

The Cruise Lines & Ships

Types of Cruises

The majority of Caribbean cruises share many common attributes and even common ports of call, but the available variety may come as a big surprise. Caribbean cruises are most frequently one week long (eight days and seven nights, although on the eighth day you get off the ship early in the morning). They often begin and end on either Saturday or Sunday, but this is not always the case. If a week is too long for you, it is quite easy to find Caribbean cruises that are as short as two nights. At the other end, you will find cruises as long as 10 nights. Two-week Caribbean cruises are more rare, but they are out there if you hunt hard enough. Those who wish to cruise for two weeks can sometimes do so by taking “back to back” cruises. This is an option on those cruise ships that alternate itineraries from one week to the next. In such cases, you can remain on board when the ship returns to its port and then take the second week cruise, which saves having to change ships.

The major other distinction is where the ships go. The Caribbean is large enough, both geographically and as a cruising market, to allow segmentation by region. The eastern, western and southern regions are the usual designations, although not every cruise line includes the same islands in these regions. Cruises of less than four nights always depart from southern Florida and visit the Bahamas. Week-long cruises can have any number of embarkation points.

Cruise Lines Serving the Southern & Western Caribbean

The majority of the major cruise lines have extensive Caribbean itineraries to choose from, but don't assume that they will always have something to suit your interests. The following list of cruise

lines serving the Caribbean gives a brief rundown of each line's service as well as a short summary of the fleet.

Mass-Market Lines

"Mass-market" isn't used in a derogatory way here. It simply means that these cruise lines appeal to the broadest section of the traveling public. They generally have the most ships in service on Caribbean routes and also feature the newest and often largest of today's ships. The cruise line profiles that follow are meant only to introduce you to the main choices and to categorize their styles. Further details are provided in the individual ship descriptions that follow in *The Ships* section, page 18.

Carnival Cruise Line, ☎ (800) 327-9501, www.carnival.com. The world's largest cruise line now has a fleet of 19 self-proclaimed "fun" ships and 18 of them are on various Caribbean routes either all or part of the year, covering a wide spectrum of ports in all regions. They are at the top of the list in terms of ships serving the Caribbean. Carnival also has more US embarkation ports than any other line. They have been introducing new ships into their fleet with amazing frequency (more are under construction and in the planning stage as you read this) and even their older ships aren't particularly old. In addition, almost all of their ships are quite large, with most being in the mega-liner category. Carnival provides a very competent cruise experience at a competitive price and strives for a mostly informal and fun atmosphere, good for both couples and families. They target the average person.

Celebrity Cruises, ☎ (800) 437-3111, www.celebritycruises.com. Celebrity has a total fleet of nine ships, eight of which are serving the Caribbean market for at least part of the year (the ninth does briefly make it into the Caribbean on trans-Panama Canal cruises). It is one of several lines that plays a transitional role between the Carnival/Princess-type ships and the more sophisticated luxury lines. You can expect to pay somewhat more for that slight upgrade, which may or may not be worth it to you. Celebrity's ships are both modern and beautiful. They are generally large, but not as big as most ships in the other mass-market lines. Celebrity visits just about all of the Caribbean's major ports, so finding a suitable itinerary shouldn't present any problem.

Costa Cruises, ☎ (800) 462-6782, www.costacruises.com. This Italian line is better known in Europe, but it has two of the finest ships in

its large fleet sailing the Caribbean during the winter. “Cruising Italian Style” is their motto, and Costa does a good job providing a mostly casual and highly entertaining experience. Because they are a smaller player in the Caribbean they compete by offering very attractive fares. The level of amenities, service and cuisine is on a par with the better-known American lines. Because they have fewer ships in Caribbean service, they obviously have fewer itineraries from which to choose.

Crystal Cruises, ☎ (800) 446-6620, www.crystalcruises.com. This line comes as close as possible to the luxury yacht class without quite crossing over the border. Their three gorgeous ships are among the smaller vessels serving the major lines in the Caribbean. However, both in size and in style, they are more like mass-market ships than, for instance, the luxury yachts of Seabourn. For that reason, I have included them in this group. You will definitely find that the prices are much higher than the other mass-market cruise lines. But, for your extra dollars, you will get a considerably higher level of luxury and service. Crystal clearly caters more to upscale couples, so families are probably better off looking elsewhere for their cruise. Itineraries are somewhat limited because of the relative size of their fleet. In addition, none of their ships remains in the Caribbean for the entire year.

