

Over
6 million
Unofficial
Guides
sold!



the
Unofficial
Guide®

DISNEY Cruise Line 2024

- Reviews and ratings of Disney Cruise Line's restaurants and live shows
- Money-saving tips on when to book

Erin Foster with Len Testa



The *Disney Dream* docked at Castaway Cay
Photo: Erin Foster



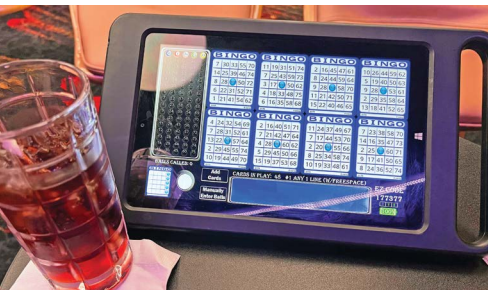
The *Disney Wonder* leaves Nassau at twilight after a day in port.
Photo: Laurel Stewart



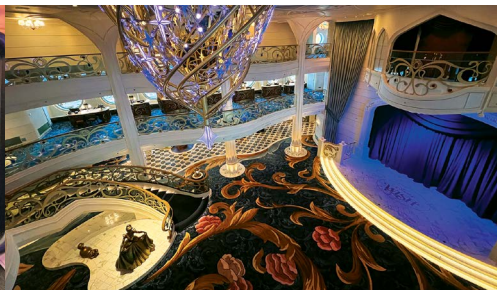
Castaway Cay hosts the *Disney Fantasy*.
Photo: Erin Foster



Disney Cruise Line sailing out of New York City Photo: Erin Foster



Bingo is a popular diversion on all the Disney ships. Photo: Erin Foster



The *Wish*'s atrium hosts character greetings and has a small stage for performances.
Photo: Erin Foster



The *Dream* decked out in holiday finery
Photo: Erin Foster



The decor gets spooky on Halloween cruises.
Photo: Erin Foster

CONTENTS

List of Diagrams and Maps vi

About the Authors vii

Acknowledgments viii

Introduction 1

Cruising in the Time of COVID 1

About This Guide 3

Disney Cruise Line: An Overview 4

How to Contact the Authors 14

PART 1 Dollars and Sense 16

What's Included in Your Disney Cruise Fare 16

Cruising With Kids 20

Cruising Without Kids 21

Where to Find More Information 22

Is It Worth It? 24

PART 2 Planning Your Cruise 28

Choosing an Itinerary 28

Saving Money 33

Surf and Turf, Disney-Style 40

Back-to-Back Cruising 41

The Booking Process 43

Other Prep Work 49

Disney World vs. Disney Cruise Line: How to Decide 79

Castaway Club 83

PART 3 Staterooms 86

How Stateroom Category Affects Your Cruise Price 87

Our Stateroom Recommendations 89

Booking a Cruise Without Selecting a Stateroom 103

Concierge Level: What You Need to Know, and If It's Worth It 104

Stateroom Selection for Larger Parties 105

Get to Know Your Verandah 107

Making Changes to Your Stateroom Reservation 108

Choosing a Stateroom 109

PART 4 Arriving, Getting Your Sea Legs, and Departing 116

- Transportation to Your Cruise 116
- The Day Before Your Cruise 123
- Get in the Boat, Folks! 127
- Bare Necessities 134
- Checkout and Departure 143

PART 5 Tips for Varied Circumstances 148

- DCL for Solo Travelers 148
- DCL for Single Parents 150
- DCL for Larger Guests 150
- DCL If You're Expecting 151
- DCL for Younger Children 152
- DCL for Older Teens 153
- DCL for Seniors 153
- DCL for Large Groups 154
- DCL for Guests with Disabilities 155
- Dietary Restrictions 159
- Smoking on Board 160
- Traveling With Medication 160
- Friends of Bill W. 161
- LGBTQ+ Travelers 161
- Reluctant Cruisers 162

PART 6 The Ships at a Glance 164

- Overview and Our Recommendations 164
- The *Disney Magic* 167
- The *Disney Wonder* 170
- The *Disney Dream* 171
- The *Disney Fantasy* 172
- The *Disney Wish* 172
- The *Disney Treasure* 173
- Magic/Wonder* Deck Plans 175
- Dream/Fantasy* Deck Plans 178
- Wish/Treasure* Deck Plans 182

PART 7 Dining 186

- Noshes, Noshes Everywhere 186
- Disney Magic* Dining 203
- Disney Wonder* Dining 207
- Disney Dream* Dining 209
- Disney Fantasy* Dining 214
- Disney Wish* and *Treasure* Dining 217

PART 8 Entertainment and Nightlife 223

- Live Theater on the Ships 223
- Movies 229
- Television and News 230
- Live Sports and Other Broadcast Entertainment 231
- Themed Events and Holiday Entertainment 231
- Nightclubs, Bars, Cafés, and Lounges 237

PART 9 Activities, Recreation, and Shopping 262

- Family Activities 262
- Children's Programs and Activities 265
- Pools and Water-Play Areas 287
- Onboard Seminars 294
- Sports and Fitness 296
- Spas 298
- Shopping 303
- Onboard Photography 310
- Religious Services 311
- What to Do During a Day at Sea 311

PART 10 Disney's Private Islands 313

- What to Bring 313
- What to Do on Castaway Cay 316
- Where to Relax on Castaway Cay 317
- Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point 319

PART 11 Itineraries at a Glance 321

- Overview 321
- Alaska 322
- Atlantic Canada 323
- Caribbean, Bahamas, and Bermuda 324
- Hawaii 326
- Mexico 327
- Northern Europe, British Isles, and Norway 328
- Pacific Coast 329
- Panama Canal 329
- South Pacific, Australia, and New Zealand 330
- Southern Europe and Mediterranean 331
- Transatlantic 332

PART 12 Port Adventures 334

- Overview 334
- Finding Port Adventures 336
- Port Adventures on Castaway Cay 339
- Nassau 344
- Beyond Castaway Cay and Nassau 348

PART 13 River and Expedition Cruising 350

- Overview 350
- River Cruising for Families 351
- Excursions on an AbD River Cruise 353
- More Differences Between AbD and DCL Cruises 356
- Traveling with Adventures by Disney 359
- Cost Considerations 359
- Expedition Cruising 363
- What's Next for Disney and Small-Ship Cruising? 364

DCL Glossary 365**Index 370**

INTRODUCTION

CRUISING *in the* **TIME of COVID**

THE GLOBAL TRAVEL INDUSTRY has largely returned to its pre-COVID normal. Port Canaveral broke numerous records of cruise-guest arrivals and departures in 2022 and 2023. In late 2022, *Seatrade Cruise News* reported that Disney Cruise Line revenue passed pre-pandemic levels and that the *Disney Wish* was routinely sailing at 90% or more occupancy. You will, however, encounter occasional remnants of the precautionary practices instituted during the immediate return to travel after the massive COVID shutdowns of 2020 and 2021.

While the Disney Cruise Line experience has largely returned to pre-COVID norms, there are still areas where veteran cruisers will notice modifications to their previous sailing experiences, such as QR code menus in some locations (initiated to reduce COVID transmission via high-contact surfaces) and enhancements to the mandatory precruise health questionnaire (see page 50), but these are now limited to minor inconveniences. Similarly, some port locations may continue to enforce COVID-era precautions. For example, while masks are optional (though strongly encouraged) at most Broadway shows in New York City, some theaters still require them for select performances. These adjustments may last through 2024, or they may fall by the wayside entirely. Most likely, however, COVID-related protocols will simply continue to evolve, being updated and tweaked as conditions warrant.

That said, depending on when you sail, you might see pre- or post-pandemic practices implemented. But more likely, with much about the virus still in flux, you'll experience a continuum, with more-restrictive practices implemented while the virus is more pervasive and

back, in whole or in part, in response to a future COVID outbreak or other medical situation. With this possibility in mind, here's a recap of the more restrictive practices implemented on DCL ships at various points during 2021 and 2022:

- COVID vaccinations required for all guests or for all guests above a certain age
- Precruise proctored home tests, precruise COVID tests at the port, both precruise and port testing, testing for guests of certain age groups, or testing for unvaccinated guests
- Sailings without port stops
- Mask requirements for all indoor and outdoor venues on board, except when eating or drinking
- Reservation requirements for kids' clubs and limits on time spent in them
- Closure of onboard nurseries
- Fewer stage performances and movie screenings to allow for social distancing in theaters
- Suspension of deck parties and other mass gatherings
- Use of spa and fitness center by timed reservation only
- Suspension of character greetings
- Delayed sail-away times
- Capacity restrictions for pools and/or reservation requirements for pool access
- Cafeteria-style service at the buffets

While we are not expecting that any of these precautions will be in effect in 2024 or beyond, if the COVID pandemic has taught us anything it's that travelers should hope for the best but prepare for the worst. All Disney Cruise Line guests should check DCL's Know Before Your Go webpage (tinyurl.com/DCLKnowBeforeYouGo) multiple times prior to their sail date to be sure they are aware of and compliant with current protocols.

ABOUT *this* GUIDE

WHY "UNOFFICIAL"?

THE MATERIAL HEREIN originated with the authors and has not been reviewed, edited, or approved by the Walt Disney Company Inc. or Disney Cruise Line. To the contrary, we represent and serve you, the consumer: if a ship serves mediocre food or has subpar entertainment, we say so. Through our independence, we hope we can make selecting a cruise efficient and economical and help make your cruise experience on-target and fun.

