

# ESCAPE

## *Little BIG CRUISING*

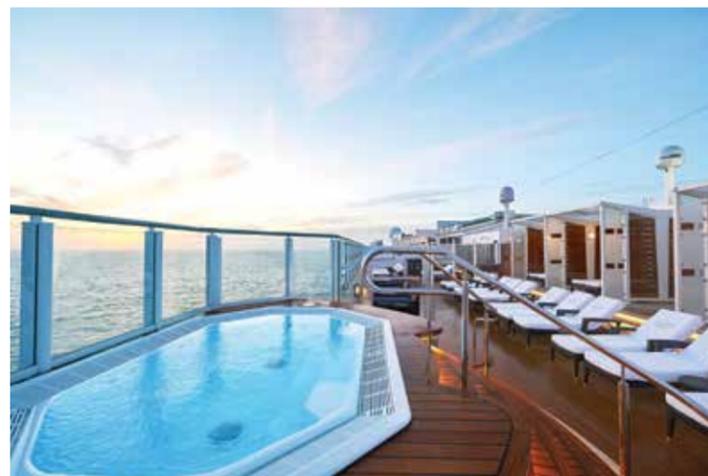
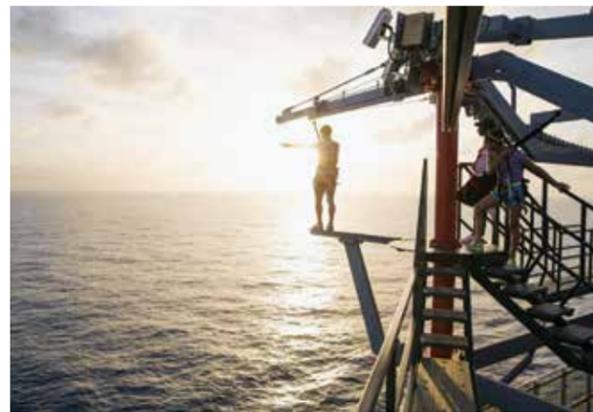
*The Haven fosters an intimate experience within Norwegian Cruise Line's new OVER-THE-TOP MEGASHIPS*

By Paul Rubio



NORWEGIAN'S BREAK-AWAY PLUS SHIPS, SUCH AS THE NORWEGIAN BLISS, BOAST FEATURES LIKE AN ON-SHIP GO-KART TRACK.

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The debate between booking the newest larger-than-life cruise ship versus a tried-and-true boutique luxury liner is a polarizing one among the cruise-going elite. The primary argument for the former boils down to the range of overall amenities, from Broadway-caliber entertainment to prolific specialty dining to headline-making temptations like rooftop race tracks and climbing walls. The key case for the latter

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In an ideal cruise world, elements of top-tier ships, big and small, would unite for the ultimate seafaring vacation. But how?

Well, just ask Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), which has crafted—and now perfected—the answer to little big cruising on its newest Breakaway Plus class ships. The ingenious solution, The Haven, is a private, multistory enclave occupying prime real estate on the top decks, situated near the bow and separated from the masses by key-card access. Comprised of the ship's premier accommodations plus a dedicated restaurant, bar, lounge, courtyard, sundeck, and hydrotherapy area, The Haven promises the atmosphere and intimacy of a superlative small ship. Add Haven-

specific staff, from butlers to concierges to maître d's, and rest assured that even the most minor requests will be fulfilled at a five-star level. The Haven experience begins upon arrival, indicative of the ultra-VIP treatment to come. A personal escort whisks you to an embarkation lounge from ground level, bypassing all check-in lines. (Expect a similar no-wait return at ports-of-call and a surprisingly seamless, stress-free disembarkation on your final day.) Once on board, a reserved elevator ascends to The Haven, where a concierge team is eager to help with priority reservations for shows, dinners, and activities. Attendants stand ready to ensure dietary preferences are diligently met at The Haven restaurant and across the megaship's dozen-plus other dining outlets. Then, arrive at your luxe lair, which impresses as one of the most well-appointed and spacious accommodations at sea. Whether in a 378-square-foot spa suite, a 440-square-foot penthouse, a 1,307-square-foot deluxe owner's suite, or somewhere in between, anticipate a space that includes an en suite bathtub or hot tub, dark furnishings, a wide balcony, and dramatic views through floor-to-ceiling windows. Meet your 24-hour trained and certified suite butler and his or her colleagues, who will gladly unpack your suitcases and pour your first (of many) glasses of Champagne. They'll keep your room immaculate throughout the cruise and handle things like 3-a.m. cravings for chocolate chip cookies, refreshing the ice for your bubbles, pressing your clothes well before the

night's dinner reservations, or setting up white-tablecloth in-suite dining.

