

AN INTRODUCTION TO CARIBBEAN PRINCESS

By

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Caribbean Princess towers over the pier like a large white building. At 112,894 gross tons, she is a large ship capable of accommodating more than 3,000 passengers. Entering service in 2004, Caribbean Princess is similar to P&O Cruises' Ventura, and is one of Princess Cruises' popular Grand-class mega-cruise ships.

While Caribbean Princess offers an American style cruising experience, it is not like an American theme park. There is no neon or whimsical, pop-art style sculptures in the public areas. Rather, the public rooms are done in a contemporary-style with light wood paneling and marble dominating. Indeed, some public areas such as The Wheelhouse Bar are even more restrained and resemble a gentleman's club with dark paneling, over-stuffed leather chairs and nautical paintings depicting early P&O ships. (P&O was Princess Cruises' parent company until 2003. Both companies are now part of Carnival Corporation).

The lifestyle is more casual than on the line's traditional British affiliates, Cunard and P&O. Yet somewhat more formal than American

competitor Royal Caribbean. Typically, there are only two formal nights on a nine-night cruise and for these most men wear a jacket and tie rather than a dinner suit. The remainder of the time, the attire is a loose version of business casual. People are on the ship to relax.

Caribbean Princess offers both traditional dining and a more flexible dining program known as "Anytime Dining". One of the three nearly identical dining rooms is devoted to traditional dining where each guest has a reserved table and is assigned to one of the two seatings. Guests on Anytime Dining can use either of the other two dining rooms and can arrive for dinner when they wish. However, just as with restaurants ashore, guests may have to wait a short time for a table at popular hours.

There are several alternative dining venues on Caribbean Princess. The line has a long Italian connection extending back to its early days when its fleet consisted of chartered Italian ships. Today, this connection is most evident in the line's extra-tariff specialty restaurant Sabatini's, named after the 200 year-old establishment in Florence. Here,

dinners are presented with a sampling menu of Italian dishes prior to the main course and desert. The room has murals of the Italian country side and fragrant aromas drift out from the open kitchen.

The other specialty restaurant is the Crown Grill, which replaced an earlier beef-centric alternative, the Sterling Steakhouse. While the Sterling recalled the establishments frequented by the cattle barons of the American West, the Crown Grill has more of the atmosphere of a sophisticated New York steakhouse. In addition to premium beef dishes cooked individually as ordered, the Crown offers lobster, salmon and other seafood dishes.

As seen by the rise of celebrity chefs such as Gordon Ramsay and all of the television programs devoted to cooking, people have become interested both in who is preparing dinner and how it is done. In line with this, Caribbean Princess offers "The Chef's Table." Once or twice during a cruise, small groups of ten guests are taken behind the scenes into the ship's main galley for a tour conducted by the ship's executive chef and the maitre d' hotel. There, they see not only how the food is prepared but also what happens between the time a guest places an order and when the meal reaches the table. Both the chef and the maitre d' give insights into the process and dishes.

But, this is not just a tour. In a relatively quiet corner of the galley, the guests are welcomed by glasses of French champagne. The chef then brings a series of specially-prepared appetizers including foie gras terrine, tuna carpaccio and caviar on strips of potato. Following this, the guests adjourn to the adjacent dining room for a multi-course gourmet meal paired with wine. Periodically, the chef and the maitre d' comment on the dishes. At the end of the evening, each guest receive a beautifully bound book of recipes used on the Princess ships.

There are always several entertainment options to choose from in the evening. Instead of having one great theater designed to house all of the guests, Caribbean Princess has a large theater plus two large lounges, each of which has a different type of entertainment. There are also smaller bars and nightclubs. "The philosophy on Princess



has always been that we keep the space quite intimate and we use the space to create more options, more variety, and more choice," explains Peter van der Schee of Princess UK. Since different people have different tastes and interests, the guests spread out throughout the ship, which makes the ship feel less crowded.

One popular feature is the 28 square meter screen mounted on the open deck. On a tropical evening, guests can lie on deck chairs by the pool or sit in one of the hot tubs and enjoy a recent movie or sporting event. Unobtrusive deck stewards come by with popcorn and blankets.

As the name suggests, Caribbean Princess sails mainly in the Caribbean. In 2008, however, she took over the itineraries that were previously done by her sister ship, Crown Princess. Accordingly, Caribbean Princess spends the Spring and Summer months based in New York sailing to the Eastern Caribbean, Bermuda and Canada/New England. In the winter, she is based in San Juan, Puerto Rico and cruises various Caribbean itineraries.

While Caribbean Princess has its own UK following, her new itineraries are expected to bring her even more UK guests. When Crown Princess was sailing from San Juan, she would typically have 500 UK guests per voyage who flew in to take a pair of back-to-back cruises making for a two-week holiday.

James Deering, Passenger Services Director on Caribbean Princess, sees three reasons why Princess' ships are attractive to UK passengers. First, "I think the style of the ship probably appeals better to the British market than some others." As noted earlier, the ships are more restrained than

some of the other American lines yet not as restrained as some of the traditional British lines.

Second, "Princess does have a British pedigree - - quite a long one through P&O - - there is a certain same blood. Also, a great percentage of our senior management still are Brits or British Empire so if they are not from the UK they are still from Australia or Canada or New Zealand and I think that makes things a bit easier."

Third, "we have Princess UK, a huge office which certainly helps sell the Princess cruises. Some of the cruise lines do not have much of a presence outside the U.S. so it is rather difficult if you live in the UK to buy those cruises."

While Caribbean Princess has her own substantial following as is, Caribbean Princess underwent an extensive re-fit in January 2009 designed to give her all of the features offered in the subsequent ships of her class and more. This included: the addition of The Sanctuary, an adults-only spa and relaxation area on the open decks; a re-designed atrium that includes the International Café coffee and pastries venue, a sushi bar, as well as space in which entertainers perform throughout the day. There was also replacement of carpeting, repainting and wallpapering. Thus, in addition to having all of the features of the newest Princess ships, Caribbean Princess, as Mr. Deering put it, has "a really nice new feel and look about her."

