

## Ship Review: Living on The Edge

I'm a pretty traditional kind of person, but when I saw the design of Celebrity Cruise Line's newest ship, I just knew I had to step out and experience life on the Edge. As in the Celebrity



Edge. I first wrote a preview of the Celebrity Edge in 2017 and got so excited about it I talked Janet into booking us on one of her first sailings. Now that I've experience Edge for myself, I want to share how my in-person experience compared with my expectations from two years ago. I'll cut to the chase and say up front I was impressed from the moment I stepped aboard the Edge. One of Celebrity's goals with the Edge design was to offer cruisers a completely different experience, and in that they have

succeeded. Perhaps more than they intended. The Edge experience is nothing short of...well...edgy. Celebrity put together a highly talented design team including architect Tom Wright, designer Nate Berkus, and award-winning interior designer and author Kelly Hoppen. It was a move that has paid off.

With such a high-powered design team it should be no surprise that the emphasis on Celebrity Edge's design is refined luxury. Edge was designed using all 3D technology, allowing advanced design concepts to be visualized as they were developed. Some of the buzz words that permeate Celebrity's marketing are that Edge is designed as an outward facing vessel, it merges design with passion, and it features modern luxury. When I first read those words my reaction was "huh?" I had no idea what they meant. Having experienced the Edge for myself I now get it. All that said, Edge left me thinking it has the same look and feel of sister brand Royal Caribbean's Quantum class ships, which is a good thing since I love that class of ship.

I mentioned that Celebrity succeeded in their desire to put a revolutionary product into the cruise marketplace perhaps more than they intended. What I mean by that is Edge hasn't been universally lauded for its creative design. In fact, there is much about Edge that traditional cruisers don't care for. Reviews of the ship have been mixed...people either love her or they hate her. Let me just say having spent a week aboard the Edge I love just about everything about her.

### By The Numbers

Just to review from my last article on the Edge, she is the largest ship in Celebrity's fleet, though at about 129,500 tons displacement and with a capacity of 2,918 passengers, she will only be slightly larger than Celebrity's Solstice class ships. Edge carries a total of 1,467 staterooms of which 81% are balcony staterooms or suites, 10% are oceanview staterooms, and 9% are inside staterooms. This follows a trend in cruise ship design to limit the number of inside and oceanview staterooms, which places them in higher demand and effectively drives their price point much closer to balcony staterooms. Most staterooms can accommodate 3-4 passengers, but Edge offers some interesting connecting options to accommodate larger families or groups. In an

ongoing effort to accommodate single travelers, Edge offers 16 single staterooms, all in one of the more pricey balcony categories. In-room automation allows passengers in all staterooms to control room features such as lighting, temperature, shades, and service through a single touch screen. The technology piece is one of the aspects of Edge's design that has gotten the most complaints. I don't see what people don't get about it...I found the touch screen to be very intuitive, and even if I hadn't, our cabin steward explained it completely.

## Life on the Edge

In my preview article I listed my takeaways from the roll-out, and I wanted to revisit that bit with my direct observations and experiences.

