



# NDA GLOBAL

NOVEMBER 2022 ISSUE

## VIRGIN VOYAGES CRUCIAL REVIEW

**POPE FRANCIS  
VISITS THE KINGDOM  
OF BAHRAIN**

**THE ROYAL BALLET:  
LIGHT OF PASSAGE**

NDA  
GLOBAL

# NDA NEWS

## Virgin Voyages: Honesty is Crucial

We are normally very optimistic in our newsletters at NDA GLOBAL and are always looking forward to share with you the latest and most cutting edge of businesses that we would like you to experience for yourselves. In this edition we will highlight the most prominent positive features of this ambitious cruise line and in our humble opinion its rather unexpected disappointments.



At NDA GLOBAL we have shared with you our numerous travel experiences onboard the Belmond Scotsman trains to The Silver seas Cruises. In This edition we would like to share with you our latest experience onboard the Newly launched Virgin Cruises Valiant lady ship. Let's begin shall we.

We booked The Spanish Obsession from Barcelona, 25 September – 2nd October 2022 (7-night cruise).

What's included you might ask?

- Gratuities included
- Unlimited Wi-Fi\* throughout the ship
- Adults only – no kids, no kidding! But your inner child is welcome!
- Detox and Retox – rest and recover by day, enjoy some hedonism by night!
- Immersive entertainment with original programming and ground-breaking acts
- All group fitness classes included – from slow-flowing vinyasa and meditation, to cycling and HIIT classes
- All food included – 20+ eateries – from refined dining to relaxed and casual, all included with no surcharge!
- Essential Drinks – stay hydrated with filtered still and sparkling water, non-pressed juices, sodas, teas and coffees included
- Stylish accommodation modern,
- yacht-inspired aesthetic and clever cabin technology make for more than just a space to live (or sleep)

## Inside Valiant Lady Ship Cabin.

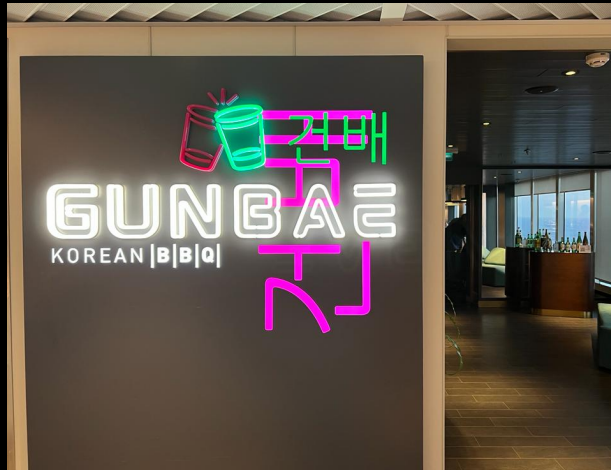
The Valiant lady has many Cabin categories from their heavily Celebrity endorsed suites to their iconic Virgin red hammock terrace cabins. On this trip we booked The Sea Terrace: The Minimum cabin size is 225 sq. Ft and are located on Decks 8 -14.



### Cabin Features:

- C-Table
- Clever cabin technology
- Flexible wardrobe for luggage and clothes
- Glam area
- In-room entertainment (43" 4K TV)
- In-room safe (fits 17" laptop)
- Mini bar
- Mood lighting
- Plugs/USBs in all the right places
- Roomy Rain shower
- Saddle leather lounge chair

Here's a look at some of the public areas, facilities, and restaurants on board the Virgin Cruises Valiant lady ship.



### Where Virgin Voyages' Valiant Lady Hits the Mark - The Pros:

Valiant Lady's beverage programming is stellar, as a matter of fact their drinks are not only impressive, but it also rather feels like going out on a Saturday night to Soho in London with your friends with its multitude of venues and expansive Cocktail menus. They also went a step forward by adding a decent selection of non-alcoholic drinks to their restaurant and bar menus across the ship. Options included creative mocktails and a few shaken or stirred libations featuring zero-ABV mixers such as Seedlip that hold their own against traditional bar offerings. This works well with their mission to promote health and wellness onboard.

**Valiant Lady also offers excellent choices for nearly every kind of atmosphere.**

The Manor and the adjacent The Den, two of the ship's multi-purpose venues, you'll find a sleek, velvet and gold nightclub for those who love to dance and party. Just around the corner, at On the Rocks, the ship's official martini bar, it is still sleek but a bit more social as the seating spills out into the main atrium and nightly live music gets the crowd moving. The floor above, The Draught Haus offers a laid-back space (conveniently near a selection of vinyl and public record players) for beer lovers to work their way through obscure craft beers and big-name favourites served in cans, bottles and on tap. Cruisers seeking out an even more social and casual spot can head to The Loose Cannon, Valiant Lady's nautical-themed pub bar where games and good cocktails await. There is a dedicated champagne bar that stretches across the midship starboard (right) side; the classy aft-facing bar that offers stunning views of the ship's casual Mediterranean spot, The Dock House, that's perfect for pre-dinner drinks; and even a spot where you can get boozy milkshakes, The Social Club.



