

**INSIDE VIEW:**

# THE SATURDAY SHIP

**A conversation with Steven Jacobsen,  
Hotel Director on Norwegian Gem.**

by

**Richard H. Wagner**

**B**efore coming to Norwegian Cruise Line, Steven Jacobsen worked in the hospitality and catering industry in places such as Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong as well as in his native United States. "I think that [international experience] helps me managing the hotel operations on a cruise ship." Since coming to NCL, he has served on Norwegian Pearl, Norwegian Jewel, Norwegian Jade and Pride of America.

### *The Gem Experience*

Jacobsen's goal on Norwegian Gem "is to offer a memorable, fantastic, vacation. We do that onboard with the experience onboard as well as by taking people to some fantastic destinations. The Gem is an

excellent product."

Painted on the side of the Gem is NCL's motto: "Freestyle Cruising" and the Freestyle concept lies at the heart of the cruise experience aboard the Gem. "Freestyle is all about choice. You have your choice of entertainment options. You have your choice of dining options. We have our main dining rooms; we have our buffets; [we have specialty restaurants] - - lots and lots of choices. If you want to sit with other people you can. If you don't want to, you don't have to. It is all about choices."

Similarly, it is left to the guest to decide how formal or informal the cruise experience will be. "We have our 'dress up or not nights' so the option is there. We have people who do get dressed up and we have people who choose not to." Along the same lines, a

guest can choose whether or not to dine in one of the venues that has a special dress code. "It is a very easy dress code."

While having choices is attractive in theory, in practice, it will not be much of a cruise if all of the choices lead to bad experiences. To ensure this does not happen, there is an emphasis on service on the Gem. Key to good service is the crew. "We work closely with them. We always work on training -- training is non-stop; it never sleeps -- and on making sure our crew is happy."

What makes for a happy crew? "The food is good. The accommodations are good. We all work as a team. And we have a great job."

"I think the most important thing is recognition. We have an excellent crew here and the guests say fantastic things about them. So I like to make sure that they know that management is aware of it. It is a very simple thing but it is all important."

Jacobsen also believes in managing by being out where the customers are -- the ship's public areas. "I try to be on the floor as much as possible. [The object is] to meet our guests; to hear what they have to say; to make sure they are comfortable; and to make sure they are having a great time -- anything that any good host should do. That is where I really learn about what they enjoy and what we can improve on. That is the only way."

Along the same lines, Jacobsen reaches out to the guests to let them know that he is accessible. "I do a little thing on TV where I am standing by my mailbox and I encourage people to please drop me a note if there is something they would like me to know or anything I can assist them with. I also give my phone number out on the TV. There is nothing worse than when at the end of the cruise someone says 'I didn't enjoy myself [but] I didn't know who to tell.' It may be something really small so let us know please."

#### *Homeport New York*

Since her introduction in 2007, Gem has spent much of her career cruising from New York. This has included sailing from New York in the winter.



*Hotel Director Steven Jacobsen*

Several other cruise lines have also attempted to cruise from New York in the winter but all but NCL and Royal Caribbean have withdrawn from the market.

"Take our Freestyle product, some fine ships and a good itinerary and I can't say why it would not work. The market is there."

The rationale for basing a ship in a northeastern city such as New York rather than in the traditional Florida cruise ports is that cruises on such a ship will be more attractive to people living in the northeast because they will not have to travel a long distance to get to the ship. Accordingly, Gem draws most of her passengers from the northeastern states. "This is certainly a good get-a-away for people in the New York area."

Still, New York is an international city and people visiting New York from abroad sometimes will add on a cruise on Gem as part of their holiday. "On this cruise, we have 336 non-US guests, which is low."

While basing Gem in New York is convenient





for New Yorkers and those visiting New York, it also means that in the winter the weather will not be warm and sunny from the moment the cruise begins. "For one day in New York and maybe one day [going down the coast], we lose a lot of our outdoor activity. But we make adjustments. [For example], we know it is cold and people will not necessarily have their embarkation day lunch outside so we have more options inside."

Going along the coast, Gem can encounter some inclement weather but she handles it well. "It is a fine ship."

Most of Gem's cruises are seven day cruises, leaving on a Saturday and returning the next Saturday. However, she also does some longer cruises. As a result, in order to return to being a "Saturday ship," Gem also has to do the occasional short one-night cruise. These short cruises also yeild a dividend. "They also open up the market a little. People can experience it and see if they want to do this."

Cruising year-round from New York has worked so well for NCL that it generally bases two ships in New York. As of this writing, the ships are Gem and her sister ship Norwegian Jewel. While there are some minor differences between the ships (e.g., Jewel does not have a bowling alley), both ships offer similar cruise experiences.

"The difference is whether [what] works for you is a Saturday ship or a Sunday ship. Whatever works with your schedule. Our itineraries are the same. We get the people who are interested in a Saturday departure. [Jewel gets those interested in] Sunday departure."