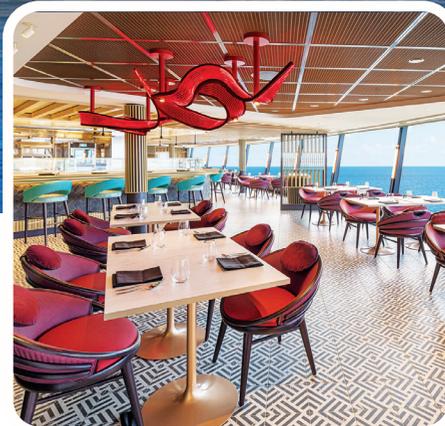


NORWEGIAN AQUA: SAIL, SLIDE, SIP AND SAVOUR



I was glad to fly into Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, to set sail to the Netherlands and then to Southampton in the United Kingdom on board Norwegian Cruise Line's newest ship, *Norwegian Aqua*. After all, it was the perfect city to embark on the cruise, as Lisbon is one of the sunniest capitals in Europe.

But as fate would have it, heavy rains and storms lashed the city all that week, delaying the trip by a couple of days. Although that meant cutting short the cruise slightly and missing the stop at Rotterdam, there was a silver lining as it gave me an opportunity to explore this wonderful Portuguese city built on seven hills.

From eating the most flavourful egg tarts, riding the fabled yellow tram, visiting the majestic Saint George's Castle and taking in some iconic views of the city from its many viewpoints, I did it all despite the rain.

The *Norwegian Aqua* is the latest playground for cruise travellers around the world, riding the ocean with fine dining options, luxe suites and the world's first roller coaster-water slide at sea!

» **TEXT: PALLAVI PASRICHA**

» **PHOTOS: NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE**

Finally, the rain gods took pity on me and the sky cleared and it was time to set sail. I have cruised earlier with Norwegian Cruise Line on *Norwegian Prima* and I was ready to be pampered again. The *Norwegian Aqua* promised to pack in a lot that was new, from design, decor to dining options and new experiences as this ship is the first one in the Prima Plus class of NCL.

Design meets luxury

This facade of the massive ship,

which can accommodate 3,500 passengers was a splash of colours. The vibrant artwork by Allison Hueman, a renowned Filipino-American graffiti and street artist, depicts mythology via abstract and figurative representations of the sea, sky and ancient goddesses.

Once aboard, I was happy to find out that I was on a high deck, the 16th, which is also where the spa is located. The spacious balcony stateroom had one queen bed, a sofa

that could be pulled out to turn into a bed, a dressing table with a vanity mirror, a mini fridge and a television. There was ample storage space and a large bathroom with a shower.

This was not any room that one just came in to curl up and sleep after a hectic day, especially on board a ship, as it was spacious, comfortable and stylish. As I unpacked, I had visions of watching the sunrise from my balcony once we began the sail.

This was just one of the seven categories of cabins on the ship, giving every type of traveller a choice. Those cruising alone can opt for the solo studio staterooms. However, those who want frills like round the clock butler service, private hot tubs on the sundeck and premium liquor at the bar can check into 'The Haven', an exclusive part of the ship with spacious suites including a three-bedroom duplex suite, which is the first of its kind on the ship. This section is called 'the ship within a ship'.

Sip, savour and sail

When it comes to food and drinks, this ship spoils one with as many as 35 options, translating into 17 restaurants and 18 bars and lounges, which range from speciality restaurants to a food court, which is a casual open space venue. As ticking all of them was not possible, I had to select carefully where to dine. Craving flavours from my continent,



Japanese and Thai cuisines were on my radar. While many of the restaurants are on other Prima Class ships as well, a Thai restaurant, Sukhothai is a new addition on the Aqua, so I dined there soon after setting sail. Having the pepper prawns and Red Thai curry as we passed under Lisbon's iconic 25 Abril Bridge somehow enhanced their flavour.

