



## **Royal Caribbean's Mariner of the Seas**

**2 day cruise February 2009**

**By Tim Larison, Master Cruise Counselor (MCC)**

**With contributions by travel agent Anne Larison**



Delicious dining, exhilarating recreation, soothing hot tubs, and exciting entertainment. You can now experience these amenities and more on the largest cruise ship sailing out of Los Angeles - Royal Caribbean's Mariner of the Seas.

After several years of sailing the Caribbean from Port Canaveral, Florida, the Mariner of the Seas has moved to the West Coast in 2009. In her new home port the ship is now sailing 7 night Mexican Riviera cruises year round.

We had sailed on the Mariner twice previously while she was based in Florida, and we looked forward to cruising once again on this wonderful ship. Royal Caribbean invited us to check out the Mariner on a special two night "travel agents only" cruise in February 2009 – we report on this voyage below.

### **Staterooms**

The Mariner has a good variety of staterooms. For this sailing we had an inside "promenade" room, cabin 7281 on deck 7. These inside rooms have a special feature – each has a window which overlooks the "promenade" area of the ship (a large indoor shopping mall).



We enjoyed the opportunity to people watch as we looked out from our window to the promenade below. Because this “interior” room had a window, it was slightly larger than the inside stateroom I had on our 2004 cruise. The deck 7 location was convenient to get to all areas of this huge ship.

Not as good was the noise level in these rooms. If there was a parade or music going on in the promenade you could hear it very clearly in your room. On our first night there was a parade which was impossible to sleep through! Due to the excessive noise levels, we wouldn't recommend these rooms for those who go to bed early. Otherwise we enjoyed this stateroom location.

We also toured several other types of staterooms on the Mariner. As you can see in our pictures, the Family Suite was impressive (very roomy) as well as the other suites. I also liked the handicapped inside room - considerably bigger than a normal inside room. These rooms are reserved for handicapped guests but sometimes become available shortly before sailing for non-handicapped passengers.

Anne says:

I enjoyed the promenade stateroom also. One plus was that the promenade staterooms are located mid ship. I liked having a stateroom located in the middle of a deck – convenient access to go to the restaurants in the aft and the showroom in the forward. In addition to the usual features the promenade rooms have a couch and a window seat – extra seating for guests or lounging.

In addition to the noise level, another caution – there is a privacy issue. The window covering include sheer curtains and black-out drapes, but you are directly across from many other promenade rooms and guests in those rooms can look directly in your room when your drapes are open. Even the crowd on the promenade can look up and watch you watching them!



**Stateroom grade: B**

## Dining

The biggest difference we noticed from our previous cruises on the Mariner was the improved quality of the food! We enjoyed our two dinners in the main dining room. The Mariner has a huge 3 story dining room which is one of the most impressive we've seen on a cruise ship. Anne had a



generous portion of chicken marsala the first night – the chicken was extremely tender and tasty. On the second night we both had “Surf and Turf” with a delicious cut of Filet Mignon and lobster tail. The only disappointment in the main dining room was my shrimp scampi dish the first night. A meager portion of shrimp was not enough to satisfy my appetite – thankfully with appetizers, dessert, and sampling Anne’s chicken marsala I did not leave hungry!

We ate at the Windjammer buffet for two lunches and one breakfast. This large buffet had a Chinese section (Jade) as well as standard buffet fare (salads, burgers, hot dogs, chicken dishes, sliced beef, desserts). We found the selections plentiful and delicious. In comparison to our most recent cruise on the Disney Wonder, the Royal Caribbean buffet was much bigger with more choices.



The Mariner also has two “specialty” restaurants. Chops Grille is a steakhouse. The cut of beef we sampled here was excellent. Portofino is an Italian restaurant where we sampled a yummy chocolate dessert. From our samples we think each restaurant is worth the extra cover charge to dine there one night of your cruise.

We also liked the wide variety of snacks that were available. The Promenade is open 24 hours a day and guests enjoy in-between-meals snacks of cookies, sandwiches, and pastries. At various times you can purchase Ben and Jerry’s ice cream cones. We enjoyed eating our Ben and Jerry’s cones while sitting on the Promenade – it reminded us of eating at a sidewalk café back home.

