

INSIDE VIEW:

REVITALIZING CARIBBEAN PRINCESS

CAPTAIN MARCO FORTEZZE AND PASSENGER SERVICES DIRECTOR PETER HOLLINSON TALK ABOUT TRANSFORMING THEIR SHIP

by

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In January 2009, Princess Cruises took the Caribbean Princess out of service for three weeks in order to do a massive revitalization project. Considering that Caribbean Princess was just shy of five years old at the time and was a popular ship, this was a bold move. Two people who were intimately involved with the project were Captain Marco Fortezze and Passenger Services Director Peter Hollinson. I sat down with them and asked them to share their thoughts about the project.

The Ship

Caribbean Princess is a unique ship. She is based on a design that was first introduced with the Grand Princess in 1998. Princess then built two more ships in Italy to the Grand Princess design and two in Japan to a slightly modified version of the Grand's design. With Caribbean Princess, the design was changed to

include an additional deck. As a result, she is sometimes referred to as the first of the Super Grand-class ships. Subsequently, Princess has built three more ships beginning with Crown Princess with the additional deck but with a somewhat different interior and exterior configuration than Caribbean Princess. As a result, Caribbean Princess is as Mr. Hollinson pointed out a "bridge between the Grand and Crown class."

The Reason Why

Caribbean Princess has been a very popular ship since the day she was delivered, consistently sailing at or near capacity. Then, why spend millions of dollars to change her? Doesn't that go against the old adage: "if it isn't broke, don't fix it?"

The answer appears to be competition. "My perception is that five years in the life of a cruise ship in this day and age is quite a long time.

Things develop so fast in this industry," explains Hollinson.

Indeed, in the last five years, the world's shipyards have produced a steady stream of new ships with new features and amenities. Thus, to stay in the first tier of the market, Caribbean Princess needed to change.

The impetus for change came not just from other brands but from within Princess itself. As noted earlier, since Caribbean Princess was delivered, Princess has built three new ships. While they were built to a similar design, they have features that Caribbean Princess did not. "Crown Princess and Emerald Princess were so popular that even before they delivered Ruby Princess, the company realized that if this ship were to be as popular as it was at the beginning, it would have to offer similar amenities. People having the choice of the Crown, Emerald, Ruby and the Caribbean would say why go on Caribbean Princess if we could go on a very similar ship and have added amenities."

Preparing for The Project

The revitalization project was the result of several years of planning. "All those departments ashore got together - - Marine, Technical, Hotel - - and drew up plans well in advance. There was a project manager, one of our technical superintendents Steve Story. It was a combined effort from all departments but there was one project manager looking after all the contractors," Hollinson noted.

Most of the work was done by outside contractors, all of whom lived onboard Caribbean Princess during the revitalization. Workers were constantly coming and going throughout the project as the need for their specific skills arose and as their tasks ended.

This did not mean that the project was a three week vacation for the ship's crew. Since the ship was housing and feeding the contractors as well as its own crew, "the cabin stewards were doing their jobs, the waiters were doing their jobs and the cooks were doing their jobs," Captain Fortezze explained. "The engineers were busy doing the engine repairs and maintenance that we usually do during a dry dock. We were very busy cleaning the ship. There was a team of people to clean the ship 24 hours a day. All of the garbage was collected, put in skiffs and taken off the ship. To keep the ship secure and safe, there was a crew working as the fire watch, walking around the ship



Captain Marco Fortezze

to make sure everything was okay."

"The nice part of a dry dock is that you see everybody helping each other." Differences in rank and department are largely ignored. "Everybody works together. You see a waiter and a cabin steward doing something together."

For Captain Fortezze, the mornings and often the afternoons were spent in meetings coordinating the work. Between meetings, he would walk around the ship to see how the work was progressing. "You would see large progress from morning to afternoon, afternoon to evening."

The bulk of the work was to be done in a dry dock in Freeport in the Bahamas. However, because the ship was only scheduled to be out of service for three weeks, time was of the essence. Thus, the work began in San Juan, Puerto Rico where the ship completed her last cruise. "As soon as the last passenger had disembarked the ship, the ship was completely covered up with plastic in order not to ruin the carpet and anything else that was around. Some areas were completely closed off to protect them even better. Everybody was working on the changes already. We arrived in dry



dock with most of the team onboard for the revitalization. The process was long - - 24 hours a day."