1. **Infinity Veranda.** This is probably the most polarizing and controversial aspect of the Edge's design. Most staterooms on Edge are balcony cabins, and most of those feature the infinity veranda. Folks, this is not a new concept in spite of the marketing hype. It is an adaptation of a concept that has been popular for years on river cruises where the balcony is an extension of the cabin. At first glance the "balcony" looks like a floor to ceiling glass wall, but the top can be lowered opening the cabin up to the elements. This provides open access to the entire veranda, with no obstructions to the view from within the cabin, allowing fresh air and the sounds of the ocean to come into the cabin. In the event of inclement weather, the upper portion of the glass wall can be raised at the touch of a button to fully enclose the veranda and making it a true extension of the cabin with a clear and unobstructed view of the ocean. This is a feature that I thought would go over well with cruisers, but reviews have been mixed. Our cabin had a traditional balcony, but we were able to see one of the infinity balconies in action and I get why people have some complaints. It provides significantly greater privacy since the ceiling and walls are an extension of the cabin, but you lose the open-air feeling of a traditional balcony. In fact I heard several cruisers refer to it as a window more so than a traditional balcony, and that description isn't far off the mark.
2. **Suites.** Edge includes two new concepts in suite class accommodations, the Iconic Suites and the Edge Villas. Iconic Suites are 2,600 square feet with two bedrooms and two bathrooms. They provide panoramic views from just about every nook and cranny of the room. Verandas on the Iconic Suites offer a generously sized private sun deck with hot tub and a 270-degree view of the ocean. There are only two Iconic Suites on the entire ship, with both positioned all the way forward in the ship, one deck above the ship's Bridge. That may be problematic for some cruisers, but since there are only two of these suites, I expect they will sell out quickly for each sailing. Edge Villas are two stories and



take the standard suite experience several steps further in luxury with stunning views, private plunge pools, and direct access to a suites-only sundeck that is part of The Retreat. There are only six Edge Villas available on the entire ship. The remainder of Edge's 190 suites fall into the existing categories of Celebrity suite staterooms.

3. **The Retreat.** Cruisers booking Sky Suite category and above staterooms gain access to an area not available to other cabin categories. This area, known as The Retreat, provides suite guests with a private sundeck, pool, pool bar, and lounge. In addition to the full range of dining options available to all cruisers aboard Edge, suite guests also have their own restaurant, Luminae, which offers a unique menu. Celebrity is clearly appealing to multi-generational families much like Norwegian Cruise Lines pioneered with their Haven concept. Unlike The Haven, which is designed as an exclusive ship within a ship, Edge extends access privileges to passengers who book a suite with a connecting non-suite stateroom. This means multigenerational families can enjoy all that The Retreat has to offer together without having to completely break the bank. The downside of that is The Retreat is not adults only and for me that was a negative. While there weren't many kids on our cruise, we did have a handful in The Retreat which made it less of a retreat than I would have liked. On our cruise one family commandeered one of the few covered spaces for the entire cruise. They camped out with a play pen for the kid, a high chair, and they put towels over the half dozen or so lounges in that area. Given that there are only two such covered spaces in The Retreat, I found that presumptuous. Even though their stuff was in the area all day, most of the time they weren't which bothered me even more.
4. **The Resort Deck.** The Resort Deck includes a 25-yard lap pool, two martini glass shaped hot tubs (think Poconos and the champagne towers), two story cabanas, and access to the Solarium which offers a covered adults-only pool. What makes The Resort Deck unique is the outward facing nature of the design. The layout of pool, chairs and even the pool bar is designed to focus cruiser's attention outward toward the ocean. I didn't appreciate what that meant when I read the early marketing materials for the Edge, but now I get it. It is subtle...from the shape of the pool to the layout of the lounge chairs, the ship design draws your eyes outward, toward the ocean. The pool is the longest I have encountered on any cruise ship, though it is a bit narrow. It takes up so much deck space there is precious little room for lounge chairs, though there are plenty of lounge chairs and open deck space the two decks above the main pool.
5. **The Rooftop Garden.** Tom Wright's architectural prowess is on full display here. He took the Lawn club area that is a feature of Solstice class ships and completely stood it on its head to come up with a public space that is as visually appealing as it is functional.



Celebrity is marketing it as an unexpected playscape that engages the senses. Wright replaced the plain grass lawn that was the main feature of the Lawn Club with an urban



garden that is reminiscent of the Central Park neighborhood on Oasis class ships, though with far less botanical density. Rather than a park, it is truly a garden-like setting where cruisers can sit and relax during the day. The space comes alive at night with live music from musicians perched in the garden's architectural features. Celebrity is rolling out another new concept for The Rooftop Garden, which they are calling "A Taste of Film." This is an outdoor treatment of the dinner and a movie concept that takes advantage of the Rooftop Grill, which is another carry-over from the Lawn Club. Janet and I

enjoyed watching *Mama Mia 2* one night. It was so relaxing I didn't even realize it was after midnight by the time the movie was over!