Toward that end, our *unofficial* guide offers the following:

- Our recommendations for which ship to choose for your first cruise
- When to book your cruise to get the cheapest fare

- What to pack, including travel documents for you and your children
- Color photos from throughout the ships, along with deck and stateroom plans
- Unbiased reviews of onboard restaurants, live entertainment, and nightlife
- Our recommendations for the best family activities: kids’ clubs, games, outdoor sports, and more
- Coverage of Disney’s private islands, Castaway Cay and Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point, along with chapters about ports of call and shore excursions
- Tips on how to choose the best stateroom for your needs
- Comparisons of DCL vacations with Royal Caribbean cruise vacations, Walt Disney World vacations, and Adventures by Disney (AbD) river-cruise vacations

DISNEY CRUISE LINE:

An Overview

DISNEY CRUISE LINE SHIPS AT A GLANCE						
	<i>Disney Magic</i>	<i>Disney Wonder</i>	<i>Disney Dream</i>	<i>Disney Fantasy</i>	<i>Disney Wish</i>	<i>Disney Treasure</i>
YEAR LAUNCHED	1998	1999	2011	2012	2022	2024
CAPACITY						
PASSENGERS	2,713	2,713	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
CREW	950	950	1,458	1,458	1,555	1,555
TOTAL CAPACITY	3,663	3,663	5,458	5,458	5,555	5,555
PASSENGER DECKS	11	11	14	14	15	15
STATEROOMS						
INSIDE	256	256	150	150	121	123
OCEANVIEW	362	362	199	199	185	185
OUTSIDE VERANDAH	259	259	901	901	948	948
TOTAL STATEROOMS	877	877	1,250	1,250	1,254	1,256
DESIGN/DECOR	Art Deco	Art Nouveau	Art Deco	Art Nouveau	Enchantment*	Adventure**

* Gothic, Baroque, and French Rococo
** Gilded palace with Asian and African artistic influences

IN 1998, the Walt Disney Company launched its cruise line with the 2,400-passenger **Disney Magic**. An almost identical ship, the **Disney Wonder**, entered service in 1999. Two larger ships, the **Disney Dream** and **Disney Fantasy**, joined the fleet in 2011 and 2012, respectively. In 2016, DCL announced they would be building two additional ships. A year later, this was amended to include a third new ship. The **Disney Wish**, the first of this new generation of ships, now known as the **Wish Class** ships, set sail during summer 2022. The second *Wish* class ship, the *Disney Treasure*, is scheduled to launch Christmas week 2024. The third *Wish* class ship is presumed to set sail in 2025.

PART 1

DOLLARS *and* SENSE

WHAT'S INCLUDED *in your* DISNEY CRUISE FARE

AS MENTIONED EARLIER, a Disney cruise isn't cheap. Given the cost, you might be wondering how much more you'll have to pay once you're aboard the ship. Here's a quick rundown of what is and isn't included in your cruise fare. We've included some rough estimates of the optional items to help you with budgeting.

FOOD

INCLUDED: LOTS OF FOOD All meals, including snacks, are free at all of the ship's restaurants *except* the adult-dining venues **Enchanté**, **Palo**, **Palo Steakhouse**, and **Remy**.

NOT INCLUDED: FANCY RESTAURANTS **Remy** and **Enchanté** cost an additional \$135 per person for dinner and \$80 for brunch. **Palo** and **Palo Steakhouse** cost \$50 per person at brunch and dinner. **Palo's** dinner is fixed-price, but be aware that many popular dishes are no longer included in the cost of your meal; they're now à la carte only. Keeping that in mind, and figuring in tips and alcohol, you'll likely pay considerably more than the quoted \$50.

INCLUDED: MOST ROOM-SERVICE FOOD Your fare includes room-service meals, except as noted on page 192. Room service is a great option if you're in the mood for breakfast on your verandah or you don't feel like dressing up for dinner.

INCLUDED: ALL-YOU-WANT SOFT DRINKS AND ICE CREAM Soda, coffee, water, cocoa, and hot and iced tea are free and unlimited at meals, as are beverages served from the drink dispensers on deck. Soft-serve ice cream is also free, but the specialty ice creams sold at **Vanellope's Sweets & Treats** on the *Dream*, **Sweet on You** on the *Fantasy*, **Inside Out: Joyful Sweets** on the *Wish*, and **Jambeaux's Sweets** on the *Treasure* cost extra, as do the specialty smoothies at the pool-deck windows and in the spas.

PLANNING YOUR CRUISE

CHOOSING *an* ITINERARY

DISNEY CRUISE LINE OFFERS more than 50 different itineraries that cover 11 geographic regions or major routes, classified as follows: **Alaska, Bahamas, Bermuda, Canadian Coastline, Caribbean, Northern Europe** and the **Mediterranean, Hawaii, Mexico, New Zealand** and **Australia, Pacific Coast, Panama Canal, South Pacific, and Transatlantic**.

These cruises don't fit neatly into their assigned geographic categories as defined by Disney, however. For example, both Bahamian and Caribbean cruises stop at Disney's private islands in the Bahamas; the sailings that DCL classifies as Canadian stop only along the Atlantic Coast; and its Alaska cruises include Vancouver, British Columbia, as a port of call.

unofficial TIP

The average DCL cruise lasts five nights, sails somewhere in the Caribbean, and stops at one of Disney's private islands in the Bahamas.

Further muddying the waters, so to speak, Disney breaks out a number of these cruise regions into subcategories. For instance, Caribbean cruises encompass Eastern, Southern, and Western Caribbean itineraries, while European cruises comprise British Isles, Mediterranean, Northern European,

Norwegian Fjords, and Western European itineraries—which are sometimes subdivided even further into trips with names such as “Mediterranean with Greek Isles” and “Norwegian Fjords with Iceland.”

DCL uses **repositioning cruises** whenever it needs to move a ship between the US and Europe, between the Atlantic and the Pacific, or from one base port to another within a geographic area (say, from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Port Canaveral, Florida). Any cruise that starts at one port and ends at another is a repositioning cruise, the most notable being **South Pacific, Transatlantic, and Panama Canal** cruises.

To appeal to as wide an audience as possible, Disney cruises vary in length (and price) within each geographic area. Guests interested in visiting the Bahamas, for instance, can choose from cruises of three, four, five, or even seven nights.

PART 3

STATEROOMS

DCL'S SHIPS BOAST some of the largest cabins in the industry, which helps explain why its fares are correspondingly high. An inside cabin,

unofficial TIP

On the *Dream* and *Fantasy*, (some inside cabins have **virtual portholes**, or video screens that combine real-time views from outside the ship with animated snippets of Disney characters. Many kids prefer these to actual Verandah views, and inside cabins are usually much less expensive.

generally the least expensive room on any ship, is 169–184 square feet on Disney's ships, compared with 114–165 square feet on Royal Caribbean and 160–185 on Carnival. Disney's Oceanview and Verandah (balcony) cabins are also larger than Royal Caribbean's and Carnival's.

Besides being more spacious, DCL's bathroom layout is superior to that in staterooms on other cruise lines. All but the smallest inside cabins have a split-

bath design, in which the shower and toilet each has its own door and sink. The advantage is that two people can get ready at the same time. (Category 11 staterooms have the shower and toilet in the same compartment.)

Clever incorporation of storage space is another plus. Most DCL staterooms have two closets, each big enough to store one large suitcase or two small ones; under-bed storage for carry-on or soft-sided

unofficial TIP

luggage; and several drawers built into the desk area. Additional nooks and crannies are scattered throughout each stateroom. Wish staterooms have fewer dresser drawers and more storage shelves than staterooms on the other DCL ships. Packing cubes can help you contain and separate family members' belongings.

But while Disney staterooms are generally larger than those on other cruise lines, they're still smaller than the typical hotel room. For example, a room at a Walt Disney World Value hotel, such as Pop Cen-

tury Resort, is about 260 square feet—about 40% larger than a DCL Inside Stateroom. Even a well-appointed Family Oceanview Stateroom with Verandah tops out at 304 square feet, a little smaller than a room at a Disney Moderate resort, such as Caribbean Beach Resort.

HOW STATEROOM CATEGORY AFFECTS *your* CRUISE PRICE

ALONG WITH YOUR departure date and how far in advance you book, the type of stateroom you choose is one of the major factors that determine your cruise's cost.

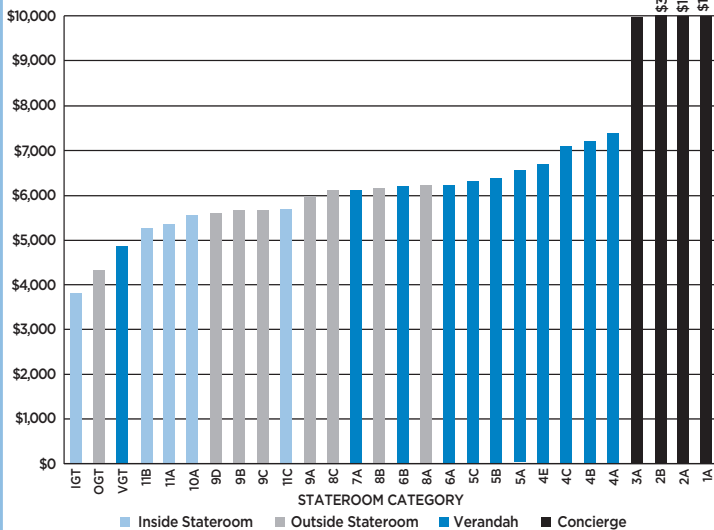
The chart below shows how much a fare increases, based on the cabin category, for a typical seven-night cruise on the Disney Fantasy for two adults and two children.

A Category 4A stateroom—the most expensive non-Concierge category—costs, on average, about \$2,000 (30%) more than the least expensive cabin. With that higher cost, though, you get another 130 square feet of space and a better view.

What's remarkable is the steady upward movement of the lines until you reach Concierge level. This shows that Disney is very consistent in its pricing across stateroom categories. That's interesting, because there aren't the same number of staterooms in each category—the vast majority are Verandah Staterooms, but in this case a larger supply doesn't equal a lower price. Disney seems to have just the right amount of each type of stateroom to meet guest demand.