**Health and Wellness is a priority Aboard Valiant Lady.**

Virgin Voyages makes it clear that they are all about finding that balance between holiday partying and relaxation. (almost) all fitness classes are free of charge, meaning cruisers can really take advantage of getting their fitness on or trying out something new. We fell in love with the fun, hilarious and no-judgment VHS Workouts and we were delighted to know it's as 80s as ever while also levelling up the sweat factor a bit. There is also the ship's state-of-the-art gym split into two sections, Burn + Bike and Build + Balance, Valiant Lady's B-complex gym runs down the sides of the pool deck (Deck 15), and is a bright, sunny space with great views and equipment where you can go as hard as you wish. We also loved how Valiant Lady's thermal suite area was accessibly priced. During our sailing, the £39 (just over \$50 USD) pass gave pre-booked guests three hours of access to the space, which is one of the best for this level of ship. Heated slabs, hot tubs, relaxation chairs, a mud room, saunas and steam rooms are all ready and waiting to take you away to another level of relaxation or to ease that pesky hangover, without breaking the bank.

### Valiant Lady Excels in Inclusivity.

Virgin targets in their marketing millennials, specifically 35+ cruisers. They weren't making a point to show off how inclusive the ship was. It was very nonchalantly done, from non-ABV drinks to menus with marked dietary restrictions and preferences, to representation in onboard staff, ADA access and entertainment, Virgin Voyages' Valiant Lady wowed us with their natural ability to represent all types of people.

There's also a whole schedule of events planned for every day of the cruise, which you can find on the app or printed out and presented throughout the ship. On the schedule, for example, you'll find all the shows, any pop-up experiences, game nights where you can meet and play with new friends, musical performances, late-night themed parties, and more. The biggest event of each sailing is called Scarlet Night, in which everyone dresses up in the colour red. The entire night is basically one big performance full of surprises, which concludes with a dance party into the night. (Think: a fun middle school dance but with alcohol.) it takes place around the main pool.



### The Shows are unique.

Every ship sailing features six original shows, most of which include some fun audience participation. My favourite two were Dual Reality, a Cirque du Soleil-style production with some mind-blowing acrobatics, and Never Sleep Alone, a hilarious and risqué interactive show run by a "sex therapist" named Lady A (I would very much recommend not seeing this one with your parents).

## Valiant Lady Inaugural Sailing Shortcomings: The cons

### The Virgin Voyages App.

We're all used to apps not always working when we want them to, or having a few glitches and crashes here and there, but the issue with the Virgin Voyages App that made it more frustrating is that it has made cruisers almost completely reliant on it during their sailings. The only internet available was the basic level due to satellite positioning. The app was often useless, leaving passengers unable to access their schedule, favoured events and activities, restaurant reservations and even their tabs (the bills :). The app is also how Rockstar suite guests chat with their dedicated Rockstar Agent (aka butler), and we found the on-and-off Wi-Fi connectivity meant our messages were getting lost in the ether without even knowing it. Plus, for the app to work, you must be signed into the ship Wi-Fi, which means you can't use the app prior to boarding to book into restaurants, fitness classes, or spa treatments. You've also got to have your phone on airplane mode for the app to work, meaning, if the Wi-Fi was down, so was your connectivity to everything else as data wasn't an option.



### The Wrist bands.

When you book a cabin, you'll receive a wristband (used for checking in and out of the ship, charging for alcoholic drinks and souvenirs, and opening your cabin door) when you check in. The Design of the band is loosely fitting, it cannot be secured properly so it's very easy to lose while you are working out or dancing. We have both lost it on multiple occasions on our cruise. The wrist band also stopped working a few times when we were trying to unlock our cabin door and when we wanted to charge drinks and due to the app's unreliability, you would have to go down to Sailor services multiple times. This was very time consuming, especially when tired and simply wanting to go bed!

## Sailor Services (Guest Services).

Let's start with the Staff on Virgin cruises who were extremely kind and worked hard to make everyone on board feel happy as much as possible. Especially the ones working in the restaurants, eateries, bars, spa and just all around the ship in general. However there seems to be a disconnect between those who are working in service (on the ground) and those who were behind desks managing guest related issues on board.



When we first checked in onboard and after unpacking and spending our first night and day, we returned to our cabin smelling like a literal ashtray. After calling guest services and sending people over to double check the situation multiple times and struggling to prove to them that there is in fact a hideous smell, they finally confirmed that it is indeed coming from a cabin on the level above us. They offered us an upgrade, they also offered to help us pack and move our luggage to the new cabin. They never helped us pack as they promised on the phone claiming that it was not part of the service, we eventually had to do everything. They also did not upgrade us (as we thought the next step up would be a junior suite of sorts) they just moved us to another room that looks the same on another level. I have no idea till today how this is considered compensation when it comes to something as serious as cigarette fumes bathing your cabin like incense in a church. After challenging them on what happened they also finally gave up unwillingly and hesitantly gave us free access to the spa. Another concern raised was that they cannot help you book or even at the least advise you on any offshore activities, no concierge service whatsoever. So, you were depending on Mr. GOOGLE and the ships weak Wi-Fi and faulty app for everything. All these issues mentioned made us go to guest services multiple times, in fact I cannot remember a day I have not passed by their desk. Obviously, we were not the only cruisers onboard and the queues were long and time consuming.



