

CROWN PRINCESS, ONE YEAR LATER

by
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CROWN PRINCESS went into service in June 2006. Since then, the 113,000 gross ton mega cruise ship has been sailing out of New York during the summer and fall, primarily doing 9-day Caribbean cruises but with the occasional Canadian cruise as well, and sailing from San Juan, Puerto Rico during the winter months. Shortly after the ship first went into service, I had the opportunity to go onboard and was impressed by the elegance of the ship both in terms of the quality of its décor and amenities. Of course, all ships look good when they are new. Consequently, I was pleased to see some 14 months later that the ship still looked much the same.

James Deering, Passenger Services Director (a position often called "Hotel Manager" on other lines) had recently joined CROWN PRINCESS after serving on several Holland America ships including NOORDAM, OSTERDAM and ZUIDERDAM, as well as on ships belonging to Norwegian Cruise Line and Star Cruises. As Passenger Services Director, he is responsible for the accommodations, the dining, the entertainment, the shore excursions - - just about everything that directly impacts the passengers. Sitting in his large wood paneled office on Deck Five just off the Piazza, Deering commented on his new ship. "I am very impressed. In fact, this is the twenty-seventh ship that I have managed in my career and she is easily the best. I was very, very pleasantly surprised."

We were joined by Steven Ross, First Purser Administration. Ross has served on CROWN PRINCESS since she was in the Fincantieri shipyard in Italy being built. Prior to that he served on most of the other Grand-class ships in the Princess fleet. In his view, CROWN PRINCESS' first season in service went "very successfully. The run isn't difficult. It is a nine day run with lots of sea days. In general, it has gone very smoothly."

During her first season, CROWN PRINCESS has built-up a loyal following. "The guests love the ship." Ross pointed out that one couple had already been on CROWN PRINCESS four times in the 14 months that the ship has been in service and are return-



First Purser Steve Ross (left) and Passenger Services Director James Deering (right) of CROWN PRINCESS.

ing for their fifth and sixth voyages in November. Deering added: "We have a cruise group coming on today of 65 people and I know most of them already."

Not surprisingly, with the ship operating out of New York during the summer months, a high proportion of the passengers have been from the New York area. Deering reported that "I was reading the comments from the cruise that ended this morning and many of them say 'I wish you would have more and more cruises out of New York' because they really don't want to fly. They want to cruise out of New York."

Still, convenient access is not the only explanation for the ship's following. As noted above, during the winter months, CROWN PRINCESS has sailed out of San Juan, Puerto Rico. "When we went to Puerto Rican cruising, there was a high number of Puerto Ricans but only at the start of the season. However, as the season progressed, we did not see any. Very, very low numbers of Puerto Ricans. There were usual number of Americans and Canadians." In addition, there were approximately 450 people from the United Kingdom on each winter cruise.

What is it that most attracts people to this ship? "The ability to do what they want when they want. There are so many things on offer. You can sit in the

Sanctuary, rest in the spa or go to the gym or really anything. We have two of the pools that are adult only which the passengers really like. Especially in the summer, we have a lot of children onboard, a lot of junior cruisers. It just helps to balance. There are a lot of activities going on." Ross answered.

"It is a busy ship but there are just as many places where you can disappear, it is quiet and you are lost to the rest of the ship." Deering added.

It should also be borne in mind that CROWN PRINCESS ushered in "a lot of new concepts for the company [such] as the International Café, the Sanctuary, the new Crown Grill and all have gone very, very well." Ross noted. "Within the year, we were the first ship to go through the whole new menu change so even the menus in the main dining rooms have been improved a lot. The whole new china program has been introduced into all of our main dining rooms. It has been very successful for us thus far."

One concept that did not premiere on CROWN PRINCESS but which has been implemented successfully is "Personal Choice Dining." Under this system, passengers have the choice of having a traditional reserved table and time for dinner or of "Anytime Dining," in which the passenger can dine when and where he or she likes. One of the main dining rooms on CROWN PRINCESS is reserved for traditional dining while the other two are Anytime Dining. Ross observed that: "What we find is that more and more people who are in the traditional dining will move out to the Anytime Dining because sometimes they may want to go earlier or one night they may want to go later. It is funny because the people who are supposedly their table mates, end up going too because they are left alone at the table."

One concern about Anytime Dining, particularly for passengers traveling alone, is that they may end up eating alone if they do not have assigned tablemates.

Deering explained that CROWN PRINCESS takes this concern into consideration. "We ask guests when they arrive 'would you like to sit alone or would you like to sit with someone.'"

Ross added: "A lot of people like to dine with other people and we will seat people together."