Average Cruise Fares by Stateroom Category on the *Disney Fantasy*

Prices listed are for a 7-night cruise and assume 2 adults and 2 children



• **CATEGORY 1A** (*Wish*): Concierge *Wish* Tower Suite

MAXIMUM OCCUPANCY 8 people

SIZE (square feet) 1,966

DESCRIPTION With subtle *Moana* theming, the *Wish* Tower Suite features two main bedrooms, four full bathrooms, and one half-bath; an eight-seat dining table; a pantry with dishwasher, refrigerator, and coffee maker; a library (which can serve as a bedroom, if needed); and a kids' room with built-in bunk beds. The lower-level living room affords views across the ship's upper decks through a two-story window wall. The main bedrooms, both on the upper level, have walk-in closets, king-size beds, and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the living area. The main bathrooms each have rainfall showerheads, double-sink vanities, and spa tubs. All fixtures and finishes are top-of-the-line. The tower is located inside the ship's forward funnel stack on Decks 14 and 15 (this is the only area designated as Deck 15 on the entire ship). (Note: No floor-plan art was available for this suite at press time.)

BOOKING *a* CRUISE *without* SELECTING *a* STATEROOM

UNLIKE BOOKING A HOTEL, where you typically don't find out your exact room until you arrive, most guests booking a Disney cruise choose a specific stateroom when they make their reservation. When a preferred stateroom category is nearly full, however, DCL offers what's known as a **GTY reservation**. *GTY* stands for "guarantee," meaning you're guaranteed to be in a particular category of room or a higher category, but you won't know exactly which cabin you're in until immediately before you depart. *GTY* reservations are often offered close to the ship's sail date.

Other acronyms you might see are **VGT** (Verandah Guarantee), **OGT** (Oceanview Guarantee), and **IGT** (Inside Guarantee), which are typically used when DCL is offering a last-minute discount on a cruise that's not selling well. There are a number of restrictions on these fares—the cruise must be paid in full at booking time, for example—but there are often good deals to be had if you're willing to leave your stateroom selection up in the air.

Note: *GTY*, *VGT*, *OGT*, and *IGT* rates don't typically appear on the DCL website until about three months before the sailing date, so if you're booking far in advance, you won't see these prices listed. If you have more flexibility, however, booking a *GTY* room can save you money. In late April 2023, for example, we spot-checked prices for a **7-Night Eastern Caribbean Cruise** on the *Fantasy* in June 2023, about eight weeks in advance of the sailing. The lowest available price for a Deluxe Oceanview Stateroom for a party of two adults in a specific location was \$5,633. The *GTY* rate for the same sailing and the same party was \$5,563—a savings of \$70 right off the bat. While that may

ARRIVING, GETTING YOUR SEA LEGS, *and* DEPARTING

TRANSPORTATION *to* YOUR CRUISE

CHOOSING A DEPARTURE PORT BASED ON TIME AND MONEY

THE LOCATION OF your departure port affects the transportation cost of your cruise. Driving yourself to the port, of course, is your least

unofficial TIP

If you're flying in from North America for a DCL European cruise, consider arriving **two days** before you sail. This will not only serve as a buffer against flight cancellations but will also give you a bit of extra time to recover from jet lag.

expensive option if you live within a reasonable distance. If you'll be flying to the port, though, you need to think about not only money but also time and logistics.

In past editions, we have recommended **flying in at least a day before you sail**. Post-pandemic, we want to add glow-in-the-dark paint, multicolored glitter, and flashing neon lights to this advice (see page 122 for more thoughts on air travel).

GETTING TO AND FROM THE PORT

MOST NORTH AMERICAN DCL guests have three options for getting to their departure destination: booking transportation through Disney, booking through a third-party service, or driving themselves. The following section covers all three options in detail.

Using Disney Transportation from the Airport or a Disney-Approved Hotel

If you're flying to **Orlando International Airport (MCO)**, you can use DCL's shuttle service to get to Port Canaveral. Per-person fares are \$78 round-trip, \$39 one-way, and free for kids under age 3. DCL recommends that your flight into Orlando arrive by **1:45 p.m.** on embarkation

airports, the type of plane, or other particulars that can turn a good trip into a logistical headache. You may also find that refunds are more difficult to obtain if you arrange your flight through Disney.

If you're looking for bargains on airfare, your first stop should be a website such as **Expedia**, **Google Flights**, **Kayak**, **Orbitz**, **Priceline**, or **Travelocity**; many of these sites will also find you discounts on hotels and rental cars. Sites like **Airfare Watchdog** (airfarewatchdog.com) and **Scott's Cheap Flights** (scottscheapflights.com) can send you alerts about airfare discounts. That said, if things go sideways with the airlines, it can be easier to switch your flight or get rerouted in a timely manner if you've booked directly with the airline.

The **DAY BEFORE** *your* **CRUISE**

STAYING AT A LOCAL HOTEL THE NIGHT BEFORE

YOUR CRUISE WILL start on time whether you're on the ship or not. Again, we strongly recommend arriving at your departure destination a day or more before you sail and spending the night at a local hotel. Yes, it adds another day to your trip's length and lodging adds to your trip's cost—but we think the peace of mind you get from knowing you'll make your cruise is worth it.

You can book your pre- or postcruise hotel stay through Disney as part of your vacation package, no matter which port you're sailing from. This has its advantages and disadvantages:

THE PROS Disney has vetted the property, so you're unlikely to end up in a dump. Plus, transportation to/from the port will be seamless if you've also purchased ground transfers (see page 117).

THE CONS Your choices of properties and price points are generally limited to chains like Hilton, Hyatt, and Marriott. If you want to stay at a hip boutique hotel, you'll probably have to book it on your own.

For the type A trip planner, booking a hotel through Disney can feel (to use a travel metaphor) like flying blind. Before one DCL Alaskan cruise, for instance, we had Disney book our pretrip accommodations at the Fairmont Vancouver Airport Hotel. Because we booked through DCL, we received no direct information about our room reservation—not even a confirmation number. Then, about six weeks before our trip, we called the Fairmont to find out what type of room we were booked in, only to be told that they didn't know. As it turns out, Disney doesn't send your hotel your room preferences—or even your name—until about two weeks before you check in.

If you're driving to the port, most hotels near cruise terminals offer inexpensive parking and shuttle transportation. There are exceptions, of course, but parking rates are often substantially less than what you'd pay at the terminal. In Port Canaveral, for example, parking at many hotels costs less than \$10 per day, compared with \$17 per day to park at the terminal.

muster.) DCL is now back to the traditional assembly drill, with every guest participating at the same time. *Note:* If a member of your party has autism or experiences sensory issues, you may qualify for a modified muster experience. See the DCL information form for guests with autism spectrum disorder (tinyurl.com/DCLwithAutism).

Your KTTW Card lists your assigned lifeboat station; you'll also find it listed on the DCL Navigator app.

BARE NECESSITIES

CAN YOU CRUISE WITHOUT A PHONE?

PRE-PANDEMIC, it was perfectly possible to take a DCL cruise without a cell phone. You could use an old-school camera if you wanted to take photos, rely on paper sources of information, and call or text your family on the ship with a portable device called a Wave Phone. Post-pandemic, however, managing the key aspects of your cruise while on board is virtually impossible without a smartphone or tablet. Communicating with family and friends on different parts of the ship requires use of the Navigator app. Your dining rotation and the ship's activity schedule are listed on the app, as are reservations and instructions for port excursions. Onboard booking of some activities is done via the app. Some bar menus are now only available via QR code. And so on.

There are some workarounds. For example, you could stop by Guest Services to ask about your dining rotation. The activity schedule is listed on your stateroom TV; you could watch the scroll and make notes about what you want to do, or you could beg Guest Services for a basic schedule printout (we've had about 50/50 luck making this happen). But in general, you'll have a much smoother onboard experience if you have access to a smartphone or tablet.

Many DCL guests lament losing the ability to unplug on a cruise, and we can sympathize. A veteran cruiser posted this comment in a discussion on DISboards:

I'm attached to my phone or computer 90% of the time I'm awake on any given day. I refuse to be a slave to my phone when cruising.

THE DCL NAVIGATOR APP

THE NAVIGATOR APP lists the daily schedule of events and activities on your ship, along with information about onboard entertainment, specials in the shops, and so on. Available free at the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store, the app works through the ships' onboard Wi-Fi, so you can keep your device in airplane mode while using it; you won't be charged for Wi-Fi if you're using it only with the app. To avoid unnecessary data charges, however, be sure to download the app to all of your family's mobile devices *before* you depart.

The app consists of five main categories: **Dining Information** (including the menus for your ship's dining rooms); **Deck Plans** (maps showing

TIPS *for* VARIED CIRCUMSTANCES

DCL *for* **SOLO TRAVELERS**

BECAUSE DCL IS TARGETED to families, roughly 90% of its guests are couples or parents and children. That's about 10 points higher than the cruise industry's average, and it means that there are around 200 solo travelers per cruise on the *Magic* and *Wonder*, and around 400 on the *Dream*, *Fantasy*, and *Wish*.

Like the Disney theme parks, Disney Cruise Line is great for solo travelers. The bars, lounges, and nightclubs are clean, friendly, and interesting; the restaurants are welcoming; and the spas are excellent places for grabbing some solo time in public. One aspect you do have to be vigilant about when traveling alone is shore excursions in foreign countries—more on that a bit later.

If you're interested in meeting other singles, Disney sometimes runs a **Singles Mingle** session on one of the first few days of each cruise. These informal get-togethers last about an hour and are typically

held at the Cove Café in the adults-only part of the ship. We've also seen lunchtime gatherings with the name **Cruisin' Solo**.

Single and not-so-single guests ages 18–20 are welcome to attend an **1820 Society** gathering on one night of their cruise. It's a meet-up attended by guests and crew, generally in the

evening after the second dinner seating and usually at the Cove Café (*Magic*, *Wonder*, *Dream*, and *Fantasy*) or the Hideaway (*Wish* and presumably *Treasure*).

DINING Unless you request otherwise, single travelers will almost certainly be paired with other groups for dinner in the main dining rooms. When we've cruised solo, our dinner companions were usually two couples or several couples and several singles. Our dinners with these new friends have gone well—we've met people from many different

unofficial TIP

If you're not comfortable walking back to your stateroom at night, you can ask a cast member to accompany you.

with familiar essential oils such as lavender and peppermint. (For a list of oils to avoid, see tinyurl.com/EssentialOilsPregnancy.) Again, though, get your doctor's advice before you sail.

