

Independence of the Seas



...through the eyes of a 7 year old

Andrew Harrison – General Manager at Broads Travel, his wife Claire and their two young sons recently enjoyed a 14 night cruise to the Canaries on Royal Caribbean’s ship, Independence of the Seas. This is their report, through the eyes of Louis, aged 7.



At Southampton

Check-in could not have been easier; Dad had already sorted out much of the check in formalities online so all we had to do was park the car! The luggage was collected from the car at the quayside and taken directly to the cabin and Dad parked in the secure car park 250 metres from the ship.

From arrival to boarding the ship took no more than 15 – 20 minutes, a bit different to an airport check in. Finding our cabin was a different matter – this ship is big and we do mean big! It would help if Royal Caribbean had some staff available to give passengers directions to their cabins. Still, trying to find our cabin just added to the fun!

We had a 4 berth, outside cabin in the middle of the ship on a low deck (deck 3 to be exact). I don’t think Dad trusts us on a Balcony cabin just yet, although he did say it was one of the only 4 berths still available when he booked. I suspect he was saving money! Still you wouldn’t know that you were on a low deck. The cabin was great although a little on the cosy side – we knew we should have taken less luggage – wardrobe space for 4 was going to be a bit of a problem!

Anyway, that’s boring and best left to Mum and Dad, so off we went for lunch to the Windjammer. Whatever you wanted to eat was here and I do mean whatever - pasta, pizza, burgers, roast dinners, soup, salads - the list is endless, not to mention their dessert station!

Next was the lifeboat drill (I got the feeling that this was going to be a busy holiday). Everybody had to line up with their lifejackets on. Our cabin steward fetched a little one for my brother and we felt really special when they lined us up at our station insisting that children were at the front of the queue. Quite right too!! All children had to wear a wrist band at all times in case they were ever separated from Mum and Dad and this would identify them to the right lifeboat – they were a bit of a nuisance and we had to have them replaced a few times during the holiday – I mean the bands, not Mum and Dad!

Once the lifeboat drill had finished we found the ice-skating rink - yes I did say ice skating – on a ship!! – How cool is that? Here we got to see the fantastic rink with lots of seating for the ice shows later on, for which you need to book tickets. It’s easy to book and they make sure everybody gets a chance to see a show.

Next we went to the kids’ club to find out what that was all about. Different clubs exist for various age groups.

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Restaurants

We had chosen Anytime Dining rather than the two fixed sittings. I think this is one area that Royal Caribbean could improve on. Anytime Dining has only just been launched and the restaurant staff prefer you to come at a fixed time each day and/or make a reservation for that night (not exactly anytime dining). We had no problem ever getting a table – it's just that they prefer to seat you with your own waiters each night. This would be great, but on the nights we didn't want to join Mum and Dad for dinner, the kids club doesn't open until 7pm. This means you end up going for dinner too late for the first sitting and too early for the second which confuses the waiters at your table!

Anyway, we had a great dinner on the first night (which was casual dress) and the waiter quickly established that we liked coke, apple juice and ice cream. Mum and Dad really enjoyed their red wine!

Our cabin

When we got back to our cabin we were amazed as our beds had transformed and now there were two berths that had magically appeared from the ceiling with two ladders!! Mum and Dad had big problems persuading Sebastian to sleep on a low berth (young children must sleep on a lower bunk to be safe). Still – I was happy and had a great view from the massive porthole.

Mum and Dad ordered a room service pot of tea and settled down to watch a movie (ordered from a massive choice) - it's a bit like being at home really. The TV is fantastic, it is totally interactive and you can view your bill, shop, order wine for your evening meal, pause a movie, view the day's activities and even try and spot yourself on the TV!

One point to remember here when choosing your cabin, is that like ours, some of them will have connecting doors to another cabin so even when the doors are closed, you do hear some noise through the edges of the door frame. Unless you specifically want an adjoining cabin, it is probably best to avoid these wherever you can.

Onboard Activities

Mum went to the aerobics class before breakfast, while Dad, Sebastian and I got ready. Breakfast was fantastic – once again – whatever you wanted was there. The waiters made such a fuss of Sebastian and me that Mum and Dad got to enjoy a peaceful cooked breakfast.

We were now well on our way to the Canaries, the Captain said that the weather would get better each mile we cruised and already the weather was improving. This is when I get my first real look at the Rock climbing wall – wow – I couldn't wait! Later that afternoon I got my harness, shoes, helmet and instruction for the first climb. It looked high and pretty scary but I was determined to do it!

The Wall (as it is now called) was the best bit of the Cruise. Lots of adults couldn't do it but I did, and I got to ring the bell at the top! I was on the Cruise DVD which we watched in the cabin on TV later that night. Sebastian was too little for rock climbing so we went to play golf with him. I think I forgot to mention the 9 hole putting course. He loved it and we had to do it again and again and again!

I had made a friend at the kids club who was from America – she was cool and really good at the hula hoop. I liked playing on the Nintendo Wi, Sebastian enjoyed playing in his club but preferred to be with Mum and Dad – so that was fine.



Ice Skating

Dad never knew that Mum could ice skate. We were amazed as Mum sped around the rink in an effortless manner. We on the other hand, struggled to get round and spent most of the time clinging to the side!