6. Magic Carpet. This is the only aspect of Edge's design that gave me pause when it was first rolled out, and having experienced it, I'm still not sold. The Magic Carpet is effectively an extension of the ship hanging off the starboard side. It is the size of a tennis court with a capacity of about 90 people. The Magic Carpet is the ultimate multi-purpose space. It can be raised or lowered from the top of the ship all the way down to the water line with stops at four decks with a unique use on each of those decks. On port days the Magic Carpet will be lowered down to the water level on Deck 2 where it will connect with a large open space inside the ship designed to provide a more comfortable and relaxed place to wait for your tender to disembark the ship. When Edge is at sea, the Magic Carpet is raised to deck 14 where it serves as an extension to the pool area on The Resort Deck and acts as an outdoor lounge. What gives me pause about the Magic Carpet, aside from the name, is that it reminds me of the Rising Tides Bar aboard Royal Caribbean's Oasis class ships. A novel space in search of a purpose but one that doesn't draw you to the ship. It is a feature that seems more at home on an aircraft carrier than a modern luxury cruise ship.



7. Tenders. Celebrity extended their Edge concept of luxury to newly designed tenders. Rather than using standard lifeboats, Edge comes with eight sleek launches that provide a yacht-like setting for passengers to transition from ship to shore in comfort. I wouldn't exactly describe the tenders as a yacht-like setting, but they were much more comfortable

than the traditional cruise ship lifeboat pressed into service as a tender. This was a feature that I appreciated.

8. Dining. The similarity between Royal Caribbean's Quantum class ships and the Edge is most marked in the dining program. Edge offers a refined version of the Dynamic Dining concept that was such a disaster aboard the first few years of Quantum class ship sailings. By the time Celebrity adopted the concept they were able to learn from Royal Caribbean's mistakes and the dining program was smooth. Edge offers four complimentary restaurants that are significantly smaller than most mass market cruise ships, and a number of specialty restaurants that require reservations and a cover charge. The dining experience was a pleasant surprise for me, both in the main dining room and the specialty restaurants. I was most looking forward to two experiences, Le Petit Chef and Dinner on the Edge. Food in the main dining room was good...not gourmet, but better than most mass market cruise lines and better than my prior experience with Celebrity.

9. Le Petit Chef. Initially Celebrity planned to offer this 4D dining experience on select nights during the cruise. A cast of animated characters are projected onto each plate and the animation shows them preparing dishes from raw materials to finished product. Once prepared, the wait staff delivers the real dish for the diner's enjoyment. Fortunately, Celebrity decided to offer it for dinner on each night of each cruise. It was a whimsical experience that I thoroughly enjoyed. The food was good and the presentation quite amusing. You have to watch carefully to catch all of the subtle humor built into the presentation but if you do, you'll be well rewarded. You can see for yourself



- with the video of our dinner at Le Petit Chef that I posted to facebook during the cruise.
10. Dinner on the Edge. Celebrity decided to use the Magic Carpet space for an elevated dining experience. During select evenings the Magic Carpet is raised to the highest level of the ship, deck 16, where it serves as the ultimate specialty dining experience for a select group of 90 diners in what Celebrity is labeling Dinner on the Edge. Unfortunately, this was one of my few disappointments during our cruise. Not because it was unpleasant but because I couldn't experience it. Dinner on the Edge was only offered once during our cruise, and we didn't find out what night it would be offered until after we boarded. The only night Dinner on the Edge was offered happened to be the same night we were booked into Le Petit Chef, and I wasn't about to give that up. While I was disappointed, in hindsight it probably was a good thing. Dinner on the Edge requires a \$65 per person cover, and there is no way with my surgically miniaturized stomach I would get my money's worth out of it. Still, I think Celebrity would do well to offer the experience more than once per cruise.
  11. Raw on 5. I just learned to appreciate raw oysters last year when Janet and I found ourselves in Annapolis for one of their special summer festivals. I decided to be bold and order oysters from a street vendor and discovered that I love them. Especially the pickled