OFF THE SHIP **Shore excursions** such as scuba diving, off-road driving, and parasailing prohibit pregnant guests from participating. And some tour operators have restrictions on snorkeling and dolphin encounters. But even if all you have planned is a day of sightseeing or lying on the beach, be aware that the trip to your destination could involve a lengthy trip in a rattletrap vehicle on a bumpy road.

Besides COVID-19, a lingering health concern for pregnant guests is **Zika**, a mosquito-borne virus that causes catastrophic harm to developing fetuses. The last major Zika outbreak was in 2016, but researchers warn that future outbreaks aren't out of the question. Check the **CDC website** (tinyurl.com/CDCZika) for the latest information.

DCL *for* **YOUNGER CHILDREN**

DISNEY CRUISE LINE requires that infants be at **least 6 months of age** to cruise on most sailings from the United States and **at least 1 year of age** on some longer voyages. Here are some key topics to think about if you're traveling with kids ages 5 and younger.

unofficial TIP

For more on cruising with children, see "Cruising with Kids" (page 20), "Make Sure Your Child Is Ready to Cruise" (page 77), and "Special Considerations" (page 267).

SLEEPING DCL furnishes pack-and-play cribs free of charge to families who need them, along with supplies such as bed rails, bottle warmers, and diaper pails. Request these during your online check-in process (see page 63), call DCL at ☎ 800-951-3532 before your sailing, or check with Guest Services on board.

Families traveling with young children should start thinking about sleeping arrangements ahead of their trip. In particular, a crib could make an already-small stateroom feel even smaller, so consider carefully whether you absolutely need one. If you

have a toddler who's still sleeping in a crib at home, consider helping them make the switch to a bed before your cruise. *Note:* DCL may limit the number of cribs per stateroom to one. If you have multiple small children, this advice may be particularly important.

unofficial TIP

If your preferred dinner seating is fully booked before your cruise, keep checking for openings. You may even be able to switch your seating after you're on board.

In general, the younger the child, the closer you'll want to stick to their typical eating and sleeping schedules. In most cases, will that mean

choosing the early dinner seating, but depending on where you sail, you may be competing with lots of other families for a table. (An exception is some European sailings, where the late seating may be more popular.) And if you'll be cruising far from home, be aware that adjusting to a different time zone could play havoc with your child's sleep schedule.

Because of their flexible schedules, retirees can often take advantage of off-peak cruise fares, especially during fall or spring, when the weather is nicest and crowds are lower because school is in session. If you're cruising to the Caribbean, the Bahamas, or Mexico, be sure to bring a jacket and sweater along with your warm-weather clothing. While temperature averages hover around 70°F in most of those locations, a cold front can drop temps into the upper 40s with little notice, and it's not uncommon to have morning temperatures in the lower 50s.

DCL *for* **LARGE GROUPS**

A CRUISE CAN BE a great travel choice for family or class reunions, bachelorette parties, and other groups with diverse interests or dissimilar financial situations. Nobody has to cook or clean, so everybody gets to relax.

One potentially awkward issue, however, is the aforementioned dissimilar financial situations. Whereas you can make educated guesses about this on land—you're at Walt Disney World, for instance, and one set of college classmates and their spouses is staying at the posh Grand Floridian and the other is staying at the budget All-Star Sports—on a DCL ship it's not readily apparent from the hallway whether your stateroom has a tiny porthole or an expansive verandah.

The mostly all-inclusive nature of the cruise means there's no "Hey, she ordered the steak but I ordered the salad—why do I have to chip in for an expensive meal I didn't eat?" That said, extra-cost experiences and activities such as port adventures, wine packages, or dining at the adults-only venues could prove to be sticking points later if you don't bring them up now.

In general, when you're planning a cruise for a large group, try to get answers well in advance to such questions as the following:

- Will everyone be able to afford dinner at one of the adult-dining venues, which cost extra?
- Are the adults always responsible for buying their own alcoholic drinks, or do we want to let different groups take turns buying rounds?
- What kinds of excursions do we like/can we afford? Do we have to do all of the port adventures together?
- How much alone time will each person or subgroup (such as teenagers and seniors) need?
- How much supervision will the kids need on board? How much time can the kids spend in the clubs, and what bedtimes are appropriate?

Many online tools and apps are now available to help you work out the kinks of large-group travel. Four that we like are **Doodle** (doodle.com), which lets you set up online polls about things like travel dates and preferred excursions; **TripIt** (tripit.com), which can keep everyone's airline and pre- or post-trip hotel information organized; and

PART 6

THE SHIPS *at* *a* GLANCE



OVERVIEW *and* OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

LAUNCHED IN 1998, the **Disney Magic** holds roughly 2,700 passengers and 950 crew members. The **Disney Wonder**, with the same capacity, was launched in 1999. The **Disney Dream** and **Disney Fantasy**, which took their maiden voyages in 2011 and 2012, respectively, hold up to 4,000 passengers and 1,450 crew. The **Disney Wish**'s inaugural season began in 2022. Her guest capacity is identical to that of the *Dream* and *Fantasy*, with a slightly higher crew count of 1,555. The **Disney Treasure**, scheduled to launch in late 2024, is expected to be a near twin to the *Wish*.

All six ships share sleek lines, twin smokestacks, and nautical styling that calls to mind classic ocean liners, but with instantly recognizable Disney signatures. The colors—dark blue, white, red, and yellow—and the famous face-and-ears silhouette on the stacks are clearly those of Mickey Mouse. Look closely at the *Magic*'s stern ornamentation, for example, and you'll see a 15-foot Goofy hanging by his overalls. (It's Donald on the *Wonder*'s stern, Mickey on the *Dream*'s, Dumbo on the *Fantasy*'s, and Rapunzel on the *Wish*'s, and Peter Pan and Captain Hook on the *Treasure*'s.)

A reader offers this tip for getting up to speed on the ships' design:

*I highly recommend the **Art of the Ship** tour [see page 265] for adults. We learned all about the interior decorating and decor planning on the ship.*

The ships' interiors combine nautical themes with additional design elements, including Art Nouveau and Art Deco. Art Nouveau, popular at the turn of the 20th century, incorporates natural shapes, such as plants and animals, into its geometric designs; Art Deco has the geometry without the nature—think those sleek, streamlined interiors from 1930s movies.

on guest and crew feedback from the *Wish*. Assume that the *Treasure* will rank just ahead of the *Wish*. The *Wish*, of course, is the bright, shiny new star of the DCL fleet. The pool-deck food is yummy, the kids' clubs are second to none, and the stateroom decor is lovely. Nevertheless, we think Disney made a few missteps, namely the lack of a walking track around the ship, the dearth of drawer storage, and the relatively small scale of the adult lounges—not to mention a few glaring barriers to wheelchair accessibility (see page 156).

Given the premium prices Disney is charging to cruise on the *Wish*, we think you'll have just as lovely a time on the *Dream* and *Fantasy*, which offer significantly better value. These two ships are still in great condition. They have better restaurants, bars, and pools than the two oldest ships, along with more on-deck activities, more space for kids' activities, more deck space for sunbathing, better spas, and more interactive games. These advantages make up for the ships' slightly smaller cabin sizes: non-Concierge staterooms on the *Dream* and *Fantasy*, for example, are 2%–9% (or 5–22 square feet) smaller than corresponding cabins on the *Magic* and *Wonder*.

Of course, some itineraries—basically, any destination that isn't an island—have just one ship as an option. When we want to visit Alaska or Europe, we're happy to be on any of the DCL vessels.

The Disney Magic

DCL'S FIRST SHIP, the *Magic* was launched in 1998 and underwent an extensive renovation during a two-month dry dock in Cádiz, Spain, in 2013. This makeover included cosmetic updates to the lobby atrium; **Keys**, the piano bar; **Palo**, the adults-only, fine-dining Italian restaurant; and **Fathoms**, the dance club. In addition, Vista Spa became **Senses Spa**. The *Magic* underwent additional dry-dock in late 2015, during which a **Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique** kids' makeover salon was added and the **Edge** tween club received a location update.

The *Magic* underwent yet another dry-dock refresh in 2018. **Vibe** teen club received updated decor; the **Cove Café** coffee bar was spruced up; and, most significantly, the uninspired Carioca's dining room was rethemed as **Rapunzel's Royal Table**, featuring elements from *Tangled*.

A 2023 dry dock saw the conversion of some standard staterooms to Concierge staterooms, an update to the Concierge lounge, and the transformation of the Promenade Lounge to the **Soul Cat Lounge**, themed to look like Joe Gardner's favorite music spot from the Disney and Pixar film *Soul*, the Half Note Lounge. Additionally, a new immersive experience, "**An Encanto Celebration**," gives guests an opportunity to meet and take photos with Mirabel and the family member we don't talk about, Bruno.

continued on page 170

continued from page 167

The Disney Wonder

LAUNCHED IN 1999 as the second of DCL's six current ships, the *Wonder* was beginning to show her age by 2016, with visible wear and tear and dated decor in many guest areas. In late 2016, the ship underwent a dry dock with significant updating and retheming, emerging in much better condition and with amenities, entertainment, and fittings on par with the rest of the fleet.

The *Wonder* continues to have the most in common with its sister the *Magic*, but with slightly different theming. When you board the ship at Deck 3, you're greeted by Ariel instead of Mickey and an Art Nouveau-style atrium rather than Art Deco. In keeping with the *Little Mermaid* theme, one of the standard rotational-dining restaurants on the *Wonder* is **Triton's**, named for Ariel's dad (its counterpart on the *Magic* is the *Beauty and the Beast*-themed **Lumiere's**).

The 2016 dry dock introduced **Cabanas** buffet and a unique restaurant, **Tiana's Place**, inspired by *The Princess and the Frog* and serving New Orleans-style cuisine accompanied by live jazz. Additionally, the *Wonder's* antiquated version of **Animator's Palate** was retrofitted with an interactive show to match its counterparts on the other ships. The *Wonder's* dining is now on par with that of the rest of the DCL fleet.