Disney Cruise Line, ☎ (800) 951-3532, www.disneycruise.com. This is “the” cruise line for families traveling with small children. Disney’s two ships have recently introduced a western Caribbean itinerary to go with their other cruises out of Port Canaveral. But with only two ships and a lot of time devoted to nearby destinations from central Florida, their itinerary choice for southern and western ports is the most limited of the mass-market lines. The emphasis at Disney is on a mostly casual and fun-filled cruise with plenty of activities for all ages. Their ships are both modern and very much in line with contemporary mainstream cruise ships. Their success has resulted in a price scale that is not cheap, although they do have some prices that are among the lowest of any major cruise line.

Holland America, ☎ (800) 426-0327, www.hollandamerica.com. The most traditional of the major players in the Caribbean market, HAL’s fleet has, with the introduction of several new ships, grown to a total of a dozen vessels. They are currently featuring nine of these on a wide variety of itineraries throughout the entire Caribbean. Most of their ships can be considered as mid-size in today’s world of cruising. A passenger count of about 1,500 people is their norm, considerably less than the 2,000-plus average in most new ships, but much larger than the thousand-person count found, for instance, on Crystal. The style of their ships and the nature of the service, as well

as the overall cruise experience, is somewhat more formal than many of the mass-market lines and is more in keeping with what cruising was like 20 or 30 years ago. For some people, that is exactly what makes Holland America such an attractive choice. HAL's fare structure is only a little higher than average.

Norwegian Cruise Line, ☎ (800) 327-7030, www.ncl.com. NCL has introduced several new ships in recent years and, although it isn't one of the five largest cruise lines world-wide, it does rank up with the biggies when it comes to offering a huge range of Caribbean destinations. With the introduction of their ninth ship in late 2002, Norwegian currently has seven different vessels serving the region during at least part of the year (although two of them have very limited Caribbean departure dates and itineraries). Norwegian has an undeniable popularity because it provides a fine cruise experience on lovely ships at a reasonable price. Although only a couple of their vessels are true mega-class vessels, NCL's attractive "Freestyle Cruising" program offers a greater degree of flexibility in dining and dress than any other major cruise line. Their prices are generally at the lower end of the scale.

Princess Cruises, ☎ (800) 774-6237, www.princesscruises.com. It is a little surprising that, given the size of the Caribbean market, only five of Princess' large 15-ship (and still growing) fleet are slated for these runs during the 2003-2004 season. However, with some switches and additions, this figure is predicted to rise to six ships within a few years. The original "Love Boat" is no longer in service, but Princess, which in many ways is responsible for today's great cruise popularity, continues to be an innovator in terms of flexibility regarding such things as on-board dining and facilities. Their sleek and modern ships are all beautiful and the majority are in the mega-liner category. Although Princess developed its following through its romantic appeal to couples, today's line is just as family-oriented as the other true mass-market lines. Pricing is competitive with the rest of this class, although it tends to be somewhat higher than Carnival. The choice of itineraries and ports is fairly varied, but not as extensive as those lines with more ships.

Royal Caribbean International, ☎ (800) 327-6700, www.royalcaribbean.com. There is no denying that Royal Caribbean is, along with Carnival, the giant of Caribbean cruising. Right now they have a 17-ship fleet, with three more coming in 2004. All but one of their ships spend at least some time in the Caribbean. Thus, you will find an amazing variety of itineraries. Only Carnival has more ships both overall and in the Caribbean – and then only by the slimmest margin. They have a growing number of Voyager class vessels, with capacities in excess of 3,000 passengers. These are the biggest

cruise ships in the world and are likely to remain so for at least a few years. Royal Caribbean offers a fine and mostly casual cruise experience at a price in the normal range of most mass-market lines. While not quite reaching the sophistication level of Celebrity, there is no reason why the typical cruise traveler should have anything less than an outstanding experience on Royal Caribbean, one of the most respected names in the cruise business.

Royal Olympia, ☎ (800) 872-6400, www.royalolympiacruises.com. Concentrating mostly on the Yucatán coast of Mexico rather than the Caribbean islands, this Greek cruise line has its two newest and nicest ships on these routes. The ships are among the smallest of the mass-market cruise lines, but have the style and most of the amenities of the newer and larger ships. Their prices are somewhat higher than many of the larger lines, but that has to be expected on smaller ships where economies of scale aren't available to the operator. The cruise experience is on the casual side, geared more toward couples than families.

