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at Carnival Corp

ASIA

Contrasting
fortunes
in terminal
design



ON THE COVER

Family fun at St. Maarten's Seaside Nature Park



SHIP PREVIEW: UK MARKET

Atrium

BRITANNIA TO BECOME P&O'S LARGEST SHIP

Just as Cruise Business Review was about to go to press, P&O Cruises, the UK-focused contemporary market unit of Carnival Corporation & plc, launched the Britannia – the company's eighth ship. The new vessel is based on the same platform as the Royal Princess from sister company Princess Cruises, but differs markedly from the Princess vessel's design both inside and out.

By Kari Reinikainen

The ms Britannia's most visible difference can be seen in the exterior: Whereas the ms Royal Princess has a single latticed funnel, the Britannia features two funnels. Inside, Princess Cruises repeated its soft, pastel-toned palette of Mediterranean colors accented with lots of glitz; the Britannia features an altogether stronger and darker color scheme, with plenty of solid, high backed armchairs and cushions that are a hallmark of British taste.

The interior design is the work of Richmond International, a London-



The Limelight Club

based company that has worked on several top-end hotels, including the recent transformation of the Langham Hotel in London. Opened in 1865 and one of the oldest grand hotels in the world, the property emerged from a multi-million pound refit some years ago with an interior that is bold and stark, yet respectful of its long history.

With an estimated gross tonnage of 143,000, the Britannia is much larger than any of the existing ships in the P&O fleet, whose biggest units until now were the ms Ventura and ms Azura, introduced in 2008 and 2010 respectively; both have a gross tonnage of about 115,000. These two ships were based on the ms Caribbean Princess platform from Princess Cruises, yet again with their own identities to appeal to a British audience.

New P&O livery

The Britannia will be the first ship in the P&O fleet to display the line's new visual identity: Parts of the Union Jack grace the forward section of the hull, whereas so far, the hulls of P&O ships have been painted all white. The funnels are done in royal blue, with a rising-sun motif as the centerpiece. This replaces the all-yellow funnels which, like the all-white hulls, have been used since the introduction of the ss Strathaird in 1932. Before that, P&O's hulls and funnels were painted in black and the superstructure in mustard yellow.

Onboard, P&O expects the Britannia to capitalize on the popularity in the UK of cooking and fine dining - something that at first may sound almost like a contradiction, as the image of overcooked vegetables and barely recognizable meats may come to the minds of many. However, things have improved substantially over the past couple of decades in Britain, and P&O Cruises has taken notice of this.

The new ship features a Cookery Club, where passengers can create their own masterpieces under the guidance of celebrity chef **James Martin** or someone else from his circle of chef friends. Master patissier **Eric Lanlard** will produce cakes and other sweet things, while **Atul Kochar** - who has two Michelin stars and Sindhu restaurants on two existing P&O ships - brings his third restaurant for P&O to the Britannia. **Marco Pierre White** - the holder of three Michelin stars, with whom P&O Cruises teamed up for the introduction of the Ventura six years ago - has been given responsibility for the ship's gala menus. **Olly Smith** again features his Glass House seafood, steak and wine-by-the-glass restaurant on the Britannia as well. The ship's Oriental Restaurant features Club Dining, whereby passengers sit at the same table each night at the same time, whereas the Peninsular Restaurant allows passengers to dine whenever they like within the opening hours of the venue. P&O Cruises calls this Freedom

Dining (comparable to Anytime Dining aboard sister line Princess).

Back in the 1980s, it was difficult to find decent coffee in London, but since then the number of coffee-bar chains has mushroomed and changed the landscape completely. Costa Coffee (not associated with Costa Crociere) and Caffe Nero are among the venues that grace most British high streets today. Accordingly, the Britannia features its own coffee bar, called Java, in an obvious recognition by the company of coffee's growing popularity among its British clientele.

Differences in platform

As far as other drinks are concerned, the ship offers 13 bars in all, of which the Crow's Nest above the bridge owes its name to a similar venue aboard the ss Canberra, which served the company from 1961 to 1997. In fact, the Crow's Nest is a room that does not appear aboard the Royal Princess, this being another example of how the Britannia



The Crow's Nest



The Cookery Club

is not an exact copy of the platform on which it is based, even from a structural point of view. The Blue Bar, meanwhile, serves mainly cocktails, while the Limelight Club offers dining and entertainment.

The ship's main theater features an LED background to allow for the creation of special effects, while more intimate venues for entertainment include The Studio, which is home to recitals, cooking classes, demonstrations and talks. The Crystal Room serves as the ship's ballroom, and P&O has teamed up with the production crew from "Strictly Come Dancing" - a popular television show aired by the BBC, which has filmed many episodes aboard the line's vessels. Elsewhere, the aptly named Live Lounge offers live bands, tribute acts and singers.

The Britannia houses an extensive spa facility and features The Retreat (an adults-only area that also appears on the Royal Princess), which offers spa treatments and relaxation in cabanas forward on the uppermost deck. Come evenings,

this venue also serves as an outside bar area. The ship has three pools, one of which is dedicated to teens, while children have their own areas adjacent to one of the main pools. In addition to the usual Lido buffet and grill that serves hamburgers, pre-packaged sandwiches and other snacks are available on the pool deck.

The Britannia continues a trend that P&O Cruises introduced aboard the Ventura by offering single cabins - 27 in all in this case. As a distinguishing detail, balcony cabins are equipped with a solid armchair (deluxe ones have two) with a comfy cushion that gives the cabins a distinctly British feel. The ship carries a total of 3,611 passengers, and all outside accommodations feature a private balcony.

Inaugural itineraries

The Britannia sets sail on its maiden voyage from Southampton to the Mediterranean on 14 March 2015, approximately 20 years after P&O Cruises

commissioned the 69,153 gross ton ms Oriana, which was the first modern cruise liner designed for the British market and remains with the company. The ship's first season takes it to the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, the Iberian Peninsula, the Canary Islands and the Baltic on mainly 14-night cruises. In addition, the Britannia has cruises scheduled around the British Isles and offers a number of short mini-breaks of 2 to 7 nights.

In the autumn, the ship crosses the Atlantic to the Caribbean. Throughout the winter, the Britannia will operate a series of 14-night voyages sailing round-trip from Barbados, where the vessel's fly/cruise packages begin with an overnight stay in Bridgetown. Itineraries are billed as visiting nine ports in nine countries, focusing mainly on destinations in the Southern Caribbean. In addition to the ship's homeport of Barbados, ports of call may include stops in St. Kitts, St. Lucia, Dominica, St. Maarten, Antigua, Tortola, Grenada, and Grand Turk. ■



Britannia will sail maiden voyage in March 2015