Len, a cynic whose capacity for scorn would make Ebenezer Scrooge exclaim, "Dude, lighten up!," thinks ***Frozen: A Musical Spectacular*** (presented on both the *Wonder* and the *Fantasy*) is the best stage show in the DCL fleet. In addition to catchy songs, solid stage design, and a snappy pace, it has special effects that had him saying, "Wow!" out loud.

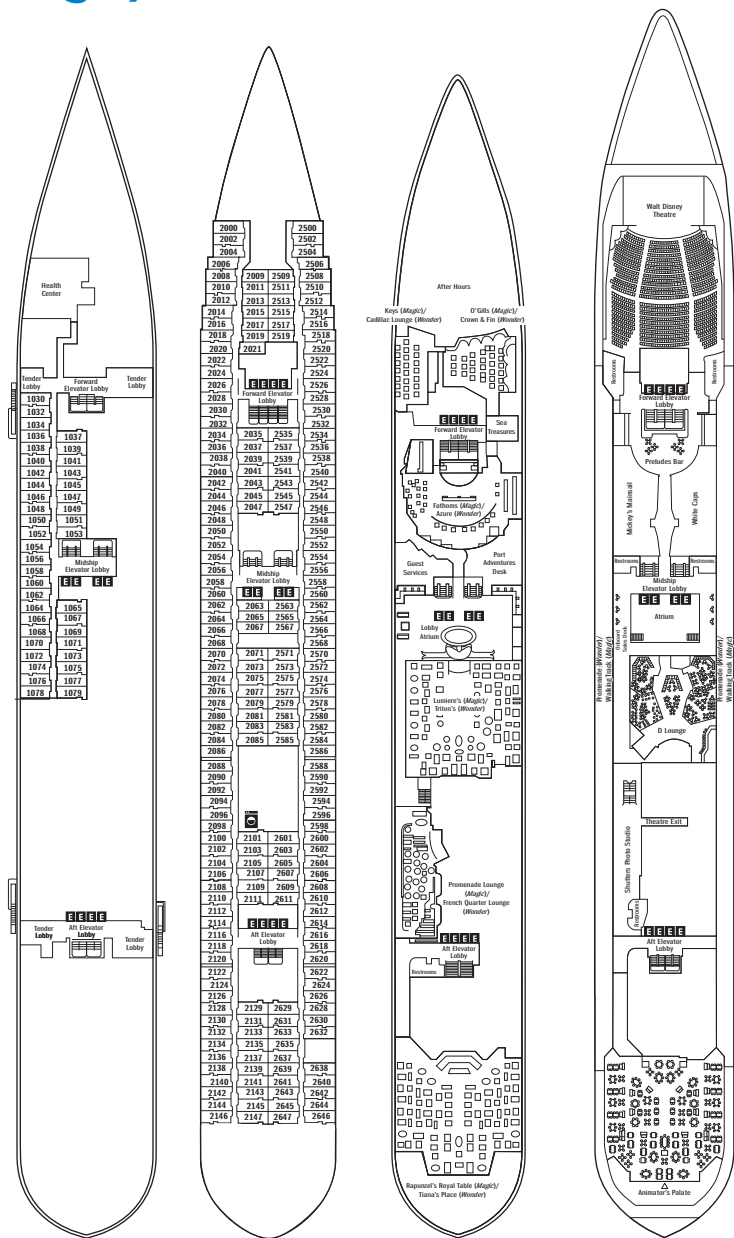
The kids' clubs were also reimaged. The **Oceaneer Club** now features **Marvel's Super Hero Academy**, in which young guests train to become superheroes (with help from Spider-Man during live character appearances), and ***Frozen Adventures***, where a digital Olaf leads kids in games and songs.

A 2019 *Wonder* dry dock saw the addition of a New Orleans-themed family nightclub, the **French Quarter Lounge**, designed to complement Tiana's Place. Also freshened up during this refurb were **Cove Café** coffee bar, **Signals** pool bar, and **Vibe** teen club.

From a bells-and-whistles standpoint, the *Wonder* continues to lag behind its newer sisters. You won't find a headliner waterslide like the AquaDunk (*Magic*) or a water coaster like the AquaDuck (*Dream*, *Fantasy*) or AquaMouse (*Wish*) on the pool deck, and inside cabins lack the "virtual portholes" found on the *Dream* and *Fantasy*.

Nevertheless, the *Wonder* is my (Erin's) sentimental favorite. The smaller capacity means fewer people jockeying for space on the private islands, and the older ships have a cozier, homier atmosphere. By the end of a long sailing, the cast members feel like family—something I haven't experienced as often on the *Dream* or *Fantasy*, and something I haven't really experienced yet on the *Wish*.

Magic/Wonder DECK PLANS



DECK 4

continued on next page

PART 7

DINING

NOSHES, NOSHES *Everywhere*

THE FIRST THING many cruisers discover when exploring the ships on embarkation day is the near-endless displays of food at the pool-level restaurants. In the way that some people remember the birth of their first child, we remember our first glimpse of the food stations stretching out as far as the eye can see. (Sorry, kids, it's eatin' time.) On one table sat a pile of crab legs that almost reached eye level, and next to this sat a trawler's worth of peel-and-eat shrimp. Surrounding all this deliciousness was enough cocktail sauce to float the ship itself. On the other side of the aisle, a chef was flash-cooking a steak, the spices, sizzle, and flame making the air smell savory. It was *heavenly*.

You'll never go hungry on a DCL cruise. The variety of dining options is staggering, with everything from coffee shops and pizza stands to Las Vegas-style buffets and ritzy French and Italian restaurants. That said, we've learned a few ways to increase your chances of enjoying memorable meals on board. This section describes your dining options in detail and includes our advice on how to make the most of them.

ROTATIONAL DINING

ONE OF THE innovations that DCL brought to the cruise industry is the concept of rotational dining, in which you visit one of three standard restaurants on each night of your cruise. As you change from restaurant to restaurant, your dining room server, assistant (beverage) server, and head server (dining room manager) all move with you. Your server team will quickly learn your dining preferences, including favorite drinks and desserts, and make menu suggestions. Along with your stateroom attendant, you'll almost certainly rely on your dining team more than any other members of the crew during your trip.

The rotational restaurants have two dinner seatings, typically around **5:45 p.m.** and **8:15 p.m.** (For sailings originating in Europe, seatings are

and then listed alphabetically. To keep things simple, we've included buffets with restaurants offering full table service.

RATINGS For table-service restaurants, the **overall star rating** represents the entire dining experience: style, service, and ambience, in addition to the taste, presentation, and quality of the food. Five stars is the highest possible rating; four-star restaurants are above average; and three-star restaurants offer good, though not necessarily memorable, meals. (No table-service restaurant rated below three stars for this edition.)

Quality ratings, on the other hand, focus on the food. The quality of counter-service food is measured on a scale of **A (excellent) to F (poor)**. (No counter-service restaurant rated below a C for this edition.) For table-service restaurants, food quality is measured on a scale of **one to five stars**, with five stars being the highest possible rating. Here, the star ratings take into account flavor, freshness of ingredients, preparation, presentation, and creativity.

For the adult-dining venues, where you pay extra to eat, price is not considered in the quality rating. But if you're looking for both quality and a good deal, check the **value rating**, which is also expressed as stars.

A REMINDER ABOUT ALCOHOL Wine, beer, and mixed drinks cost extra in the rotational restaurants and aren't included in the cost of meals at the adult-dining venues.

Disney Magic DINING

COUNTER-SERVICE RESTAURANTS

Daisy's De-Lites

QUALITY B **LOCATION DECK 9 AFT**

OPEN Morning-midday.

SELECTIONS Breakfast includes pastries and fruit, as well as build-your-own yogurt parfaits and oatmeal or granola bowls. Lunch includes sandwiches, soups, and a build-your-own-bowl station with a base of rice or quinoa and toppings such as shredded pork or chicken and fresh veggies.

COMMENTS Daisy's De-Lites is our favorite quick-service restaurant on the *Magic* and *Wonder*. It's a good alternative to the breakfast buffet if you want something light. The customizable bowls are terrific for vegetarians.

Duck-In Diner

QUALITY B **LOCATION DECK 9 AFT**

OPEN Midday-late evening.

SELECTIONS Middle Eastern meats such as chicken and lamb shawarma, served on your choice of pita bread or a tortilla. Burgers and French fries are also available.

COMMENTS There are lots of creative toppings and condiments, such as hummus, pickled veggies, baba ghanoush, chile mayonnaise, kachumber (an Indian cucumber salad), garlic-mustard aioli, sambal (an Indonesian hot sauce similar to sriracha), tzatziki, or a mint-cilantro sauce.

Finally, note that we rate Palo on the *Dream* and *Fantasy* slightly higher than the versions on the *Magic* and the *Wonder*: the decor is more sophisticated, and the kitchens are larger, allowing for more efficient food preparation. (For the purposes of this comparison, we consider **Palo Steakhouse** on the *Wish* to be its own thing.) Nevertheless, on both the *Magic* and the *Wonder*, Palo is outstanding and definitely worth the extra cost.

Disney sometimes adds special adult-dining experiences to specific sailings; see page 192 for more information.

Rapunzel's Royal Table ★★★ DECK 3 AFT

AMERICAN/GERMAN QUALITY ★★★ SERVICE ★★★★★

Reservations Not accepted. **Meals served** Dinner. **Alcohol** A decent selection of reds, whites, and sparkling wines, plus mixed drinks and spirits.

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE During the *Magic's* 2018 dry dock, Carioca's restaurant was transformed into Rapunzel's Royal Table, a nod to the popularity of the 2010 Disney film *Tangled*. Characters such as Rapunzel and Flynn Rider make appearances. Encourage your kids to stick around until the end of the meal to see the procession of floating lanterns.