Luxury Yacht Lines

There are several luxury lines that offer cruises on smaller vessels. These can range in size from as few as 150 passengers to a high of around 650. But even the largest of this group of ships provide a level of service and luxury well above the mainstream cruise operators. Because of the more limited appeal of these very expensive lines, the individual ship details will not be included for this group. The ships of these lines tend to have different itineraries throughout the season, thereby providing travelers with a choice that is greater than one would expect from their generally smaller fleets.

Radisson Seven Seas, ☎ (800) 285-1835, www.rssc.com.

Seabourn Cruise Line, ☎ (800) 929-9391, www.seabourn.com.

Silversea, ☎ (800) 722-9955, www.silversea.com.

Sailing Ships

Another more expensive alternative to regular cruising is to see the Caribbean on a sailing ship. These luxury or near-luxury cruises offer romanticism and a bit of the past. Some have motorized back-up while others are true sailing ships like the tall ships of a bygone era. Passenger counts range from about 100 to 200 in most cases. Sailing ships are, of course, not as fast as motorized vessels so some of these

cruises visit fewer ports. This is especially true in the southern and western regions of the Caribbean, where the ports aren't as close as in the Antilles island group. As a result, the available selection of cruises is more limited. Again, ship details for this group are not included here.

Star Clippers, ☎ (800) 442-0551, www.starclippers.com.

Windstar, ☎ (800) 258-7245, www.windstarcruises.com.

Windjammer, ☎ (800) 327-2601, www.windjammer.com.

Small Ships

The "small" ship cruise experience is provided by a number of operators. These vessels usually carry fewer than 150 people and, although attractive, they have few facilities. They are more for the person who seeks an in-depth shore experience, rather than a true luxury cruise. The small ship concept, which began in earnest in Alaska, has now spread to many parts of the world. Once again, however, the majority of these cruises ply the eastern Caribbean. Two popular operators who do offer southern and western itineraries are:

American Canadian Caribbean Cruise Line, ☎ (800) 556-7450, www.accl-smallships.com.

Clipper Cruise Line, ☎ (800) 325-0010, www.clippercruise.com.

Another option in the small-ship category is to travel on a private yacht. People with sufficient sailing experience can rent a vessel and be their own captain and crew. Non-sailors can also rent a crew along with the boat. Either way, this is a very expensive way to travel and is not practical for the vast majority of travelers.

Other Cruising Options

The numerous cruise lines discussed to this point are not the only ones with Caribbean itineraries, although they certainly do represent those with the greatest choice. Here are a few more alternatives that you may wish to consider.

Cunard, ☎ (800) 728-6273, www.cunard.com. The grand-daddy of all cruise lines, Cunard has only limited Caribbean itineraries for a part of the year. They are a more expensive operator and cater to the well-heeled traveler who prefers traditional-style cruising. Their new flagship, the *Queen Mary II*, is slated to enter service in late 2003 and

will be the largest ship in the world. It has been designed mainly for ocean cruising so its Caribbean service will be limited, as with other Cunard vessels.

First European, ☎ (888) 983-8767, www.first-european.com. Known as Festival Cruises in Europe, this Italian company has a small number of southern and western Caribbean itineraries during the winter season, using mostly their newest and best ships. These are referred to as their "Premium" class vessels and are on a par with ships from the mass-market lines. It's unlikely that non-Premium ships will ever be used in the Caribbean but, if they are, I suggest avoiding them.

Fred. Olsen, ☎ (800) 843-0602, www.fredolsencruises.co.uk. A British company with Norwegian heritage, Fred. Olsen operates several smaller, traditional-style vessels. Their Caribbean itineraries tend to be longer than a week and visit many unusual ports, some of which are unique to this line. The cost isn't low. Unfortunately, most of their ships are showing their age.

MSC Italian Cruises (MSC), ☎ (800) 666-9333, www.msccruisesusa.com. An Italian company formerly called Mediterranean Shipping Cruises (thus, MSC), they are best known in Europe for their older and smaller ships. MSC does have a decent selection of cruises that get as close to "budget" as any ships, for those who don't necessarily desire a luxury experience or require the facilities of the larger ships. MSC, in trying to keep up with the Joneses, now has several new ships under construction. These will be introduced over several years beginning in late 2003.