The range of specialty restaurants vary from Mexican, Japanese, French, Italian, Spanish and a steakhouse. At Los Lobos, the Mexican restaurant, watching the guacamole

being prepared tableside was as interesting as it was delicious. I couldn't get enough of the rock shrimp tempura and the beef carpaccio at Nama, the Japanese restaurant. I never thought I would end up trying Indian when I am overseas but I did. At Indulge Food Hall, which has a range of cuisines, one can conveniently order via an iPad for the meal to be delivered to your table. I chose to have chicken *tikka* from Tamara, the Indian kitchen. Though it wasn't as good as what I have had at home, I still relished it, certainly because I was thousands of miles away from my country.

The Starbucks on board was buzzing each morning. But in the evening, wine lovers made their way to the swanky new addition, the Swirl Wine bar, a small bar with a choice of the best reds, wines and bubbly available by glass. I loved reading about each wine, its flavour profile, grape variety, winery and more on the tablet placed at each table, before placing my order. I chose a glass of Jean-Noel Haton Brut Rose champagne, a lovely crisp wine with fruity bubbles.

Experiencing the world's first roller coaster-water slide at sea

When it comes to fun and re-creation, the ship spoils one for choice. One simply cannot miss the 'Aqua Slidecoaster', a hybrid roller coaster and water slide at the top level, which





is the first of its kind in the world. Even though it was rather cold, I challenged myself to try it. One can go as a single or double rider and I decided to go alone. Anticipation tinged with anxiety built up as I clambered into the inflatable raft. Within seconds I had entered a tunnel with twists and turns that I could not even count. Throughout the ride, I screamed my lungs out and though it lasted just a minute, it did feel much longer when I was in the midst of it. The raft plunges into a pool of water at the end of the tunnel, but the adrenaline rush was worth getting wet and feeling cold, I could even have gone for another round but the waiting time was too long as almost every fellow passenger wanted to try it out!

So I headed to 'The Drop', a ride I had really enjoyed on the *Norwegian Prima* ship. The thrill lies in the floor dropping in just a few seconds as one plummets 10 stories.

Game and entertainment mode on
For the growing legion of pickleball fans, there is a pickleball court on

Deck 19, but that is not the only option. The Glow Court on Deck 20 with LED lights on the floor and wall, where a range of games are played, can also be converted into a pickleball court. I loved watching the floor lighting up and changing colours when the games were on. For lovers of virtual reality games, there is a wide choice at the Games Zone with games like Mario Brothers, which was my favourite video game as a child. Ms. Pacman and DuckPin Bowling are also fun. Adults who want to be away from the kids for a while can relax and chill at the Vibe Beach Club, an adults only sundeck. One can also just lounge in an infinity pool overlooking the ocean.

Come evening and all doors lead to the Theatre with three fantastic productions. Music lovers and fans of the famous American singer Prince, will love *Revolution: A Celebration of Prince*, an hour-long show with some of his most popular songs. *Elements* is a fun show with acrobatics and high energy dancing. Yet another interesting one, especially if you are a fan of the British-American rock

band Fleetwood Mac is Syd Norman's *Rumours*.

Wellness on board

Ever thought of getting skin tightening, filler and cosmetic wrinkle treatments on a cruise? I was surprised as I glanced through the spa menu, with its range of advanced treatments on board, the Mandara spa has crossed all boundaries. Apart from regular massages like deep tissue, aromatherapy, hot stone and Swedish, it has SmartGLO 360 facials and medical treatments.

Or one can just enjoy the advanced steam and sauna rooms at the massive Thermal Suite area, such as an aromatic steam room, a Finnish sauna, charcoal sauna, clay sauna, salt room and even an ice room. There is also a vitality pool with warm water and massaging jets and a floatation salt pool with warm salt water. I chose to plonk myself on one of the hot stone loungers in the relaxation area.

On my last day on board, I opted for a deep tissue massage. The therapist released every inch of my stress out by using warm body oil made of sea buckthorn, sea fennel and orange peel extract.

A few hours later, we had reached Southampton. As I disembarked, I turned back to see the *Norwegian Aqua* one last time. Leaving the ship, I felt like a new person, having experienced new adventures and a new level of luxury on the ocean. **LO**