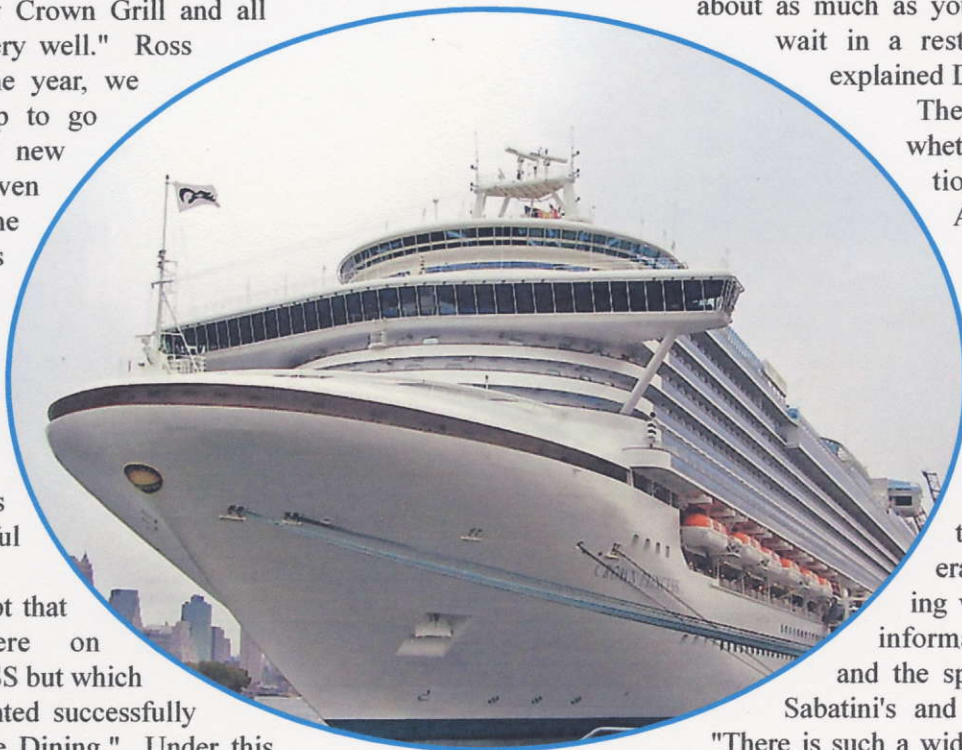
While Anytime Dining seeks to give passengers the choice of when and where to have dinner, passengers do have to wait for a table sometimes. "Everyone wants to eat their dinner at 7:30 and there is not enough room for everybody so that is why there is a 20 minute wait. Twenty minutes maximum in most cases, which is about as much as you would expect to wait in a restaurant at home," explained Deering.

The question of whether to choose traditional dining or Anytime Dining only relates to dinner in the main dining rooms. Breakfast and lunch in the main dining rooms are open seating. In addition, there are several alternative dining venues such as the informal Horizon Court and the specialty restaurants Sabatini's and the Crown Grill.

"There is such a wide array of food on this vessel that you really never get through it all." Deering observed.

"I ate in the Crown Grill for the first time two weeks ago right after I came onboard. In 32 years on ships, in 27 different ships, it was the best meal that I have ever had. I was blown away, I was quite shocked. The service is possibly better than the food. It is a great match, nicely balanced."

Before returning to New York last spring, CROWN PRINCESS underwent a wet-dock refit in San Juan. "All the carpets were re-bordered, general cleaning, a lot of things were done to the open decks - - some decking was replaced, we had the secondary wooden railings put on the open decks, - - more technical stuff rather than hotel. The only things we had done were just carpet borders and a general spruce up really." Ross



said.

CROWN PRINCESS' voyages from New York have all begun at the new Brooklyn Cruise Terminal. "As far as US ports go, this terminal is probably the best one in America just for being functional." Deering noted.

"Logistically, we love the Brooklyn terminal because it works very well for us for embarkation and disembarkation. The only thing that we would wish for the terminal was that the actual docking space was maybe a little longer and a little wider. But the terminal, the parking, the logistics, we just wish we had more space pier-side for loading and things like that but we get by," Ross added.

"One would think with dealing with the US immigration and customs people being New York, this would be one of the more difficult places in the US but it is actually one of the best places. They are far more co-operative and helpful and supportive than anyplace. Absolutely marvelous." Deering said.

This does not mean that there have not been any teething problems with the new terminal. "The terminal was built for us and QUEEN MARY 2 so when we started sailing from here it was very new and a lot of people did not know where it was. The problem seems to be communicating with taxi drivers. They know where Brooklyn is but they don't know where Red Hook is or Terminal 12. It will get better."

Ross continued, "Brooklyn is also doing a fantastic job of renovating the whole area outside of the terminal because the traffic has been terrible. There has been gridlock there. But they have police there all the time directing traffic and it has got a lot better. There have been big improvements."

Despite her success in New York, CROWN PRINCESS will not be returning for another season. "On this run will be the newly-refurbished CARIBBEAN PRINCESS," Ross explained. With the explosion of the European cruise market and with the success of EMERALD PRINCESS in carrying large numbers of passengers on European Mediterranean cruises, "we will be heading across the Atlantic to the Baltic. We will be doing 12 day cruising out of Copenhagen. It will be the first time we take this number of passengers to the Baltic."