The Work

The centerpiece of the Crown-class ships is the Piazza. This is the area at the base of the multi-story central atrium and is a combination entertainment, dining and drinking venue. During the day and evening, different acts appear in the central area. Meanwhile, guests have specialty coffees and pastries or a drink at the International Café that surrounds the central area on the port side. On the starboard side, there is Vines, a wine bar that also serves sushi and tappas.

On Caribbean Princess, this area was called the Grand Plaza and contained a bar, the shore excursions desk, the library and the future cruise sales office. The central area had a beautiful marble floor and detailed metal work, which cried out to be preserved. Consequently, the workers had to completely change one part of this space while being careful to protect and preserve the remainder. "It was an art." Captain Fortezze recalls. "The space they were working in was completely limited."

Not only did the workers have to contend with limited space but they had to work according to a rigorous schedule. Since time was limited, the workers putting in a pipe to a wet bar had to estimate how long it would take them to install the pipe. At the end of the estimated time, another

team would arrive to install the bar itself. Putting the schedule together and coordinating everyone's efforts "was like a puzzle."

The second major area of work is referred to onboard as "the Swop." The Grand Casino, which had been located on Deck Six, was moved to Deck Seven and the steakhouse specialty restaurant that had occupied the space on Deck Seven was moved to where the casino had been. This part of the project also included building a new shore excursions desk, a shop, a future cruise sales office, a Captain's Circle office and seven new suites on Deck Six.

"They stripped it down completely to the steel and built it up again completely," Captain Fortezze pointed out. This was necessary because the work did not just involve changing the décor. A new galley had to be built on Deck Six for the new Crown Grill. This required new water pipes and a large air conditioning pipe to draw the exhaust away from the galley. Plumbing and electrical work also had to be done for the new suites.

The third major revitalization area was on the open decks. The Crown-class ships have a luxury, adults-only area on the top deck at the forward end of the ship that is called the Sanctuary. On Caribbean Princess, this area consisted of a basketball court and a jogging track.

"Everything was taken off and the entire floor was redone with green AstroTurf. The area was closed off with a barrier and glass. There is a new gazebo for massages. Plus, we now have all

new deck chairs."

Not wanting to jettison the basketball court altogether, the designers found a new home for it just aft of the funnel in an area that had been the mini-golf course. Amongst other things, this move involved building new outdoor stairways leading up to the new Sports Court.

Since the designers did not wish to disappoint the ship's golfers, a new home for the ship's golf offerings was found in an observatory/sun bathing area amidships. In work that has taken place since the ship returned to service, golf nets and a putting area have been installed on top of this area while the ship's computerized virtual golf course is located inside.

Dry dock periods are typically times when work is done on the more nautical aspects of a ship and this was no exception. Caribbean Princess had her hull re-painted. "We went down to the steel and re-painted with a new silicon paint. What happens with this new paint is that there is no dirt on the hull so there is no friction with the water." The lack of friction means that the ship's engines do not have to work as hard to achieve the desired speed thus saving fuel. "Fuel efficiency is important these days. It is very good for the optimization of fuel and speed as well. We are not talking five or six knots, we are talking about a knot or two maximum. But in 24 hours one knot is a lot."

In Retrospect

Even with the changes made during the revitalization, Caribbean Princess remains distinct from the Crown-class ships. Due to differences in her physical configuration, various features such as the Crown Grill could not go into the same location as they are on the Crowns. In addition, she has new features that the others do not such as the oceanview suites. "We have done this revitalization project and we have brought in some Crown-class things - - the Sanctuary, for example, the Piazza - - but we have retained the uniqueness of Caribbean Princess," Mr. Hollinson said.

But was the revitalization project a success? "It was the first experience for Princess with this large revitalization. It enhanced the product. I can see the difference," concludes Captain Fortezze. "I was the captain before and I am very happy to be the captain after the change. It was already a fantastic product but since we did this the passengers love it. It is nice to talk to passengers who were onboard before and after. They were all happy to

see the changes. It was beautiful but now, everything is warmer, everybody says. They have found a different atmosphere onboard. The Piazza is always full, morning, evening, anytime you walk through. In the casino, there is more light [because it now has windows]. The colors, everybody feels it is much more attractive."



Passenger Services Director Peter Hollinson