HOUSE SPECIALTIES Many dishes have a *Tangled* theme, such as the Snuggly Duckling Platter (sliced meats with pumpernickel and mustard); Maximus Salad (potatoes, carrots, and greens); Flynn Rider Platter (smoked pork loin with braised cabbage); Pascal Punch (Odwalla Mango Tango smoothie with coconut and strawberry yogurt); and the pièce de résistance, Tangled Pasta (angel hair tossed with basil pesto and scallops). Gimmicks aside, the food is quite good.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS On longer sailings, Rapunzel's serves German-style dishes in honor of the Brothers Grimm (who popularized Rapunzel and other characters in their bestselling *Children's and Household Tales*). These may include pretzel bread, a grilled-knockwurst appetizer, a green-and-white asparagus salad, a trio of veal (tenderloin, pulled shank, and pasta with veal sauce), and a Sacher torte for dessert.

COMMENTS Rapunzel's kids' menu is full of safe bets—macaroni and cheese, mini burgers, baked salmon, whole-wheat pasta—but much of the adult fare successfully straddles the line between kid-friendly and grown-up. It's a great way to introduce your children to more-sophisticated dishes that aren't totally weird or unfamiliar. (At Lumiere's, on the other hand, we've heard a few kids cry with dismay when they learn what escargots are.)

Disney Wonder DINING

COUNTER-SERVICE RESTAURANTS

Daisy's De-Lites

QUALITY B LOCATION DECK 9 AFT

COMMENTS See the profile of Daisy's De-Lites on the *Magic* (page 203).

Pete's Boiler Bites

QUALITY B LOCATION DECK 9 AFT

OPEN Midday–early evening.

ENTERTAINMENT *and* NIGHTLIFE

LIVE THEATER *on the* SHIPS

LIVE STAGE PERFORMANCES take place at the **Walt Disney Theatre**. The shows are generally either Disney-themed theatrical productions (typically musicals) or variety acts such as comedians, magicians, and ventriloquists. The theatrical presentations are usually of two types: (1) retellings of familiar Disney stories and (2) so-called jukebox musicals. (Note that not all productions are performed on every sailing.)

RETELLINGS *Disney's Aladdin: A Musical Spectacular*, on the *Fantasy* and the *Wish*, is an example of the retelling genre. This is DCL's interpretation of the *Aladdin* story: it's not the same *Aladdin* as the 1992 animated feature or the 2019 live-action film, nor is it exactly the same as the musical that's been playing on Broadway since 2011. The cruise version features live actors and multiple Arabian-themed sets reprising key scenes from the animated film, including the most popular songs, in about half the time of the original movie.

unofficial TIP

If you're sailing on the *Wish* and you're awake at midnight, head to the Grand Hall atrium to see the **Glass Slipper Kiss Goodnight**, a charming little music-and-light show that concludes the day on board.

Frozen: A Musical Spectacular, on the *Wonder* and *Fantasy*, is the best of the retelling shows. The character puppets (Sven and Olaf) are charming, and the lighting, sets, and costumes are the best we've seen in any show at a Disney property, the theme parks included. We also like the *Magic's Tangled: The Musical*, with songs from beloved composer Alan Menken. **Beauty and the Beast**, on the *Dream* and *Treasure*, draws from both the 1991 and 2017 films; while it breaks no new ground—and yes, “Be Our Guest” is among the musical numbers—it's still entertaining. The *Magic's Twice Charmed: An Original Twist on the Cinderella Story* is a fresh spin on the retelling genre, with surprises aplenty. The *Wish's* new **Little Mermaid** show, on the other hand, is a letdown.

JUKEBOX MUSICALS DCL's jukebox musicals are *Disney Dreams*, *Disney's Believe*, *The Golden Mickeys*, and *Disney Seas the Adventure*. Each features

DISCONTINUED CRUISE THEMES

IN PREVIOUS YEARS, Disney Cruise Line has offered other themed cruises, notably *Frozen*- and *Star Wars*-themed sailings. These are no longer available. Disney Cruise fans widely assumed that the *Star Wars* sailings were discontinued in an effort to push *Star Wars* enthusiasts to Disney World's Galactic Starcruiser, an immersive two-night experience that included a themed hotel, food, entertainment, and extended role-playing. The Galactic Starcruiser was unceremoniously shuttered in late 2023. It remains to be seen whether this will prompt DCL to reinstate the *Star Wars* sailings.

NIGHTCLUBS, BARS, CAFÉS, *and* LOUNGES


EACH DISNEY CRUISE LINE SHIP has a collection of places to drink, dance, and listen to music; some are geared more to quiet conversation than partying. Some clubs host family activities during the day but become adults-only at night, usually around 9 p.m. (Guests must generally be age 21 or older to drink; see page 46 for an exception.)

ABOUT THOSE DRINK PRICES . . .

IF IT'S BEEN a while since you last cruised with Disney, you may notice that some signature cocktails cost significantly more than they used to. For example, the **Shipbuilder's Wife**—made with Absolut Pears vodka, limoncello, grappa, agave, and fresh lemon juice—was introduced on the *Fantasy* in 2012 for \$5.75. By summer 2016 the price had increased by just a dollar, but by early 2017 the same cocktail showed up on the menu of the *Dream*'s Pub 687 sports bar for a notably higher \$8.50. By mid-2019 it was sold at Pub 687 for \$11.75, in mid-2022 it was priced at \$12, and by mid-2023 it was \$12.50—more than double its original price (on the *Fantasy*, the same drink is sold at the same price but under a different name: the **Mercutio**), though it's still a bargain relative to other onboard beverages. A few DCL specialty cocktails on the ships are now priced in the \$20–\$25 range, although most cost \$4–\$5 less. You may even find the same or similar drinks at different prices on the same ship. On one sailing of the *Dream*, for instance, we found Bloody Marys priced at both \$4.75 (at the bar in Cabanas) and \$10 (at Palo brunch).

As a point of reference, you will be familiar with this type of pricing if you're used to drinking in a major city or at Walt Disney World; craft cocktails are priced at \$16–\$18 at Jaleo in Disney Springs and \$19–\$24 at the Gramercy Tavern in New York City.

If you enjoy wine with dinner, ask your server about a multibottle **Wine & Dine package**, available in the main dining rooms and at Palo.

 **unofficial TIP**
Check your DCL Navigator app for **Happy Hours**. Drinks are often 30%–50% less during these events.

ACTIVITIES, RECREATION, *and* SHOPPING

BESIDES EAT, DRINK, be entertained, and tour ports, you'll find lots of things to do on every Disney Cruise Line itinerary:

- **Family activities**, held throughout the day, include trivia contests, bingo, deck parties, and more.
- **Children's programs**, the strength of Disney Cruise Line, begin early in the morning and end after midnight on most days.
- **Pools and water-play areas** are usually the center of activity during the day.
- **Onboard seminars** (some of them free) cover everything from cooking demonstrations to wine tastings.
- **Sports and fitness amenities** include a measured track on four of the ships, a full gym, fitness classes, and a basketball half-court.
- **Senses Spa** is a great place to relax after a tough day on shore.
- **Character appearances** include Mickey, Minnie, the Disney princesses, and many others, often wearing special costumes themed to the cruise destination.
- **Shopping opportunities** are available on board and in port.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

BINGO

DCL IS ONE of the few cruise lines that have no casino gambling on board. What it does have is bingo, played most days on most ships, in one or two hour-long sessions per day, with four games played per hour. Prizes range from DCL swag to actual cash jackpots of several thousand dollars. On one sailing, we watched a young guy win nearly \$9,000 at bingo—enough to pay for his entire vacation and then some.

With that much money potentially at stake, it's no surprise that many people take Disney bingo quite seriously. Games are fast-paced, and players are expected to keep up. Additionally, DCL interjects sound effects, music, dance, and random chatter into the number calling. (*Pro tip:* The reason the bingo crew members do a wacky dance every time the B-11 ball is called is that when the machine is in Spanish-language mode, B-11 is *B once*, pronounced more or less like “Beyoncé.”)

ITEMS DISNEY CHARACTERS MAY SIGN

- Autograph books
- Disney-branded items, provided they're appropriate to the character doing the signing. For example, Cinderella would be unable to sign a Buzz Lightyear item.
- A Disney-approved photo. Only characters in the photo can sign it.
- Disney note cards
- Disney Dollars—once signed, however, they can no longer be used as currency. (Note: Disney Dollars were discontinued in 2016 but are still redeemable.)
- Clothing (may not be worn while being signed)

in line, you present the character with whatever you want signed, then pose for a photo if you like. Be aware, however, that DCL imposes a number of restrictions on the kinds of items that characters may sign. Prohibited items include those listed in the table below.

ITEMS DISNEY CHARACTERS MAY NOT SIGN

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| • Flags of any nation | • Receipts or banking slips |
| • Money other than Disney Dollars | • Skin |
| • Non-Disney merchandise | • Non-family-friendly or sexually explicit items |

POOLS *and* WATER-PLAY AREAS

EACH SHIP HAS separate freshwater pools designed for small children, families, and adults. All are heated to a minimum temperature of 75°F. If you've never been on a cruise ship before, you may have been duped by creative photography into thinking you'll be able to swim laps in DCL's pools. In reality, not only is it impossible to exercise in the pools, but you can barely even splash in them. One Ohio reader deemed the DCL swim areas "pool soup."

No DCL pool has a capacity of more than 80 guests (and most pools' capacities are much smaller than this)—even on the *Dream*, *Fantasy*, and *Wish*, which carry about 4,000 guests each. In a highly unscientific study, we've shown photos of the pools, with varying numbers of guests in the water, to several noncruising acquaintances. The consensus seems to be that the pools start to look uncomfortably crowded when they're filled to about half capacity.

A North Carolina mom comments:

For our cruise on the Dream, the pool was my only semi-complaint. The pools were PACKED with kids, I couldn't have gotten in if I wanted to, and it was just myself and my then-6-year-old. We love Disney, but the crowds at the pools will definitely be a turnoff for my husband, and I'm not sure I'll be able to persuade him to book another cruise with all of us if they're that crowded.

