



The suite life

The suite-class revolution is under way, but do guests really get more bang for their buck?

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It's a growing trend. Premium as well as mainstream cruise lines are increasingly going after more-affluent clients prepared to pay more. While sticking to their main brand positioning, these lines are both copying the luxury lines and innovating to appeal to a wider audience.

This 'ship within a ship' concept is catching on. It's something Cunard, MSC Cruises and Norwegian have been doing for some time, but last year

Celebrity Cruises and Royal Caribbean International also got on board and introduced their own versions.

Each line has different inclusions for their suite classes, but generally it's all about exclusivity - private access to bars, swimming pools, restaurants - and even better service than already exists in the cruise sector. Think of it as similar to an airline, where first and business-class passengers

get more benefits than those in economy. But, just as in the world of air travel, guests have to be prepared to pay more for perks.

Cunard was one of the first to introduce an upgraded offering for guests willing to pay more. Guests staying in Grills suites and penthouses get their own butlers, an extra-special afternoon tea and access to the exclusive Queens Grill Restaurant, a private lounge and terrace. While the Grills suites are highly



DESTINATIONS SUITE CLASS CRUISE



→ regarded and counted among the best in the industry, Cunard bosses have admitted the rooms on *Queen Mary 2* need updating. The line's flagship will head into drydock in Hamburg in May for the most expensive ship refurbishment in Carnival UK's history and will emerge in June with new contemporary and modern Grills suites.

MSC Cruises offers seven nights in the Yacht Club on *MSC Fantasia* from £1,399. The price includes flights from London and is based on a May 1 departure from Genoa sailing to Cannes, Majorca, Barcelona, Ajaccio, Naples and Le Spezia. mscbook.co.uk

Norwegian Cruise Line offers seven nights on *Norwegian Escape* staying in a The Haven Spa Suite with a balcony from £2,169. The sailing departs Miami on April 23, sailing to the US Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, the Bahamas and back to Miami. ncl.co.uk

Celebrity Cruises offers 14 nights in a Sky Suite on *Celebrity Eclipse* for £3,750. The price is for the line's Scandinavia and Russia sailing, departing on June 5, and excludes flights. cruisingpower.co.uk



RIGHT: Royal Suite Class service, Royal Caribbean

BELOW LEFT: MSC Yacht Club, *MSC Splendida*

BELOW RIGHT: The Haven, Norwegian Cruise Line



Norwegian's The Haven is more akin to a luxury line than a family-friendly and activity-crazy brand

feature on the Fantasia-class ships. They'll have a more modern feel than previous Yacht Clubs and the changes will enable the line to rectify the location of the restaurant by housing it within the club area. New features

also include larger balconies within the Royal Suites. There will be two Royal Suites on the two new ships, each with outdoor hot tubs.

Like rival MSC's Yacht Club, Norwegian Cruise Line's The Haven area has a completely different feel to the rest of a ship. It's more akin to a luxury cruise line than a family-friendly and activity-crazy brand. In this area, you leave the ropes course and mini golf behind and head to a world that's more like a members-only club.

The VIP area on Norwegian's fleet comes complete with 24-hour butler service. The piece de resistance is the courtyard at the centre of The Haven, with a swimming pool, hot tub and private fitness area. As well as being able to saunter around The Haven, suite guests also get priority access to the spa and the gym.

On newest ship *Norwegian Escape*, The Haven has been extended by one deck, giving luxury lovers even more space to wine and dine.

Celebrity Cruises may have introduced its suite class only last →



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→ April, but the line has already stepped it up a notch with the introduction of extra benefits. From this month, guests now get Bulgari toiletries and Perrier-Jouët champagne on arrival. That's on top of butlers, private dining room Luminae, access to Michael's Club lounge and all-inclusive drinks.

The newest line to introduce a suite-class proposition is Celebrity's sister brand Royal Caribbean International. The line is targeting "discerning adventurers" with its launch of Royal Suite Class, which offers suite guests three service levels based on their suite category. It will also feature a 'Royal Genie' instead of private butlers.

Royal Suite Class will be available from May on *Anthem of the Seas*, *Quantum of the Seas*, *Allure of the Seas* and *Oasis of the Seas*, and also on new ships *Harmony of the Seas* and *Ovation*

of the Seas when they launch this spring.

Michael Bayley, president and chief executive, said: "The new Royal Suite Class redefines luxury at sea with exceptional experiences that discerning travellers will appreciate."

Arguably, the suites phenomenon has been created by the mainstream and premium lines in a bid to hold on to passengers who have aspirations of moving up to luxury brands such as Crystal Cruises, Silversea and Regent Seven Seas Cruises, where having a butler and all-inclusive benefits is commonplace.

These five-star lines are also stepping up their offering to retain significant differentiation from the mainstream brands. Silversea is adding more inclusive aspects, with free Wi-Fi and free shore excursions, while Crystal is expanding its offering by delving into the river cruise sector,



ABOVE: Luminae restaurant, *Celebrity Eclipse*

yachting and luxury air charters.

Regent Seven Seas, however, is ensuring its suites remain the cream of the crop – and it will certainly be hard to beat the most expensive suite at sea. The Regent Suite, on new ship *Seven Seas Explorer*, which launches in July, will be not only the most

pricey at sea but also the largest.

The suite, which sleeps two, is a massive 3,875sq ft and costs £42,799 per person. With a price tag like that, guests will expect to be treated like a king or queen, and with its own in-suite sauna and steam room, they'll certainly feel like royalty. **TW**



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