Another dining venue which we didn’t make it to this cruise was Johnny Rockets – a fun hamburger and shake shop near the kids club. We found Johnny Rockets to be extremely popular with our fellow cruisers, and heard a few raving about the chocolate shakes served there.

Anne says:

Take time to explore the whole Windjammer buffet. The first meal on the first day, many guests got in a long line for the Jade Chinese buffet because it is the first line you see upon entering the dining area. Back farther toward the back there were additional food selections. I like to explore all my options so I don’t fill my plate with the first few options I see. During peak times for meals both sides of the buffet are open, so if you see a long line, don’t forget to check to see if the other side is less crowded.

## Dining Grade: B+

### Entertainment

I often tell people that one of the best shows I have seen on a cruise ship is Royal Caribbean's ice show on the Mariner. This cruise was no exception. The "Ice Under the Big Top" show was again excellent. Particularly impressive was guest star Emanuelle Balmori who performed aerial acrobatics above the ice in addition to skating flawlessly (see a sample of a Balmori performance here: <http://is.gd/mdR0> )



One night as we were waiting for dinner I heard two gentlemen discussing the ice show. "I didn't expect much," said one, "but the quality of the skaters was amazing!". "I would pay to see that show if it ever came 'on land' to San Diego," said the other.

We also saw comedian/vocal impersonator Scott Record in the ship's main theatre. Record was an above average stage act – his vocals were very impressive and he had good humor throughout his performance.

Throughout the day Royal Caribbean also featured various pool games (such as a "men's international belly flop contest"). At night the Royal Promenade was abuzz with activity (the first night an "Enchanted Nights" parade was the highlight, and on the second night passengers danced late into the night at a 70's party)

Anne says:

The ice show was great. One of the amazing aspects was that it was not a huge ice arena and yet the performers made use of all of the ice and made it seem effortless. Everything from the music, to the costumes, to the lighting added to the feeling of a professional ice show.

### Entertainment Grade :A

### Recreation and Pools

The Mariner has Royal Caribbean's signature "rock climbing wall" which was very popular among the cruise guests. Also available was a roller-blading track, a miniature golf course, and a large walking/running track. The ice skating rink was available for "open



skating” at various times when it was not being used for shows. The pool area was large with inviting hot tubs nearby. The Solarium was a nice “adults only” retreat area.

## **Recreation Grade A**

### **Kids Clubs**

While there were no children on our sailing, we did have the opportunity to tour the kids clubs. We were impressed with the size of the clubs and the arcade (among the largest we’ve seen on a cruise ship) and the well organized programming. Our twins enjoyed the Mariner kids club back in 2004 as 10 year olds, and now they would no doubt like the many amenities available for teens on the ship. The children’s programming is complementary as part of a family’s cruise fare, with extra fees (\$5/hour per child) for late night activities (10 pm – 2 am)



### **Kids Club Grade B+**

### **Internet Access**

A big improvement I discovered on this cruise compared to our previous sailings on the Mariner was wireless internet. Our connection in our deck 7 cabin was strong throughout the cruise. This made it much easier to stay connected with friends and family back home on my laptop rather than having to go to the internet café.

We did talk to a couple of agents who had trouble accessing the wireless internet on deck 2 (we saw them in one of the pool areas with their laptops later)

### **Internet Grade B+**

### **Summary**



The Mariner of the Seas to us proved to be as good as ever, and now provides the West Coast with the biggest ship to cruise the Mexican Riviera itinerary. Sailing on the

Mariner made us wish our 15 year old twins were with us – we think this is a great ship for teenagers and families in general. Physically active cruisers will enjoy the wide variety of recreation options available onboard.

Anne says:

When Tim and I disembarked from our 'too short' 2-night cruise, other than wishing we could stay longer, we looked back on the experience with all the positive memories of our past cruises. The food was great, we had fun, we relaxed and we reinforced our belief that Royal Caribbean is a family vacation option that we highly recommend.

**Overall Grade A**

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