## The Food:

Virgin Cruises is advertised as a foodie heaven on social media, with 20+ eateries from refined dining to relaxed and casual one would expect so. The Venues are beautifully designed like something out of Architectural Digest. However, it is far beyond what you might expect once onboard. We had booked all the table service restaurants prior to cruising to make sure we had a chance to try everything. Let's start with the Wake, which is their signature fine dining restaurant and the most glamorous aesthetically. The steak at Salt Bae's Nusra-Et steakhouse ranked as one of London's worst restaurants could have been better than what we have experienced on board. The polenta was rock hard and not smooth nor creamy and the meat was impossible to chew or swallow. It was so bad that we left in the first 15 minutes of being served. The food at all other restaurants were at their best reasonable, acceptable and decent albeit tasteless. It's nothing that would leave you wanting more or thinking of repeating. If I would compare the food to another destination I would say Walt Disney world Orlando (Yes ! theme park food ) .



Valiant Lady had marked menus denoting gluten-free, vegan and vegetarian options, something which is admirable. However, for a variety of reasons supply chain issues, chef choices, miscommunication we quickly learned that we couldn't 100% trust that the dishes were marked correctly. If you have celiac disease, this proved to be more challenging than expected or necessary during our sailing, and we are sorry to say that they ended up getting served gluten at one or more points during the sailings.

## The Galley

(Virgins Version of a Buffet restaurant) food waiting time was a joke especially at breakfast time it wasn't even at full capacity (it was 70 % apparently) . They take your order, but they take forever to bring your food and sometimes it never even arrives. Choices are minimal and everything seems to be closed at either all the time or at different-times. No food available after 10:30 pm other than to wait for breakfast or to have pizza. The Room service food was also underwhelming, the way it was presented (stacked up , no proper trolley table ) and brought to you. The burger bun was stale and it just felt at certain times, should we just get off the ship at 10 pm to get some proper food ?



Ultimately, Virgin Voyages' Valiant Lady is a cruise ship that can appeal to many types of cruisers but not to all unfortunately. If you are a picky foodie or someone who prefers a certain standard of luxury and service then maybe this is not necessarily the line for you.

# NDA NEWS

## The Royal Ballet – Light Of Passage

This month NDA Global attended a spectacular evening at the Royal Opera House, to see Light Of Passage by Crystal Pite. Her first creations Flight Pattern gained her an Olivier Award for best new creation. She has now returned to the stage with this marvellous new choreography and a very powerful work which illustrates the themes of displacement and loss.



The Light of Passage is split into three segments Flight Pattern, a 10-minute section called Covenant and finally Passage. From the three, the first and last are the most heart warming. Part one, Flight Pattern is a powerful take on the humanitarian crisis and the plight of refugees. The dancers deliver a beautiful presentation, even when they are depicting the horror of loss.



Part two of the show, is Covenant, this is the shortest of the sections. It expresses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in dance form. Children run, skip and are carried around by older dancers.



Lastly, part three Passage begins with two older dancers, Isidora Barbara Joseph and Christopher Havell. They move slowly together on stage, bringing emotion to every move.

Jay Gower Taylor , who is Pite's husband had designed a magnificent set, which showed the mood very well. Flight Pattern was set to the first movement of Górecki's Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, now Pite has expanded the piece into a full-length work using the whole symphony.

Light of Passage deals with dark themes, however it creates a sense of hope and urgency, a truly great piece of work that reflects the theme effectively.

# NDA NEWS

## Pope Francis visits The Kingdom of Bahrain

On November 3rd 2022 Pope Francis visited The Kingdom of Bahrain, making him the first Pope to visit The Kingdom of Bahrain. The Trip involved attending Bahrain Dialogue Forum: East and West for Human Coexistence", organised by the UAE-based Muslim Council of Elders, followed by a private meeting with Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, grand imam of the prestigious Cairo-based Al-Azhar, Egypt's highest Sunni institution.



More than 200 other religious leaders from various parts of the globe were present at the forum. Thousands of Christians crowded into a sports stadium in The Kingdom of Bahrain to listen to a mass conducted by Pope Francis during his first visit to the island nation.

**Pope Francis ended his trip with a visit to the Gulf's oldest church.**

Bahrain is home to the first Catholic church built in the Gulf area in modern times, which opened in 1939, and the cathedral of Our Lady of Arabia, is the largest Catholic church on the Arabian Peninsula. Bahrain has an estimated 80,000 Christians, many of whom are workers from south Asia.

# TOP STORIES OF THE MONTH

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