

Economy tugging at cruise prices

2010 promises more mega ships

BY PHIL REIMER, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JANUARY 21, 2010



Oasis of the Seas is the biggest cruise ship in the world, but it will soon be joined by even more mega-ships.

Photograph by: Handout photo, Royal Caribbean International

The one word for cruising in 2010 is uncertainty. It all comes down to economics, so pricing will determine how the cruise lines do in 2010.

The great bargains we saw in 2009 attracted many new cruisers. The perks and the sales now on offer indicate that these bargains might continue for at least the first half of 2010.

Some luxury brands and river cruise lines are offering free airfare and other perks to entice customers, while others offer large savings for solo travellers.

Should you book ahead or wait? Many of the cruisers who waited in 2009 won out, and cruise lines admit they expect to see that trend continue in 2010, although not to the same degree.

And the tap has not been turned off for new ships. Oasis stole the show in 2009. Now its sister ship, Allure, will add another 6,000 beds to the Caribbean this year. If that wasn't enough, more mega

ships are coming.

Epic is NCL's new ship launching in late June. It will cross the Caribbean on seven-day cruises. If you book back-to-back cruises, you can traverse the Caribbean in one direction and then return on the 14-day sailing. Bookings are also available on Epic's cruise from Europe to New York and the Caribbean.

Each new mega ship attempts to impress. Epic's unique features will be located on various decks. Freestyle dining started by NCL continues at Epic's 12 restaurants. The ship's rooms are different, more rounded. There are quad rooms for families. The 128 budget cabins, each only 100 square feet, will be attached to common areas that have a bar, lots of televisions and a concierge to take care of the small details. Luxury courtyard villas will be back on Epic.

Many of the new ships scheduled to launch this year are sister ships of those already sailing.

In July, Holland America's Nieuw Amsterdam, a sister ship to Eurodam, will launch and sail in Europe before travelling to North America.

Queen Elizabeth, a sister to Queen Victoria, is set to sail in October. There will be changes to the QE's interior and a glass roof over the games deck. It will also have a large dance floor, the biggest library at sea and guest speakers that highlight Cunard's classic style of cruising.

Celebrity is launching the third of its Solstice class ships, Eclipse. While there is little new with this ship, we are told that the fourth and fifth ships of that class will feature several changes.

If you really want to get close to the ocean, try Sea Cloud Cruise's new Sea Cloud Hussar, a full-rigged, three-masted tall ship scheduled to launch in November. It's loaded with the latest upscale amenities and will offer more of a pure sailing experience.

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