Regal Cruise Line, ☎ (800) 270-7245, www.regalcruises.com. Their one ship, the *Regal Empress*, is a somewhat older but nice mid-size vessel that offers a variety of Caribbean itineraries at reasonable prices. It's a throwback to the more traditional era of cruising and that will appeal to some.

Sun Cruises, www.simplon.co.uk/airtours.html. With affordable cruises on a pleasant mid-size ship named *Sunbird* (embarkation and disembarkation at Aruba), this British tour operator offers an option that the budget traveler might wish to consider. Information and reservations are available through *Vacation Express*, ☎ (800) 309-4717.

For those with time and budget constraints, there are a number of ship operators offering overnight cruises from Miami and Fort Lauderdale to Freeport or Nassau in the Bahamas. Some people extend these into longer vacations by staying overnight in the islands. Vari-

ous package deals offered by the ship line can also be used to turn a five-hour cruise into a longer vacation.

Setting Priorities: Selecting Your Dream Cruise

*T*he Caribbean is the number one destination for cruising in the world and there are more cruise lines and cruise ships serving all of the Caribbean than anywhere else. That means itineraries almost too numerous to count. So, how does one go about selecting the best cruise? "Best" means different things to different people. It all depends on what is most important to you. Let's take a look at the three main factors that will determine the right cruise for you.

The Cruise Line

Each line has a cruise style or personality that is reflected in all of the ships of that line. Do you want a sophisticated luxury experience or a more fun-oriented cruise? Do you like refined elegance in the ship's public areas or is glitz more your style? Is this a romantic getaway for two or a family affair? These and many other questions can help narrow down which cruise lines are in the running for your dollars. To a large degree, your available budget will also help determine what line or lines to consider. *Silversea* is a lot more expensive than *Carnival*, for example. You have to judge how much certain features of a cruise line (and the ship) are worth to you.

The Ship

Many ship features are determined by the line that owns them. However, even within specific cruise lines, there can be great variation in age, size, facilities and even style. Again, you must ask yourself what is important to you.

The Ports of Call

Look for an itinerary that hits more of the places you want to see than other itineraries. Evaluate the time spent in ports and see if it allows

time for you to cover the points of interest and activities that you want. Also consider the amount of port time vs. time spent at sea. If you like port-intensive itineraries as opposed to spending leisurely days on the great blue sea, then pick an itinerary that has ports closer together and spends less time getting from one to another.

Wrapping it all up and weighing the relative merits of these three factors isn't always easy. Keep in mind that Caribbean cruising is different than cruising to, for example, Alaska. There, the cruise is often the thing because you can't get to many of the important places of interest *except* by ship. Poorer weather conditions also means the ship is less of a floating resort. In the Mediterranean, as another example, some of the great cities of Europe are the draw in addition to the cruise. While the islands and ports of the Caribbean have unique charms and are worth seeing, most people come for the *cruising* experience. Therefore, when choosing a Caribbean cruise, the ship itself is more important and the ports less so, as compared to Alaska or the Mediterranean.

There are many sources for general information on the cruise lines and on cruising itself. The cruise line brochures are a necessary piece of literature before you make any decision, but always keep in mind that these are, first and foremost, marketing tools for the cruise lines. As a result, they're far from objective. Websites about cruise ships exist, although here, too, many are run by travel agencies looking for business or feature only certain cruise lines. The **Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA)** is an industry organization composed of most of the major cruise lines. Their website, www.cruising.org, also paints the experience in a purely positive light, as you might expect. However, a wealth of information, statistical and otherwise, can be found there. You can also call CLIA at ☎ (212) 921-0066.

Watch Out For Those Glossy Brochures!

The brochures published by each cruise line contain lots of useful information. However, these slick marketing tools can also contain a lot of "stretching the truth," if not outright lies. Some stress features that are largely irrelevant. That shouldn't surprise anyone experienced with the techniques of Madison Avenue and all lines are guilty. Here are a few of my favorite examples of the nonsense often found in the brochures:

- ⚓ "... the youngest fleet in the Caribbean." With the way new ships keep coming on line, almost all the major lines have the youngest fleet.
- ⚓ "... over 500 staterooms with private balcony." What difference does it make to you how many rooms have balconies? If you want a balcony and you get the one room that has it, do you really care who else has the same thing?
- ⚓ "Our staterooms are more than 25% larger than other cruise lines." Or 50%. How about 100%? I have no idea where they get these statistics.
- ⚓ "... big ship with an intimate feel." Sure, especially when 2,500 people are all trying to get off at the same time. Big ships are big. Period. Lots of people like big ships because of all their features!
- ⚓ "Our guests have more fun than anyone!" If that were true than every line would copy this formula and there would be no variation. Different people like different things.

