BY KIMBERLY BUTTON

The promise of rare wines and gourmet dining can tempt me to go anywhere in the world. Add in visits to some of the world’s greatest cities and luxuriating in plush surroundings and there is no doubt that I will sign up for that vacation. Which is how I found myself sailing the Mediterranean on the Royal Princess.

The Royal Princess is the newest ship from Princess Cruise Lines - the first in five years. So when she set sail in 2013, it was a newsworthy celebration, but not just because of the many cruise-industry firsts that are available onboard. Launching a bottle of champagne against the bow of the Royal Princess during the June 13 christening was none other than Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge.

Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge is godmother of the Royal Princess, following in the footsteps of Diana, Princess of Wales, who was godmother of the original Royal Princess in 1984. This ship is clearly fit for royalty and in true Princess Cruises’ tradition, all guests onboard receive the royal treatment too.

It was while I was sitting in a Super Tuscan Wine Tasting event during a day at sea that I realised how true this was. In the intimate atmosphere of Sabatini’s, Princess’ Tuscan-inspired specialty restaurant, a small group had gathered to sample rare wines from Tuscany. The Royal Princess has the largest collection of Super Tuscan wines at sea - wines known for their bold, rich Italian flavours with a hefty price tag to match.

Winemaker Lamberto Frescobaldi was the guest speaker at our tasting. He regaled us with tales of how each of the five red wines from Marchesi de’ Frescobaldi that were placed in front of us were produced.

The launch of a Royal Princess is big enough news to attract the newest royal princess, Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Cambridge. But it’s not just royalty who receive the royal treatment.
Frescobaldi explained the need to ration bottles of Ornellaia among his family because the vintage was so rare and expensive. Then, to my surprise, the wine attendant uncorked a bottle of Ornellaia for our tasting. Nowhere else can you enjoy a sampling of this famed wine without spending hundreds of dollars to buy the whole bottle. It is just one of the many luxuries discovered every day while sailing onboard the Royal Princess.

The 3560 passenger ship merges the traditional favorites of Princess’ cruise fleet with modern enhancements to seamlessly create a destination at sea that seems to have everything you want and need. No matter where she sails, the Royal Princess is as much a star of the show as the ports that she visits. As I sailed from Venice, Italy to Istanbul, Turkey, I secretly wished for a couple more sea days so that I could thoroughly enjoy all of the amenities onboard the new ship. Had my wish been granted, I would have easily spent several more afternoons in the serene, adults-only space known as The Sanctuary. Situated on the front of the ship, the melodic hum of ocean breezes is all that I could hear while sunbathing on plush lounge chairs. The staff, known as Serenity Stewards, quietly walk amongst guests offering healthy snacks and personal music players to enhance your time while relaxing in the retreat.

Located inside The Sanctuary, the Lotus Spa Cabanas are a destination for serious pampering. Private cabanas are among the new features at the Royal Princess’ Retreat Pool and in The Sanctuary. The cabanas offer unique amenities for those who have reserved the spaces, but for the ultimate indulgence the two spa cabanas with windows overlooking the water have complete privacy and are where couples can indulge in side-by-side massages.

I signed up for a couples massage with my husband and we were shown into the living area of a Lotus Spa cabana. We sat on plush couches surrounding a widescreen TV and were handed a variety of menus including massage styles, a music playlist, and spa cuisine. Following our massage, we would have room service in our cabana and private time to either eat, watch TV or simply continue to relax.

With the customised elements of our spa services chosen, we fell asleep listening to the ocean waves below as our masseuses eliminated all of the tension in our muscles. Much too soon, the massage was over, but the disappointment was erased with trays of healthy entrees and fruit juice cocktails to enjoy while we transitioned back to reality.

Peace and tranquility can be found throughout the Royal Princess for those who seek it, but there is plenty of action for those who want a more active cruise, regardless of what your sense of adventure might be. There are more group activities and sporting events planned than you could possibly fit into a single cruise.

“The glass-floor walkway curves out more than eight metres beyond the side of the ship, creating the feeling that you are walking on air above water.”

Clockwise from opposite page: The Sanctuary is an adults-only retreat for sun and relaxation; The ship lights up the night; Private cabanas at the Retreat Pool and in The Sanctuary offer additional amenities to sunbathing cruisers; The Super Tuscan Wine Tasting event offers rare tastes of premium wines; Staterooms now feature contemporary decor, on demand entertainment and larger showers; The SeaWalk lets guests feel as if they are walking above water more than 39 metres in the air.

Opening spread: Chef’s Table Lumiere is the first at sea to surround diners with a curtain of shimmering light.
Online
Stockholm
vacationsandtravelmag.com
–230–
of one of the
meal at the Chef's Table Lumiere. Nowhere else at sea can you
meals and tasting events that you want.
programs are legendary and an amazing value, offering fine
dining experiences held both day and night. Princess' culinary
panels while taking photos of my feet with the ocean below.
SeaWalk and tentatively jumped up and down on the glass
started laughing with joy. I joined in with other adults on the
ocean, took my breath away for just a moment, before I
view available on no other cruise ship, at 39 metres above the
princess.com.au
Among the most sought-after experiences onboard is a
Top: The Royal Princess is the newest ship in Princess Cruise Line's fleet.

When the sailing is very important in order to secure reservations for
the meals and tasting events that you want.
Among the most sought-after experiences onboard is a
meal at the Chef's Table Lumiere. Nowhere else at sea can you
enjoy a culinary feast while surrounded by a curtain of
shimmering lights that creates a private enclave in the middle
of one of Royal Princess' main dining rooms. With just 12 seats
available per night, reservations are hard to come by. Sadly, I
wasn't able to dine in the exclusive setting, but I now know to
book the experience as soon as possible after embarking on the
ship. Just as special, though, was the chance to savour a Wine
maker's Dinner, whose wines are paired with each of the courses.
Our group gathered around a circular table surrounded by
glass cases filled with wine bottles. We were seated close to
the kitchen, which allowed the chef to come out with each
course and describe why he chose the particular menu item to
accompany each wine.
Afterwards, I returned to my room for a necessary pause in
my on-demand entertainment system and recognise
TV programming being taped in front of a studio audience of
Princess Live!, the cruise line's first television studio, to watch
Princess both day and night.
The glass-floor walkway curves out more
during the cruise. The glass-floor walkway offered
a 270-degree view of the outside world, allowing a
unobstructed view of the ocean below. I
prided myself on being able to
see the ship's wake from the
glass floor, a testament to the
design and engineering that
went into building this
vessel. The ship itself was
beautiful, with art-filled
soaring atrium which is the social hub of the Royal
Princess both day and night.
For less active but still intriguing activities, I peeked into
The Grand Plaza, a central hub of activity on the ship that
boasted a large screen for watching movies and other
entertainment. I also spent some time in the
casino, which was well-lit and
colorful. Overall, my experience on the
was very enjoyable, with
numerous options for
entertainment and
sights to see.