And a Virginia cruiser says:

indoor facilities have a large movie screen set up in a dedicated room; a computer projects a simulated soccer field, basketball court, or other appropriate venue on the screen. You're given actual sports equipment to kick, throw, or swing. Your movements, and the movements of the ball, are tracked by computers and displayed onscreen—there's a slight lag in the display but not enough to be distracting. Half-hour sessions cost about \$28 for golf and about \$13 for other sports; hour-long sessions are about \$49 for golf and about \$22 for other sports. A penalty charge (50% of your session fee) applies if you cancel on the day of your session; you may cancel without penalty up to the day before.

Guests age 13 and younger must be accompanied by an adult (age 18 or older) when playing at the simulator; guests ages 14–17 must be accompanied by at least one other guest who's the same age or older.

HERO ZONE (WISH AND TREASURE) This multipurpose indoor space (Deck 12 Aft) is sports central on the *Wish* and *Treasure*. The top level holds games like table tennis, air hockey, and Foosball and serves as a viewing loft for activities taking place on the main floor below. The large, open space can be configured for free play; half-court basketball; chip-it golf; or **Jack-Jack's Incredible Diaper Dash**, an *Incredibles*-themed variation on a popular event for babies old enough to crawl (see page 265).

The showcase element of the Hero Zone is an inflatable obstacle course called **Incredi-Games** (guests must be at least 40 inches tall to participate). The Incredi-Games course will be inflated for 5 or 6 hours during some sea days, with various time slots open to free use, teens only, or timed family competitions. *Note:* You must wear socks to use the course—no bare feet or shoes allowed. To avoid a trip back to your stateroom, bring a pair of socks with you.

SPAS

THIS SECTION SUMMARIZES the major spa and salon services offered on each ship, but note that many more are available. We recommend visiting the spa on your first afternoon aboard to sign up for any

unofficial TIP

The best time to visit the spa is during dinner or when the ship is in port.

last-minute treatments and check for specials. *Note:* Prices listed are approximate and do not include a tip, which is typically 18% of the cost of your treatment. There's a 50% cancellation charge if you cancel within 24 hours of your appointment time.

Some salon services, such as manicures and massages, may be booked on the **My Reservations** section of the DCL website before you sail. If you want to book a hair appointment online, you can reserve a time, but you'll have to stop by the spa after you board to specify what kind of service you want (styling, coloring, etc).

If you're trying to book spa services before your cruise, Disney's website may not let you book some services, such as facials, for two people at the same time of day. (We think the website assumes that only one person per ship is qualified to do these tasks, and that this

for a four-night sailing. Granted, the *Wish's* Rainforest is larger than the other four, and it has an outdoor lounge and whirlpool area, but we're not sure these upgrades are worth paying twice as much for on a three-day sailing.

When it comes to booking the Rainforest, you may be able to make a reservation during your pretrip activity window, or you may have to call (☎ 800-951-3532); passes can also be purchased at the spa once you're on the ship, depending on availability. If you weren't able to snag a reservation before your sailing, we encourage you to buy your passes as soon as you set foot on the ship.

SENSES JUICE BAR Senses on the *Dream* and *Fantasy* offers freshly blended juices and smoothies for about \$7–\$10. See the profile in Part 7, “Dining” (see page 209), for more information.

Note that you don't have to use the spa to partake of the juice bar. Also keep an eye out for special juice-tasting menus, typically offered on embarkation day. The same types of juices are available at several of the coffee bars on the *Wish*.

SHOPPING

SHOPPING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE part of your cruise experience, but, like most cruise lines, DCL makes it hard to avoid. Shops on the ships sell everything from infant T-shirts to engagement rings; there are also shops in every port, both reputable and sketchy, along with opportunities to shop for DCL merchandise before and after your cruise.

STATEROOM GIFTS AND GOODIES

ONCE YOU'VE PAID in full for your Disney cruise, you'll have access to the **Onboard Gifts** section of the DCL website: at the top of the homepage, go to the “Already Booked” tab and choose “Onboard Gifts”

IS IT A REAL BARGAIN?

YOU PROBABLY REALIZE that the “Louis Vuitton” bag you saw on sale for \$25 at the Straw Market in Nassau is a fake, but you may not know that perfume and sunglasses are frequently counterfeited as well. Happily, many luxury brands (such as Gucci and the aforementioned Louis Vuitton) have stores in Caribbean and European ports, letting you buy with confidence. (See page 309 for more on shopping in port.)

Another thing to look out for is out-of-season merchandise being sold at full price: on one trip to Nassau, we found an authentic Kate Spade bag being sold at MSRP, but it could be found at 30%–50% off stateside because it was from the previous season.

When it comes to making any purchase, do your due diligence ahead of time to know what a fair price is. In our experience, though, haggling with vendors isn't worth the potential savings.

DISNEY'S PRIVATE ISLANDS

BEGINNING IN MID-2024, Disney Cruise Line will have two private islands. The first, Castaway Cay (*cay* is pronounced “key”) has been part of DCL since its start and has long been a favorite port stop for guests of all ages. The second, Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point, is a new development on the Bahamian island of Eleuthera and promises to have all the amenities of Castaway Cay, plus a whole lot more.

Whichever of Disney’s islands you end up on, it’s likely to be your favorite port of call on your Bahamian or Caribbean cruise. The weather is almost always gorgeous; the shore excursions are reasonably priced (mostly); and, as is the case with Walt Disney World, there’s little of the real world to get in the way of a relaxing day. And that’s before the free food and (nonalcoholic) drinks. We provide additional coverage of island activities in Part 12, “Port Adventures.”

WHAT TO BRING

DISNEY WILL PROVIDE you with medium-size towels for use on its islands—as many as you can carry. If you’d rather use a **full-size beach towel**, bring one of your own or buy one while on the island. Disney also provides free life jackets and rents strollers, wagons, and sand-capable wheelchairs on a first-come, first-served basis.

The sun and heat are intense, so bring plenty of **high-SPF sunscreen** and **water**. **Insulated sports bottles** are a great idea. Other sun protection you may need includes **light-colored, long-sleeved, lightweight shirts; sweatpants; swimsuit cover-ups; hats; lip balm; and sunglasses**. See below for additional items that you may want to bring along.

Other Items to Bring to Disney’s Islands

- **A watch or cell phone** for checking how long everyone has been in the sun and when it’s time to reapply sunscreen. It’s also useful for knowing whether the island’s restaurants are open (usually 11 a.m.–2 p.m.).

continued from page 313

- **An underwater/waterproof camera** for taking photos while swimming and/or snorkeling.
- **A small cooler** to keep medicine, baby formula, and other perishables cool. Fill it with ice before you leave the ship, and refill it from the restaurants' ice machines on the island. The cooler must be soft-sided and no larger than 12 by 12 by 12 inches.
- **Water shoes** will protect your feet from sharp rocks and coral pieces and provide some insulation from hot sand and pavement.
- **Small beach toys**, such as a shovel and pail, though pails might present some packing issues. Toys are also available for purchase on the islands.
- **Your own snorkeling gear** if you already have it, or if the idea of sharing a snorkel grosses you out. DCL provides flotation vests for free.
- **Swim diapers**, if you have little ones who like the water.
- **A hairbrush or comb**. It's windy on the islands, and you'll want to look good in your vacation photos.
- **Insect repellent**. Disney does a good job of keeping bugs at bay, but with heightened concerns about Zika virus, it's still a good idea to bring something like Off! or Repel. Disney now provides insect repellent at many ports, but if you're sensitive to certain ingredients or you prefer a particular brand, bring your own.
- **Something to read—a book or e-reader**. Be careful, however, about leaving expensive electronics unattended on the island.
- **A portable music player and headphones**, which are especially useful if you're going for a jog around the island's 5K course. *Don't* bring external speakers.
- **Athletic shoes and socks**. You'll need them if you want to play basketball.
- **A change of clothes**. While the sun will dry your swimsuit in a hurry, you may want dry clothes to wear while you're walking around the island, sitting down for meals, or riding bikes. You can return to the ship to change, but going through security takes time.

WHAT TO DO *on* CASTAWAY CAY

THERE ARE MORE things to do than you'll have time for in a single day, or even two. A list of our favorite Castaway Cay shore activities follows; see Part 12 for details.

Castaway Cay's lagoons are shallow, with small, gentle waves. Anchored within a short swim from shore is **Pelican Plunge**, a floating platform with two waterslides and a water-play area. The waterslides begin on the platform's second story (accessed by stairs) and end with a splash back into the lagoon. Each slide offers a different experience: one is a long, open slide with moderate turns, while the other is a shorter, enclosed slide with plenty of tight turns and twists.

Along with the slides, Pelican Plunge's water-play area includes pipes, nozzles, and plumes of water spraying out from every direction. The main feature is a giant overhead bucket, which is constantly being

OUR FAVORITE FUN STUFF ON CASTAWAY CAY

- **Castaway Ray's Stingray Adventure** affords you the opportunity to pet and feed small and medium-size stingrays in a dedicated lagoon.
- The **snorkeling lagoon** features underwater sights, such as a replica of the *Nautilus* submarine from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and statues of Minnie and Mickey. Common marine life seen in the snorkeling lagoon includes stingrays, blue tang, and yellowtail snapper (plus the occasional barracuda).
- Rent **sailboats or paddleboats, personal watercraft, or inflatable floats and tubes.**
- Runners may want to start their day with the **Castaway Cay 5K**, a free (as in no-cost) jog through the developed parts of the island.
- Single-speed **bicycle rentals** allow you to fully explore the island, including its observation tower and trails, which can be accessed only on foot or bike.

filled with water from the lagoon. The bucket is counterbalanced so that when the water reaches a certain level, the bucket tilts over suddenly, pouring gallons of water on anything nearby.

If you have small children who enjoy water but you're concerned about ocean currents, consider letting the little ones run around at the inland **Spring-a-Leak** water-play area, just beyond the Pelican Point tram stop, near the middle of the family beaches. Like Pelican Plunge, Spring-a-Leak has plenty of burbling, spraying, misting water to keep kids wet and happy all day long.