Don't get me wrong – I absolutely love cruising. And all the major lines each have their own variations on a fine product. But it's still a good idea to read those brochures with a hefty degree of skepticism.

The Ships

Ship descriptions are organized below by cruise line. Each line's listing begins with information on the nationality of their ship's officers (that is, the uniformed "bridge" personnel) and then the rest of the crew. As there has been a trend toward mixed nationalities in recent years, ships having such a crew will be designated by the term *international*. The country or countries where the line registers its ships are also shown. While I don't personally consider the registry to be of any great importance, many cruise travelers seem to want this item of information. The introduction for each line concludes with a description of features common to all ships in the fleet. It also gives you some insight into the style of the cruise by providing information on such things as the dining experience, the service, and so forth. This last part will be omitted for Disney Cruise Line and Royal Olympic Cruise Line because each of these has only two sister-ships in Carib-

bean service. Thus, the ship descriptions themselves will provide cruise-style information.

For each ship (or class of ships) we give statistics, followed by a narrative ship description. Most of the statistics are self-explanatory; however, a few items do require clarification.

Year Built refers to the year that the ship was first placed in service. A second date in brackets will indicate the year of the most recent major refurbishment. However, this will be shown only if the ship was originally placed into service prior to 1995 since any refurbishment on newer ships was either minor in nature or, most likely, not necessary in the first place!

Beam is a nautical term that simply means the maximum width of the ship.

Passengers is the number of guests the ship can carry, based on double-occupancy. Since many ships have at least some staterooms that can accommodate a third or fourth person, the actual capacity is usually higher and you may see larger capacities shown in other sources. Cruise lines themselves usually list the number of passengers on a double-occupancy basis.

Stateroom Size is the range of sizes in square feet of all accommodations, including suites. Keep in mind that, even on ships with the largest regular staterooms, ship rooms are much smaller than hotel or motel rooms. While land-based accommodations are rarely less than 300 square feet (and 500+ is the norm in better accommodations), a ship is said to have good-sized staterooms if they measure about 160 square feet or more. Non-suite staterooms on any ship rarely exceed 225 square feet, except on some of the high-luxury ships.

Choosing the class of stateroom is not only the single most important price determinant for your cruise, but it is also an essential factor in how much you will enjoy the cruise. If the room isn't to your liking, you are not going to have as good a time, even though you will not find yourself in your room for much more than sleeping. The two key factors to consider when selecting a room are size and location. The bigger the room, the higher the price, with the top category, of course, being a suite. Keep in mind that even in the non-suite category the best regular stateroom will be two or more times as expensive as the lowest priced cabin. Cruise ships don't offer hotel-sized rooms. Be sure you know what size room you are looking for to avoid disappointment. Read more about costs in the section titled *A Practical Guide to Your Cruise*, page 73.

Today's larger cruise vessels and almost all of the smaller cruise ships have the greatest number of rooms located on the outside, which means you wake up to beautiful scenery passing by your window or balcony each morning. However, if you're not squeamish about sleeping in a windowless room, an inside stateroom can save a great deal of money and will probably do just as well from a comfort standpoint. Inside rooms aren't always smaller, contrary to what a lot of people believe. In fact, many of the contemporary ships have inside rooms that are exactly the same size as outside staterooms (less the balcony, if any). The typical design in use today has a much smaller range of room sizes than on older ships. This, of course, doesn't apply to suites, which begin at sizes only a little larger than regular staterooms (especially if referred to as mini-suites), but can be as large as a house in some cases. Most new ships no longer have portholes but, rather, large picture or even floor-to-ceiling windows. A few rooms in the extreme fore or aft sections of the ship may still feature portholes.

The middle section of any ship gives, in theory, the smoothest ride. But a rough passage is rarely a problem unless you're unfortunate enough to encounter a major storm or unusually heavy seas. Rooms on the higher decks are less stable, though they are quieter and have more scenic views. However, on the huge ships that are so common in the Caribbean, the difference in the "ride" from one room to another isn't all that great.

