

Small-Ship Woman in a
Big-Ship World

How does an Alaskan adventure traveler adapt
to the newest megaship at sea?
Viva the Norwegian Viva!

by LISA MALONEY



“Hold. Hold! There’s somebody still in the tube.”



THAT’S NOT WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR WHILE STANDING ON A TRAP DOOR, WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO PUSH A BUTTON THAT WILL SEND YOU PLUMMETING TEN DECKS DOWN THE SIDE OF A CRUISE SHIP.

That trap door was my entry point for The Drop, which Norwegian Cruise Line bills as the first free-fall dry slide in the world. I’d boarded *Viva* — the second in Norwegian’s Prima class of ships — for the latter half of her inaugural sailing from Rome to Lisbon, and wasted no time in finding what looked like the most exciting activity.

But that warning, crackling over the radio of the crew member whose job it was to push the “release travel writer” button, gave me pause. His coworker, stationed at the end of the slide and tasked with verifying a 1:1 ratio of cruise passengers going in the top and coming out the bottom, was adamant that he’d heard somebody still in there.

I was first in line for this afternoon opening of the slide, so of course there was nobody in there. But if there had been, that would mean they’d been stuck for hours....

With that image vivid in my mind, I hopped off the trap door and, as the kids might say, noped the hell out of there. I headed past the neighboring Tee Time putt-putt course, did an end run around the Bull’s Eye (cozy ‘80s-esque nooks for playing darts), scooted straight past the entrances to the Viva Speedway go-kart track and The Rush (a less scream-inducing tube slide) and right down the stairs.

NOPE, NOPE, NOPE. NO WAY. I WASN’T EVEN GOING TO WAIT FOR THE ELEVATOR.

ART AT SEA

If you’re wondering what I thought about the rest of the ship, I’ll start by telling you that I get horribly lost inside buildings and crowds make me twitch. So you can probably imagine how my first few hours aboard a big cruise ship went. But I leaned into it with the help of the ship’s wall-mounted, digital maps that gave directions at the tap of a finger — it all felt very *Star Trek* — and within a few hours I felt reasonably confident about finding my way.

I’ve heard some criticisms of the traffic pattern in Norwegian’s Prima-class ships, and I admit to some bemusement when, for example, I had to walk straight through a restaurant to get from Point A to Point B. But I can see the sense in positioning “sit and stay” places as eddies adjacent to the main traffic pattern, keeping several thousand passengers moving so efficiently that the only real bottlenecks I encountered were, inevitably, at embarkation and disembarkation. But carrying my own bags, and waiting out the inexorable queue, kept even that part of the process relaxed.



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The ship’s decor helped set me at ease, too. Nowhere is there a bare, sterile hallway or a dead end; and art abounds, from sculpted origami shapes hovering near the ceiling of the lofty Penrose Atrium to sculptures on the Ocean Boulevard outdoor walkways and atrium staircases with organic, earthy-feeling lines that felt like a gentle whiff of Gaudí’s influence. Even the mirrored back walls in the elevators were decorated with streaks of light that made it feel as if you were speeding through space.

But the ship’s true artistic glory is a hallway with one wall completely covered in glass panels, decorated with an abstract pattern of squares. That’s what it looked like at first, anyway. But a small child revealed the truth by dragging her fingers along the glass as she dashed past: Every square she touched came to life as a digital butterfly, fluttering like a living sine wave in her wake. After a few seconds the butterflies went to sleep again, folding their wings back into that abstract pattern and awaiting the next touch.