onions and hot sauce they were garnished with. Janet is not a fan, so one of our sea days while she was basking by the pool I decided to check out Raw on 5. Oh boy what a treat! I ordered a half dozen oysters and was delivered a full dozen. No worries...I ate every one of them! And when the sushi rolls were delivered to the table next to me I decided they looked so good I just had to order some for myself. I saw the sushi chef preparing the sushi as I entered the restaurant and let me just say Celebrity didn't skimp on the quality of their chefs. The knife skills were amazing and resulted in the thinnest of cuts. I ordered a Rainbow Roll and I can't tell you how they packed so much flavor into such a compact roll.



12. Interior Public Space. The only other time I have been so wow'ed by a new ship design was when I boarded sister company Royal Caribbean's Quantum class ships. Not surprising since as noted the two classes share many of the same design elements.



Boarding the Edge felt very much like putting on a well-worn pair of slippers...familiar and quite comfortable. Celebrity Edge's design incorporates glass everywhere. Floor to ceiling windows throughout the ship's public areas extend the outward facing nature of Edge's design from the outdoor decks to the interior. Panoramic views abound on Edge. From the classy chandelier in the spa to the amazing four-deck high chandelier in the martini bar, this ship oozes subtle luxury. Speaking of the martini bar, the martinis are great and received martini connoisseur Janet's seal of approval. Be sure to make a point to be there at least once at either 8:30PM or 10:30 PM when the chandelier comes alive with a mesmerizing music and light show.

13. Attention to Detail. Edge offers so many decorative features that contribute to the overall sense of modern luxury. The décor is a sea of neutral beiges, tans and sepias which makes the occasional splash of color from the quite tasteful artwork stand out all the more. One of the things I dislike about most cruise ships is how they segment their interior decoration. Each deck, and even each section of each deck, often has its own design motif and I find that visually busy. Even confusing and in the extreme, dissonant. Not so aboard Edge. From carpet to hardwood to wall coverings and artwork, moving throughout Edge is a soothing experience, if you can imagine that. Tray ceilings with subdued lighting tucked away results in an understated sense of class. Even the white upholstered furniture in the suites lounge with their green accented pillows carries the garden of Eden theme throughout the ship. I mean who uses white upholstery on a cruise ship? Having spilled

my share of food and drink, I know how hard it must be to keep that area looking as spotless as it is.

14. The Negatives. You all know I am brutally honest and if there is a nit to be picked, I'll find it and pick it. On Celebrity Edge I was hard pressed to find any. The staff was very attentive...far more so than our past experience with this brand. It was more reminiscent of the treatment we received on our Crystal cruise, and actually in some respects even better. We had butler service in our suite, a very pleasant young lady from Prague. She was everywhere and yet we rarely saw her. She joked with me that she was a stalker and I half believed her. I left my key card in my room one morning when I joined Janet at the pool and no sooner did I realize it and there was Denisa with my card in hand. Really my sole complaint was the practice of allowing kids in the suites only Retreat area. The other aspect of the cruise that I view as something of a negative was the entertainment. The ship's program had the usual assortment of comedians, impressionists, and feature shows in the main theater. I'm not suggesting they were bad...just not as edgy as I expected. The exception is Eden. That show reminded me of the splashy edgy cabaret show on Royal Caribbean's Anthem of the Seas.

My expectations for this cruise were high, and I was pleasantly surprised when Celebrity Edge exceeded them. With the number of new ships coming out it may be some time before I get to cruise aboard her again, but if I have my way I surely will. Celebrity has a winner with the Edge's design.