun, and I tried not to think about the fact that the attraction is mounted to the side of the ship like an afterthought, partially sticking out over the ocean many decks below, and that the force of me launching myself off the trampoline might be just enough to dislodge the thing and cause it to tumble down into the sea. Pushing those thoughts aside, my 10 minutes in Sky Pad was entertaining...until a few hours later when my back and calves reminded me that I'm 61 years old. That wasn't so much fun, but a small price to pay.



The pools are another area where Odyssey of the Seas differs from Quantum class ships. Quantum class ships have an outdoor main pool and a second pool with a retractable roof so it can be used in all types of weather. Odyssey replaces that with a two-deck two-pool approach with both pools getting equal billing and both being open air, resort style pools complete with a generously sized kid's area. There is still an indoor pool option for when the weather turns frightful, the Solarium pool, but that is for adults only. No worries...there are plenty of things to keep the kids occupied to include the VR arcade, family-oriented laser tag, bumper cars in SeaPlex, and so much more.

The Quantum Ultra reboot allowed Royal Caribbean to tweak how it is using space in the Sea Plex aside from the addition of the Playmakers Sports Bar and Grill. The main level of SeaPlex is still an open multi-purpose sports and activity area, and while some of the activities have been



replaced, circus school being the most noticeable, others have taken their place so you can still find a wide range of family fun things to do. Odyssey's SeaPlex is surrounded on both levels by arcade type games that remind me of an adult version of Chuck-e-Cheese...another of the efforts to appeal to the younger than boomer generations. One interesting aspect of these games...they are operated by the casino, which means you have to pay to play.

Itineraries

It is difficult to find fault with Odyssey of the Seas, but I should point out the itineraries aren't too exciting for veteran cruisers. With so much of Odyssey being a reboot of the Quantum class ships, I had hoped the itineraries would follow suit...they do not. At least not directly. Odyssey will be sailing the same Caribbean and Mediterranean itineraries Royal Caribbean has been offering for the past decade, itineraries Janet and I have sailed so often we rarely even get off the ship. Except Perfect Day at Coco Cay. We ALWAYS take advantage of that beach day. See my destination review for all the details on that day of fun and relaxation for the entire family.

As much as I would like to have seen Odyssey sailing fresh new itineraries, using her for itineraries popular with first time cruisers makes sense. It positions Odyssey with all its attractions to provide maximum appeal to first time Millennial, Gen X and Gen Z cruisers, who are now introducing their own families to vacations. At the same time, it frees up sister ship Anthem of the Seas to sail itineraries that appeal to more seasoned and experienced cruisers, and that's what Royal Caribbean is doing. While Odyssey of the Seas hits the most popular Greek Island and eastern Mediterranean ports, Anthem of the Seas will feature western Mediterranean, European Coastal, and Scandinavian Fjord itineraries. It makes the addition of Odyssey to the fleet a win-win.

It's a Wrap

Our experience on Odyssey of the Seas bodes well for the Quantum Ultra class ships in Royal Caribbean's fleet. It has all the makings of a successful reboot, and I expect Odyssey of the Seas will quickly become a favorite. I know Janet and I would love to get aboard Odyssey of the Seas for a full week of cruising, where we have time to more fully enjoy all the aspects that make her an Ultra class ship. Right now it isn't on our schedules but someday soon!