Within the greater Haven area, the private lounge, restaurant, courtyard, and sundeck mean you'll never deal with crowds, struggle to find a chair, or have to wait more than a few seconds for your cocktail order—and even in that brief time, you'll be offered a cold towel or fruit skewer.

While you'll probably never want to leave such pampering, a great, big—and we mean *really* big, like 165 tons big—ship lies beyond, with enticements too good to resist. There are indeed bragging rights to riding the only race tracks at sea, walking a plank that extends 8 feet over the side of the ship, playing laser tag on a rooftop, or screaming your way through the most gravity-defying cantilevered slides on the ocean. You'll want to at least dabble in this megaship fun circuit to prevent FOMO (fear of missing out). And if traveling with children, you'll get props as the coolest parents ever.

There's also something to be said for the ability to choose among nearly three-dozen restaurants and bars. Desiring excellent French cuisine? Don't miss the escargots bourguignonne

and sole grenobloise at Le Bistro. Looking for a gastronomic journey through Asia with a Latin American twist? Try Food Republic, a shared-plates concept underscored by sublime dishes like Korean fried chicken, hamachi taquitos, and Peruvian beef skewers. In the mood for seafood? Check out Ocean Blue, specializing in simply prepared, freshly grilled fish (six kinds are typically available) and steamed cold-water lobster. Next, sip on a spicy passion fruit mojito from the Sugarcane Mojito Bar while listening to live Latin-Cuban music. Then, get into the casino action (if that's your thing), pop into the on-board nightclub or deck party (if you feel like dancing), or head to one of the world-class performances in the theater (no, really, this is nothing like the cheesy cruise ship entertainment of yore).

ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE PLANK AND ROPES COURSE; WATERSLIDE, OCEAN BLUE SPECIALTY DINING RESTAURANT, AND THE HAVEN SUNDECK ON NORWEGIAN BLISS. BELOW: ENTERTAINMENT ACROSS NCL'S SHIPS INCLUDE BROADWAY-CALIBER PRODUCTIONS OF SHOWS SUCH AS KINKY BOOTS.



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START THE EVENING WITH A MOJITO AND LATIN MUSIC AT SUGARCANE BEFORE HEADING TO A PRODUCTION OF THE MUSICAL *JERSEY BOYS*.

Shows vary by vessel but expect veritable productions of Tony Award-winning Broadway shows *Jersey Boys* and *Kinky Boots*, with the best seats in the house reserved for Haven guests, no less.

Through NCL's ongoing "Take All Free" promotion (which shows no sign of ending), those staying in The Haven are privy to complimentary open bar across the ship, five specialty dining options, unlimited WiFi, shore excursion credits at each port, and third and fourth guests sailing at



no extra charge. When the math's all said and done, this usually makes up for the premium charged to stay in The Haven, which is typically double or more the price of a balcony stateroom. All Jewel, Epic, and Breakaway class ships offer this special enclave, but to see the product in its most advanced form, book on one of the newer Breakaway Plus class ships: *Norwegian Joy*, *Norwegian Bliss*, or the just-launched *Norwegian Encore*. It's on North America's youngest fleet where you'll see The Haven in its supreme incarnation and understand why NCL has been branded a disrupter in cruising the Bahamas, the Caribbean, Mexico, the Panama Canal, and Alaska. Whether you want to share your cruise with 200 or more than 4,000 other passengers, live large or keep a low profile, do everything or nothing on the most buzzed-about ships on the sea, The Haven boasts all the fun of a mega-ship without sacrificing a high-end small-ship experience. ([ncl.com](http://ncl.com)) ◀◀

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