

Forbes

OceaniaNEXT: The Next Chapter for Oceania Cruises



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Penthouse Suite of the reimagined Regatta-Class ship

With changes so sweeping that the cruise line calls it a “re-inspiration” rather than a renovation, Oceania Cruises will be making a \$100 million dollar investment over the next two years in its four Regatta-Class ships —*Regatta*, *Insignia*, *Nautica*, and *Sirena*. These changes are part of an ambitious multi-year project that the line has named OceaniaNEXT.

Guests seem to have a real soft spot for these vessels because they feel “right-sized.” Each one holds a maximum of 684-guests, making them large enough to offer appealing amenities (e.g., gracious public spaces and four restaurants) but small enough to maintain a sense of intimacy and provide pampered service.

First built in France about twenty years ago for the now defunct Renaissance Cruises, these four vessels laid the foundation for the birth of Oceania. The cruise line has been operating *Regatta*, *Insignia* and *Nautica* from 2003, 2004, and 2005, respectively, and acquired *Sirena* in 2016. (The company added *Marina* in 2011 and *Riviera* the next year, thus creating a six-ship fleet.)

When the Regatta-Class ships emerge from dry-dock, each will have 62 suites and 280 staterooms with spacious interior designs reminiscent of contemporary private residences. They will also be updated with a bevy of technological enhancements (e.g., USB ports, state-of-the-art TV systems with on-demand movies in multiple languages, real-time weather and itinerary updates, etc.).

Forbes.com interviewed Bob Binder, President and CEO of Oceania Cruises, to get the scoop on what changes guests sailing on these ships might expect to see:

What is it that guests seem to love about these Regatta-Class ships?

For ships of this size, they are unique in every sense: physical size, ambiance, intimacy, and wealth of amenities. With a crew of 400 for a maximum of 684-guests, the staff-to-guest ratio is extraordinary, allowing for uniquely personal service, a level of service that typically find only on ultra-luxury ships that charge double the price.

From a guest experience perspective, everyone loves how warm and “clubby” these ships feel. Guests and staff become family during the voyage. Our guests are intensely loyal; many have traveled 30, 40, or 50 times on these ships.

The Regatta-Class ships each have four restaurants, which is also rare for ships of this size or even larger, along with lavish spas and a multitude of lounges, bars, and public spaces.

In terms of itinerary, these ships traverse the globe, calling on all manner and sizes of ports from iconic cities—such as Rome, Barcelona, Venice, and New York—to off-the-beaten-path ports that larger ships cannot call upon—such as Amalfi, Positano, Sorrento, Capri, Seville, Ullapool, Archangel, Cienfuegos, and Santiago de Cuba.

But if I had to answer the question in just a few words, it’s their ambiance that is unlike that of any other ship.

You’ve stated that this revamp is better than a new build. Why?

It would be very tough to replicate these ships today given the very high standards to which they were built, the extent to which we are transforming them, and the very short period of time in which that is being accomplished.

And the public spaces are being completely transformed to be lighter, brighter, and more progressive. We’re retaining the sense of familiarity but putting a new polish and shine on them.

Since the ships are such fan-favorites, how changed will returning guests find these vessels?

Literally everything in staterooms and suites will be brand new. New bathrooms, furnishings, lighting, closets, desks and cabinetry, upholstery—even the veranda windows and doors. They are being stripped down to the steel and built out entirely new.

The public spaces will have new furnishings from Baker and Donghia, along with fabrics from Rubelli and Kravat. But we will be maintaining a sense of familiarity with iconic elements, such as the polished walnut and mahogany paneling, and the physical structure. But the look and feel will be new and refreshing.



Martini Lounge of the reimagined Regatta-Class ship

Gone are the bold colors, heavy patterns, and over-sized furnishings. In their place, will be a softer palette of colors and materials inspired by the legendary destinations we travel to.

How will these small ships compare to *Marina* and *Riviera*?

Marina and Riviera were the muses for this revamp; much of what is being done has drawn inspiration from them. The new lobby and grand staircase and the chandelier in the Grand Dining Room are perhaps the greatest nods to those two ships.



Grand Staircase of the reimagined Regatta-Class ship

Who has been helping Oceania with such a massive redesign?

Studio DADO, a renowned interior design firm based in Miami are overseeing the project and have worked hand-in-hand with our internal team to create these phenomenal suites, staterooms, and public spaces.

Why now? Where is such a substantial cash infusion coming from?

The ships were substantially upgraded back in 2013 and 2014 to infuse some of the elements from our then-new Marina and Riviera. As a brand, we are always looking forward and as we spoke to our guests and travel partners over the past few years, we began to outline the next chapter of the Oceania Cruises story.

When we scheduled itineraries for 2018 through 2020, we decided this was the time to transform the ships into something new, better-than-new. As we are a multi-billion

dollar brand, the cost of the re-inspiration is coming from budgeted operating capital. This is just the first of many guest-experience enhancements that will be rolled out in 2018, 2019, and beyond.

Insignia will be the first ship to come out of dry dock later this year. Where will it be sailing in 2019?

Insignia will re-enter service in December 2018, sailing to Cuba and the Caribbean, and will kick off 2019 with a 180-day around the world voyage from New York to New York via Central America, Hawaii, the South Pacific, Australia, the Philippines, China, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Egypt, the Med, Ireland, the British Island and the Canadian Maritimes. She'll spend the balance of the year cruising to Bermuda, Canada, New England and Cuba.

The entire Oceania fleet has earned a reputation as a favorite of food enthusiasts because of the excellence of its award-winning culinary programs. Will that be changing?

Each of the ships will retain its restaurant offerings but we are consistently raising the bar on our culinary offerings across the brand.



Grand Dining Room of the reimagined Regatta-Class ship

One last question: Other than this refurbishment, does the line have any other new plans underway? New ships? New itineraries?

Stay tuned! We will be announcing other OceaniaNEXT initiatives later this year and through 2019.