What was great was that the professional ice skaters who perform the evening shows are there to help you with your skates and have a chat too. They want to make sure you get the best out of your holiday. To keep everyone safe there were lots of helmets, knee and elbow pads.

In the evening, the ice skating shows are truly fantastic and have to be seen to be believed. This ship has endless fun for all ages and is just awesome.

FlowRider

For older children and adults, Royal Caribbean has a FlowRider. This is basically a small pool through which water is thrust really fast. You can then surfboard the waves with staff to help you. Be aware, it does look quiet scary and is best suited to older teenagers/adults. We did see one passenger get hurt, but Royal Caribbean have a medical centre onboard and were very quick to respond.



Entertainment

We probably didn't get the best out of seeing all of the entertainment because Sebastian is only three and can't quite make late nights yet. Although sometimes he does keep Mum and Dad awake much later!

However, we did manage to see three shows which were really great. Unfortunately the seating for the main show is not quite good enough so we would recommend getting to the show really early. There is a later show, but it is quite late for children so the first show is best. A number of passengers had to stand or sit on the stairs in order to see the show.

The Ship Director was virtually a one man show. His presentation skills were very professional, polished and very funny and ensured everybody knew what was happening throughout the ship. He even has his own programme on the cabin TV where he could be seen visiting the gym, having his teeth whitened, a shave at the Barbers shop, behind the scenes on the ship and talks with the chef etc.

The basket ball court was one of the things that Sebastian liked most; each afternoon it would be used by toddlers who could drive motorised kiddy vehicles around the court. Royal Caribbean really do cater for all ages and all activities.

Mum liked the Spa very much and had a hot stone relaxing massage as a treat. I think Dad needed one by the time Mum got back!!



In port

When the ship docked in Madeira the weather was great, but we didn't want to get off. We saw loads of coaches lined up for the excursions and the ship was now pretty empty. We were more than happy to stay onboard the ship and it was perfect – we got the pool to ourselves and the H2O zone is out of this world. We played for ages and Dad got soaked by a bucket of water that filled up and fell over his head. The H2O zone is brilliant for children so after a very energetic morning, Mum and Dad took us to Johnny Rockets for lunch.

Johnny Rockets

What fun this was. The waiters were almost as good as the evening shows. They showed us some amazing tricks with cocktail sticks and napkins, it is worth the price of a cruise just to see this team in action. We had the biggest milkshakes, burgers, fries and onion rings. Mum and Dad selected lots of songs on the jukebox and we had a really fun lunch. There is a small cover charge for this restaurant but Dad said it wasn't much.

Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream Parlour

Well what can I say – every ice cream possible – whilst we ate our ice creams, Dad took a phone call from on his mobile. What was amazing is that we were in the middle of the Atlantic and yet the mobile reception was crystal clear.

Pizza café

Dad said it is important to sample all parts of the ship, so one afternoon, purely for the benefit of Broads' customers, we thought we should try out the Pizza café! Getting a table was no problem and we all enjoyed a delicious slice of pizza or two with tea for Mum and Dad. The pizza café is open all the time and there is no charge.

Gratuities/tips

The staff work hard to make sure you are well looked after throughout. They certainly earn their tips and Dad believes that this traditional approach still works best. Any bar bills have an automatic service charge added to them and you can add a further amount if you so wish when signing the bar tab.

Our cabin steward worked very hard to make sure our cabin was always clean and tidy. He was also very good at making the beds when we were out of the cabin. The upper bunks were hidden out of sight during the day time and only reappeared each night when we went for dinner. We were always excited to see the incredible animals they were able to make out of the towels each night. Some people may think they are tacky but we thought they were great fun. The monkey was our favourite as it had Dad's sunglasses on it!! On the last day of our cruise, the cabin steward gave Sebastian a small towel made up to look like a little mouse. He said we could keep it – so don't tell anyone at Royal Caribbean! Dad made sure the cabin steward was well rewarded for his hard work.

Going home

Sadly all good things come to an end and we eventually arrived back to a very rainy Southampton. The breakfast that morning was not the best as it seems that most staff were on duty to help with the massive disembarkation of luggage, passengers and resupplying the ship for the next cruise. We had to wait for our baggage colour code to be called to allow us to disembark. The problem is that many passengers block the gangways rather than waiting in the lounges areas. However, once we were off the ship, we quickly found our luggage. Dad went to fetch the car in the pouring rain whilst we sheltered with Mum. Dad had to queue for ages to bring the car to the port side mainly because of the massive container lorries also queuing to replenish the ship. However, this was only a minor niggle and I suppose we should expect it with a ship of this size.

Louis' summary

Having now travelled on four cruise ships, I have to say Independence of the Seas was the very best. It was great fun from start to finish and I was never bored. My favourite was the rock climbing wall, the staff who were supervising made sure everybody could get to the top safely.

Mum loved the fantastic keep fit classes, the Spa and of course the shops, and the excellent meals!! Dad and Sebastian liked the H2O zone best, particularly the never ending swimming pool which carried you round and round.

The ship and staff are great, nothing is too much trouble and they work hard to make sure you have a fabulous holiday.

Will we go with Royal Caribbean again? – the answer is a most definite YES please!



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