

## travel

# A look at new ships and trends in cruising for 2018

**W**hat's new in cruising for 2018? As usual, there's lots of razzle-dazzle — laser tag, water slides, zip lines and massive LED screens — along with a continued emphasis on healthy lifestyle options, from dining to fitness.

But there are also changes underway in ship design, itineraries and who's cruising.

## DESIGN, DEMOGRAPHICS AND DESTINATIONS

New ships are offering more outdoor spaces and views of the sea, with promenades, boardwalk-style decks, glass walls, transparent walkways and see-through slides.

Small ships, river ships and expedition cruises are booming, with more itineraries in cold-water destinations like Iceland, Greenland and the polar regions. Alaska cruises are as popular as ever, for big and small vessels.

There's a new focus on marketing to millennials, many of whom cruised as kids. Royal Caribbean says its shorter cruises — like three- and four-night Miami-Bahamas trips — are proving popular with 20-somethings who may not want to commit to a full week at sea. Uniworld is offering "U by Uniworld" river cruises for ages 21-45 only, with European itineraries that include music festivals.

The Cruise Lines International Association, which represents most of the world's major cruise brands, noticed another new phenomenon: "skip-gen" cruising. Grandparents are cruising with grandkids, but skipping a generation by sailing without mom and dad. Most cruises provide a range of children's programming so grandparents aren't baby-sitting all day, while also offering activities, excursions, meals and shows that all ages can enjoy together.

## NEW SHIPS

Royal Caribbean's *Symphony of the Seas* will be the world's largest cruise



The Norwegian Bliss, a new ship launching this Spring, will head to Alaska for the season. The ship is purpose-built for enjoying natural scenery with a 180-degree observation lounge perfect for watching glaciers. (Photo/Norwegian Cruise Line via AP)

ship when it launches this spring. Its inaugural season will be in Europe, with sailings from Miami beginning in November. Features include a laser tag arena, Bionic Bar where robots make drinks, a 10-storey racing slide called Ultimate Abyss, rock climbing and ice skating. The ship will host a production of the Broadway hit "Hairspray" and its sports bar will feature 30 big-screen TVs. A luxury family suite for eight includes a two-storey slide, private movie theatre, Lego wall and secret crawl space. But it's not for budget cruising: It's priced in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Norwegian Cruise Line's *Norwegian Bliss* also launches this spring and heads to Alaska. It's designed for enjoying natural scenery, with a 180-degree observation lounge for watching glaciers. Recreation includes laser tag, a race course for electric go-karts, a water slide with a transparent tube that swooshes you along the side of the ship. Other features include a Beatles club with a cover band and a spa with a snow room and a salt room. Norwegian is starting to move away from the celebrity chef craze, but dining options will include a barbecue spot called Q, Los Lobos for Mexican food and Food Republic, where dishes like ceviche or Asian noodles can be ordered from an iPad.

Holland America Line launches the *Nieuw Statendam* in December. The ship's features include World Stage, an



Carnival Cruise guests participating in a Dr. Seuss-themed "Green Eggs and Ham" breakfast. (Andy Newman/Carnival Cruise Line via AP)

entertainment venue with a two-story, 270-degree wraparound LED screen; Music Walk, where three lounges offer different genres of music; and BLEND, where guests can blend their own wine. Holland America is also continuing a partnership with O, The Oprah Magazine, through 2018, on 300 cruises with programmes for meditation, health, style and even a book club that's included onboard appearances by authors like Elizabeth Strout. Holland America Line is also starting round-trip Boston-Cuba trips this year.

*Celebrity Edge* begins sailing in November. Its futuristic design concepts include the Magic Carpet, a cantilevered movable deck that will serve as a walkway, a place to enjoy ocean views and a space for live music and themed dining. The new ship also features a venue called Eden with a three-level window on the ocean, al fresco seating, walkways and an "Eve at Eden" experience that will blend performance art and unique culinary offerings.

*Carnival Horizon* debuts in April with a Dr. Seuss-themed water park, an eatery called Smokehouse Brewhouse

featuring Guy Fieri barbecue and craft beers brewed onboard, and an LED Dreamscape atrium sculpture that will show artwork by patients of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, a Carnival charity partner. *Carnival Vista* already has the three-deck-high Dreamscape light panels. Other fun features on Carnival ships range from "Green Eggs and Ham"-themed breakfasts for kids to Lip Sync Battles a la the popular Spike TV show to custom cocktails at the Alchemy Bar.

MSC Cruises are better known in Europe than North America, but the brand is working to change that. In December, *MSC Seaside* launched and was named best new ship of 2017 by CruiseCritic.com. It features an interactive aqua-park, open-air promenade with glass-floor catwalks, two zip lines, a four-deck atrium, Aurea spa with a snow room and beachlike condo suites. *Seaside*, with a 4,100-guest capacity, is based in Miami for Caribbean itineraries. Its sister ship, *MSC Seaview*, launches in June with Mediterranean cruises for its inaugural season.

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