The **Passenger/Crew Ratio** isn't shown, but all you have to do is divide the number of passengers by the crew size to come up with a figure. For instance, if a ship has 2,400 passengers and a crew of 1,000, then its passenger/crew ratio is 2.4:1. Most of today's larger ships fall in a narrow range between 2.4:1 and 2.8:1. You won't notice any difference in the level of service based on numbers like that. Ratios of 2:1 or lower are generally seen only in smaller luxury vessels. Of the ships described in this book, your only encounter with that kind of ratio will be on Crystal Cruises.

I haven't included two other commonly listed statistics because their importance is dubious at best. These are the ship's speed, and the space ratio. The speed, which is always measured in knots, doesn't vary all that much from one cruise ship to the next and, again, means little since itineraries already have factored the speed into account when showing arrival times in each port. Finally, "space ratio" is a measure of available square footage per passenger. Despite seeing this figure with increasing frequency, I have not found that it is a reliable way of predicting whether or not a ship will feel crowded. The ship's design and layout are far more important.

Meal arrangements and the style of cruise (i.e., the degree of formality) are also important considerations in choosing a ship. The individual ship descriptions will give you some feel for this, but also refer to the *Dining* and *Dress* discussions in *A Practical Guide to Your Cruise*, page 83.

Not every ship is in the Caribbean all of the time. And, even when in Caribbean service, many ships change itineraries from one part of the season to another. So, you should be aware that the ship you first select as your dream vessel may not have a western or southern Caribbean itinerary when you are ready for your vacation.

Carnival Cruise Line

Officers: Mostly Italian but some have international backgrounds

Crew: International

Ships' Registry: Bahamas or Panama

The entire Carnival fleet features a striking all-white exterior, except for the mostly red-and-blue Carnival logo and their distinctive funnel – which is shaped like the tail of a jet liner. Although this last little feature may seem relatively unimportant, it definitely adds a graceful flair to all of their ships. When it comes to cruise style, you can count on Carnival ships providing certain features. For instance, the main showroom always puts an emphasis on rather lavish Vegas-style entertainment. Activities are geared toward the fun side as opposed to cultural enrichment. All Carnival vessels offer a wide variety of dining choices. They are known for good food, but it won't break any new culinary ground. The style is mostly casual and the service is friendly and efficient, but certainly not at a "white glove" level. The Carnival experience is equally good for couples and families with children. Carnival is definitely an innovator in the world of cruising. They were pioneers of the mega-ship category for contemporary cruising. They also offer a great deal of flexibility regarding embarkation ports, dining and activities.

ELATION, FANTASY, FASCINATION, IMAGINATION, INSPIRATION, PARADISE & SENSATION

Year Built	See below
Passengers	2,052
Length	855 feet
Passenger Decks	10
Beam	105 feet
Crew Size	920
Gross Tonnage	70,367
Stateroom size	173-410 square feet

The year that each of these ships was placed into service is as follows: *Elation* - 1998; *Fantasy* - 1990 [2000]; *Fascination* - 1994 [1999]; *Imagination* - 1995; *Inspiration* - 1996; *Paradise* - 1998; *Sensation* - 1993 [2000].

These seven sister ships represent Carnival's initial entry into what can be termed the "mega-ship" category. The only differences in the ships of this class are the names given to public areas and their theme and color scheme. For example, the bar space called Cleopatra's on *Fantasy* is occupied by Rhapsody in Blue on *Inspiration*.

The ships have a fairly easy-to-navigate layout of public rooms, which begins four decks above the lowest deck with cabins. An attractive and often glitzy central atrium rises five stories and provides a focal point for public rooms. There are two separate dining rooms separated from one another by the galley. This arrangement means each room is somewhat more intimate than if they had been combined into a single room. Many experienced cruisers prefer the less crowded feeling associated with a smaller dining area.

The dining room at the stern end can be the most confusing part of the ship to get to since you have to use the stern elevators or stairs – no access is available from the front section of the deck it's on. There's a very attractive two-level main theater.

All of these ships have many colorful and comfortable bars and lounges as well as all of the usual facilities one would expect on a large ship. The sports deck has excellent gym and other health facilities, and a jogging track is available at the top of the ship.

Accommodations on *Fantasy*-class vessels are spacious (a strong point of most Carnival ships). There is a certain sameness to the rooms on all of this line's vessels, but that is offset not only by the amount of space, but by the pleasant color schemes and well-planned layout. One important thing to be aware of is that *Paradise* is a totally **non-smoking** ship, and this regulation is rigidly enforced. It seems to have been well-received by a significant segment of the cruising public and word is out that Carnival is planning to make one of their upcoming ships smoke-free as well.