THE NORWEGIAN VIVA RUNDOWN

LOA: 965 feet
BEAM: 144 feet
GROSS TONNAGE: 143,535 grt
DECKS: 20
CABINS: 1,646
PASSENGERS (MAX): 3,950

DINING:

35 venues, including:

- Indulge Food Hall, with 11 eateries including a soft-serve ice cream station
- Eight specialty restaurants
- 19 bars and lounges, including The Humidor Cigar Lounge and Starbucks, both on Deck 7

ATTRACTIONS:

- Ocean Boulevard, a 360-degree promenade around all of Deck 8
- Oceanwalk, with two glass-bottomed bridges
- Atrium, spanning three decks with a 3-ton chandelier, numerous shops, and glass walls with sea views
- Viva Speedway, a three-level go-kart racetrack
- Tee Time tech-immersive mini-golf
- Five multi-level waterslides, three dry slides, Tidal Wave
- waterslide with inner-tube surfing
- Two infinity pools
- Two Aqua Deck pools
- Four Aqua Deck Jacuzzis (two with infinity hot tubs)
- Pulse Fitness Center with Performance Recovery Room
- The Haven luxury ship-within-a-ship with its own spa, restaurants, pool, Jacuzzis, and 24-hour butler service
- Starlink high-speed internet ... and more!

ENTERTAINMENT:

- *Beetlejuice: The Musical* full-scale show
- *Icons* live sing-along concert featuring six decades of hits
- Viva three-story theater and nightclub
- Interactive rock shows at Syd Norman's Pour House
- Improv at Sea comedy venue
- Family game shows
- Behind-the-scenes tours of the bridge and engine-control rooms



PENROSE ATRIUM



ART ABOUNDS, from sculpted origami shapes hovering near the ceiling of the lofty Penrose Atrium to sculptures on the Ocean Boulevard outdoor walkways and atrium staircases.

OCEAN BOULEVARD



ATRIUM STAIRCASE



ATRIUM NOOK



HAVEN ELEVATOR

THE CROWNING TOUCH

Two more key features pulled me willingly into the big-ship world, with the first being the Galaxy Pavilion — a virtual-reality arcade. Viva's version has a new ride I just couldn't get enough of: The Gyro, a two-person pod that spins and rotates you in every direction as you blast your way through hostile alien bases.

But arguably the most perfect thing of all aboard *Viva* is the Spa Thermal Suite. I am not a spa person — why sit around doing nothing when you could be having an adventure? — but port-day access to the spa was included in my fare. So when a new friend suggested checking it out, I dutifully trailed along and discovered it's impossible to not relax when immersed neck-deep in a warm pool.

Dunking in the neighboring cold pool afterward? Absolutely exhilarating, even if I forgot to read the label that indicated it was actually a saltwater float pool. Oops.

I was better at reading labels on the smorgasbord of saunas: Infrared, Finnish, charcoal, salt ... there was also an aromatherapy steam room and, my favorite, the ice room. It feels shockingly good to smooth handfuls of slushy ice over your body right after ducking out of a hot sauna.

It's the spa that really turned me into a convert. I visited several more times, ending each visit by lounging on a heated chaise with a view over the ocean. Relaxing thoroughly and completely was the last thing I'd expected to find myself doing on a big cruise ship — and yet there I was.



SPA THERMAL SUITE

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THE FAST WAY DOWN

But I'd left one thing undone, and I eventually found myself back at The Drop. I stepped back onto the trap door — and this time I stayed. The attendant pushed the button.

If you've ever seen those cartoons where a character falls out of frame, leaving some body part — maybe their heart or their head — behind for a moment before it snaps back into place and follows them down, that's how it felt. My innards rushed to catch up with the rest of me as I fell, and the bend in the slide that I'd thought would slow me down only redirected my momentum into a series of spiraling loops.

My voice spiraled with me, a full-throated "AAAAAAGH!!" that I just couldn't turn off. But somewhere in the second half of the descent it transformed into a WOOOOOOOOO of excitement, until I shot out of the horizontal tube at slide's end like a skeeball being returned to its thrower.

There was the bottom attendant with his radio, eyeing me quizzically. I guess not everybody emerges from that ride shrieking with joy — but at least there was no doubt about whether I'd gotten stuck somewhere along the way.

In fact, I had found the way for someone like me — an independent, outdoorsy Alaskan woman who's really most at home in the mountains — to feel at home at sea, no matter the size of the ship beneath me. ●



GALAXY PAVILLION

Left clockwise from top left: Norwegian Cruise Line; Lisa Maloney; Norwegian Cruise Line; Lisa Maloney; Right: Norwegian Cruise Line (C)