Scuttle's Cove, an additional area for the little ones, offers supervised activities, yet another water-play area, and a giant-whale-bone excavation site. Teens have their own dedicated area inland called **Teen Hideout**, with volleyball, tetherball, and other activities. Some teens, however, may not like the fact that Teen Hideout is located away from the beach and has no water features or water-play areas. Note that kids and teens must be registered at their respective youth clubs on board (see page 265) to play at Scuttle's Cove and hang out at Teen Hideout.

HEIGHT AND AGE REQUIREMENTS AT CASTAWAY CAY

- **Pelican Plunge waterslide:** Must be 38" to ride, and 48" to ride without a life jacket. Tweens (ages 11–13) have scheduled time to hang out (supervised by youth counselors) at both Pelican Plunge and the **In-Da-Shade Games pavilion.**
- **Teen Hideout:** Ages 13–17; teens must be registered for Vibe on board.
- **Scuttle's Cove:** Ages 3–12; children must be registered for the Oceaneer Club/Oceaneer Lab on board.

WHERE TO RELAX on CASTAWAY CAY

CASTAWAY CAY IS ALSO a great place to sit back, listen to the ocean, and feel the sea breeze on your face. Two family beaches are available, while adults age 18 and up have **Serenity Bay**, a private beach with its own outdoor barbecue, bar, rental cabanas, and more.

FAMILY BEACHES Most of Castaway Cay's developed beachfront is reserved for families. If you're taking the tram from the dock, get off at

DISNEY LOOKOUT CAY *at* LIGHTHOUSE POINT

THE *DISNEY MAGIC* and *Disney Fantasy* are scheduled to visit Disney's second Bahamian private island, **Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point**, beginning in summer 2024. At press time, the second island had not yet opened, so all the information we have is filtered through the lens of Disney public relations. That said, we're expecting Lookout Cay to have many of the same features as Castaway Cay, plus more "wow" experiences and possibly more areas of upcharge.

HISTORY OF THE LOOKOUT CAY DEVELOPMENT

DISNEY LOOKOUT CAY at Lighthouse Point is a 700-acre parcel of land on the southern tip of the island of Eleuthera, about 132 miles southeast of Castaway Cay. Disney has agreed to develop just 20% of the land it has purchased and return about 190 acres to the Bahamian government for use as parkland, maintaining much of the rest in its pristine, undeveloped state. DCL has also committed to using sustainable building practices and ensuring strict environmental standards. At the D23 Expo in September 2022, Disney announced that the development will be 90% solar-powered. (A 550-page environmental-impact study for Lookout Cay is available at lighthousepointbahamas.com.)

In addition to protecting the environment, Disney has pledged to make a positive impact on the Bahamian economy with Lookout Cay. The project is providing 120-plus construction jobs, approximately 80% of which are for Bahamian citizens. DCL also has a goal of creating about 150 well-paying operations jobs once the site opens. As a step toward the second goal, DCL has created a partnership with Junior Achievement Bahamas. The program will provide services to nearly 1,000 high school students on Eleuthera and will include education on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and college preparedness. Additionally, DCL has awarded \$150,000 in grants to small businesses on Eleuthera. These grants are designed to fund training in topics such as developing marketing plans and understanding financial statements. According to the project's spokespeople, Disney's goal is to have a ship at the Lookout Cay port three to five days a week, with the destination having room for just one vessel at a time. Weekly visitors are expected to number approximately 11,400–26,600, depending on the season and which ships are in port.

THE GUEST EXPERIENCE ON THE ISLAND

ACCORDING TO DCL REPS:

When guests arrive at Lookout Cay, they'll be greeted by distinctive architecture in bright, saturated hues. The curvilinear buildings will at first appear as Bahamian shells scattered along the shoreline. Upon closer inspection, guests will discover artistic expressions of

ITINERARIES *at a* GLANCE

OVERVIEW

THIS SECTION PROVIDES a broad overview of the geographic areas visited by Disney Cruise Line: the pros and cons of cruising in each area, the ports from which the cruises sail, the ships that serve these itineraries, how long most cruises run, and the time of year for most itineraries. We've also included advice and suggestions about what to pack and things to see and do. *Note:* DCL does not visit all ports every year, and new ports are added most years.

FURTHER INFORMATION

FOR THE LATEST information about specific ports and itineraries in these regions for 2024–25, visit the DCL website (disneycruise.disney.go.com) and click the “Destinations” menu at the top of the page; then select a specific geographic area and click “View Prices” to see a list of cruises for that region.

Scott Sanders's **Disney Cruise Line Blog** lists all currently scheduled itineraries on one convenient page that's updated regularly: see tinyurl.com/DCLBlogItineraries. Each itinerary includes a sketch map showing the route and ports of call. Pull-down menus on the left side of each page let you access itinerary information by port, ship, month, and year.

For tips on researching the weather in the ports that your itinerary visits, see page 74.

ITINERARIES IN THE COVID ERA

WHILE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has officially been deemed over by nearly all international governments, waves of illness still pop up from time to time. The potential for a COVID outbreak to disrupt your travel is ongoing. If your primary reason for choosing a particular itinerary is that you want to visit a specific, once-in-a-lifetime attraction, it may make sense for you to postpone your trip until COVID further dissipates. Otherwise, you should be prepared for tourist access to a

PORT ADVENTURES

OVERVIEW

DISNEY CRUISE LINE offers more than 600 shore excursions—or **port adventures**, in Disney-speak. While it's impossible for us to have tried them all, we have embarked on quite a few. We've also interviewed scores of families and DCL employees to learn which are the most popular and which ones they'd recommend to friends.

Because most Disney cruises stop at **Castaway Cay** (see Part 10), this section includes detailed reviews of its port adventures. (We expect Disney's **Lookout Cay** to offer a similar set of excursion options when it opens in mid-2024.) Castaway Cay's excursions generally last 1–3½ hours; others, such as snorkeling or biking, are self-guided.

Beyond Castaway Cay, most port adventures last about 3–6 hours, including transportation time, and all are designed to fit comfortably into the ship's schedule. Third-party companies based near the port run virtually all of the port adventures.

DOING MORE THAN ONE EXCURSION PER DAY

SOME GUESTS MAY consider booking more than one planned port excursion in a single day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, hoping to pack in as much guided activity as possible. While this is technically possible in some ports, it's not something we recommend. We've seen enough port adventure hiccups to know that the possibility of an excursion running long is real. You'll likely have a more relaxed experience if you have only one planned activity per day and use any additional time in port to explore on your own.

BALANCE YOUR EXCURSIONS THROUGHOUT YOUR SAILING

IF YOU'RE ON a quick three- or four-night sailing, you may have only one or two opportunities to explore a port. However, if you're on a

RIVER *and* EXPEDITION CRUISING

Note: Like Disney Cruise Line, Adventures by Disney (AbD), including its river cruises, took an extended hiatus in 2020, returned to modified guest experiences in 2021, and resumed near-normal operations in 2022. At press time, we knew of no significant COVID precautions affecting AbD; however, as with all international travel during the post-COVID era, be aware that things like vaccination requirements, pre-cruise testing, masking requirements, and restrictions regarding the intermingling of unrelated parties are subject to change as conditions warrant. Visit the Guest Health and Safety page on the AbD website (adventuresbydisney.com/important-updates) to verify the protocols in place for your travel dates and destinations.

OVERVIEW

DISNEY OFFERS RIVER CRUISES through **Adventures by Disney (AbD)**, the world-travel arm of Disney Destinations LLC. While these are Disney-branded experiences, they don't have anything to do with Disney Cruise Line. And because AbD deemphasizes “all Disney all the time” in

favor of bringing Disney-caliber service and quality to exploring the world, you won't be having Mickey moments on a river cruise.

Instead of starting its own river-cruise operation from scratch, AbD worked with cruise line **AmaWaterways** to build two ships: the **AmaViola**, which debuted in 2016, and the **AmaKristina**, which went into service in 2017. These newer ships are similar to existing AmaWaterways ships (see next page), but Disney requested family-friendly touches, such as additional cabins with connecting

doors and cabins with pull-out sleeper chairs.

Adventures by Disney also uses several river-cruise ships from the AmaWaterways fleet. Some of these ships that have been in the AbD rotation recently include the *AmaCello*, *AmaLea*, *AmaLyra*, *AmaMore*, *AmaSerena*, and *AmaStella*.

unofficial TIP

When AbD is running a river cruise, it charts the entire ship: all guests follow an AbD group itinerary, booked through and organized by AbD. At other times of year, AmaWaterways books its own guests on its ships, but at no point are Disney and non-Disney guests on board at the same time.

“A Tourist’s Best Friend!”

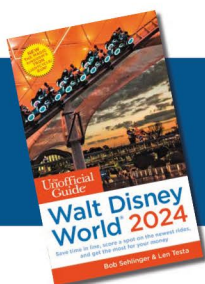
—*Chicago Sun-Times*

“Indispensable”

—*The New York Times*

Honest and Outspoken Advice from the **Unofficial** Experts

- In-depth coverage of the *Disney Wish*—staterooms, restaurants, nightclubs, entertainment, pools and slides, kids’ clubs, and more—plus a preview of the brand-new *Disney Treasure*
- Updated information on DCL’s COVID-19 policies
- Expert advice on planning, saving money, choosing a stateroom, cruising with kids, and shopping on board and in port
- Tips on deciding if a Disney cruise is right for you and your family
- How DCL compares with competitors such as Royal Caribbean and Adventures by Disney
- What’s new for DCL in 2024 and beyond: itineraries; new ships and home ports; and Disney’s new private island, Disney Lookout Cay at Lighthouse Point



Check out *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World*, the best-selling independent guide to the Disney Orlando theme parks. Supplement your valuable guidebook with tips, news, and deals by visiting our website, theunofficialguides.com.

**the
Unofficial
Guide®**



Cover photo: *Erin Foster*

ISBN 978-1-62809-147-2



Plan Your Trip Online at TouringPlans.com