LEGEND, PRIDE & SPIRIT

Year Built	2002, 2002, 2001
Passengers	2,124
Length	963 feet
Passenger Decks	12
Beam	106 feet
Crew Size	930
Gross Tonnage	88,500
Stateroom Size	160-388 square feet

The new ships of the *Spirit* class are, in the Carnival fleet, exceeded in size but not in passenger count only by the even newer *Conquest* class.

- The class of ship is sometimes named for the first ship in that series. Some people commonly refer to ships in the same class as “sister” ships – so it is a term I frequently use.

There are even bigger ships sailing the Caribbean, but these are huge. Even more importantly, they hold their own against the most spectacular ships of any line.

The gorgeous atrium lobby spans nine decks and is topped by a glass ceiling with the top two decks connected by a glass staircase – what a view when walking down! Decks 2 and 3 contain most of the public areas, including a beautiful two-level dining room, what seems like countless bars and lounges and a gracefully curving “street” of shops and boutiques.

The bow section of the ship houses a huge three-level theater that, regardless of the particular ship’s theme and décor, is nothing short of marvelous. One of the unique features of *Spirit*-class vessels is a long and narrow area that surrounds the outer edge of the theater on Deck 3. Because it isn’t the easiest place on the ship to find, it tends to be a secluded and quiet area where you can go to take a little walk or just sit and sip a drink. It is beautifully decorated on all of the ships and usually has a garden-type theme. It is also along the somewhat tricky route one has to follow to get to the arcade and child-care facilities. Perhaps an even more lovely area is the smaller and more intimate entertainment lounge on Deck 1, directly beneath the theater.

The top four decks of the ship contain the other public areas, including three swimming pools (one of which can be covered by a retractable roof). Recreational facilities are extensive and even include a water slide. The Lido Deck is the place to go for a buffet meal, snacks, pizza, ice cream and whatever else your tastebuds decide. That includes a chic and fabulous alternative restaurant spanning two decks at the very top of the ship – certainly a most spectacular place to dine. There is an extra fee for eating at the Golden Fleece (*Legend*), David’s Supper Club – based on Michelangelo’s “David” (*Pride*), or Nouveau Supper Club (*Spirit*).

The accommodations are similar in size, décor and style to the previous class of ships. However, the *Spirit* class features a much greater percentage of outside rooms with private balconies. In fact, four out of five outside rooms boast a balcony. This has become a common

and very popular feature of almost every new mega-ship, regardless of cruise line.

TRIUMPH & VICTORY

Year Built	1999, 2000
Passengers	2,758
Length	893 feet
Passenger Decks	13
Beam	116 feet
Crew Size	1,100
Gross Tonnage	101,509
Stateroom Size	180-483 square feet

Two more almost brand new ships, these sisters aren't much different in physical size than the preceding group. However, they add one more deck, much of which is devoted to cabin space. That height, by the way, does help to make the superstructure of the ship even more impressive. Likewise, their slightly greater beam allows for a larger number of interior staterooms. Both have a nine-story atrium and have many features that are somewhat similar to the *Spirit* class. These include a fabulous three-level theater and a host of other cheerfully and colorfully decorated lounges. Even the dance club covers two levels. There are two dining rooms, each of which is two levels. Thus, it combines the elegance of the *Spirit* class with the somewhat less crowded approach of the *Fantasy* class. Access to the stern-located dining room is, however, easier on these two ships because the upper level can be reached from other sections of the ship without taking a different bank of elevators.

Although the public areas are splendid on both ships, I have a slight preference for the interior décor on the *Victory*. Its Seven Seas Lobby and atrium has a dazzling splash of color and the Mediterranean casual restaurant/buffet makes you feel as if you were in Europe. Speaking of casual dining, I like the deli option on both ships (the New York Deli on *Triumph* and the East River Deli on *Victory*). Multiple pools, water slides and even a gymnasium/spa complex spanning two decks completes the snapshot of the facilities.

A positive attribute of both ships is the oversized rooms. The smallest (at 180 square feet) compares to mid-category or higher on many other ships. These sisters do have a somewhat smaller percentage of outside rooms with private balconies, but there are more than enough for those who are seeking this type of accommodation.