

## INSIDE VIEW:

# THE OASIS EXPERIENCE

## A CONVERSATION WITH HOTEL DIRECTOR RAIMUND GSCHAIDER OF OASIS OF THE SEAS

by

**Richard H. Wagner**

**H**otel Director Raimund Gschaider began to work on Oasis of the Seas long before the ship was delivered to Royal Caribbean International. In early 2009, the Austrian-born veteran of 17 different ships journeyed to Turku, Finland where the ship was under construction to coordinate the start-up planning for when the ship entered service. He became so intimately involved in the process that he received the nickname "The Oasis Tsar."

Mr. Gschaider has nothing but admiration for the people he worked with in making the world's largest ship a reality. "You cannot go to a shipyard and tell them: 'Build me an Oasis of the Seas.' Everything you see here has been developed together in conjunction with STX [the shipyard] and the brightest minds in the industry. You need to have the right people to be able to do it. You have to have the right guidance from the visionaries within the cruise line on what it should be. [The senior management of Royal Caribbean was] very much involved and directed and challenged the operating groups to come up with new

concepts, new ideas and everything else."

He is also very pleased with the finished product. "It is a new and very different experience. The way it is operating is beyond all expectations. It just flows, it just works, it just does what we all imagined it to do."

### *The Basic Formula*

**M**r. Gschaider explained Royal Caribbean's approach to the task of creating Oasis. "The formula of our new building strategy is one third traditional, one third evolutionary and one third revolutionary. You will find that very well [implemented] here onboard Oasis of the Seas."

"We have kept a lot of the traditional elements [of a cruise ship] - - certainly, what is traditional to Royal Caribbean such as the Viking Crown Lounge and the Schooner Bar."

"Other elements continue to evolve from what we had on our latest class of ship, which was the Freedom class." To illustrate, Freedom of the

Seas was the first ship to have a surfing simulator (the "Florider") onboard and to have hot tubs cantilevered over the sides of the ship. Oasis has two Floriders and cantilevered hot tubs that are half again as large as those on Freedom.

"Then, Oasis is definitely revolutionary. It just doubles what you can do on a cruise ship - - what your cruise vacation experience can be. It is all about options and choices - - that is the big revolution."

For example, in the entertainment area, Oasis offers an array of choices. "We have the Aqua Show, which you pretty much only find in Las Vegas. We have an ice show all year round. (I believe [Royal Caribbean is] the largest producer of ice show performances year round because we have nine ships which are continuously performing ice shows). In our main showroom now, we feature a full Broadway musical. We still have the entertainer programs. We still have other in-house produced shows, which rival any production you see these days in design, technology and production values."

The way these entertainment facilities is used is also different from most other cruise ships. The shows are not performed consecutively or one time only. Rather, there are simultaneous performances with a given show being repeated several times during the cruise. "Like we have an Aqua Show and a show in the theater taking place at the same time. It allows guests to really make choices. It is not just talking about them."

Along the same lines, Oasis offers numerous choices for daytime activities. "We have four different pool areas, which are distinctly different. You will see that they attract a very different profile."

"There is the kids' area [the H2O Zone]. All the little kids are there. Also, the other people onboard do not feel uncomfortable because the kids have a place of choice to go to."

"You have the Sports Pool where we keep certain activity elements going." This pool area is



*Raimund Gschaider*

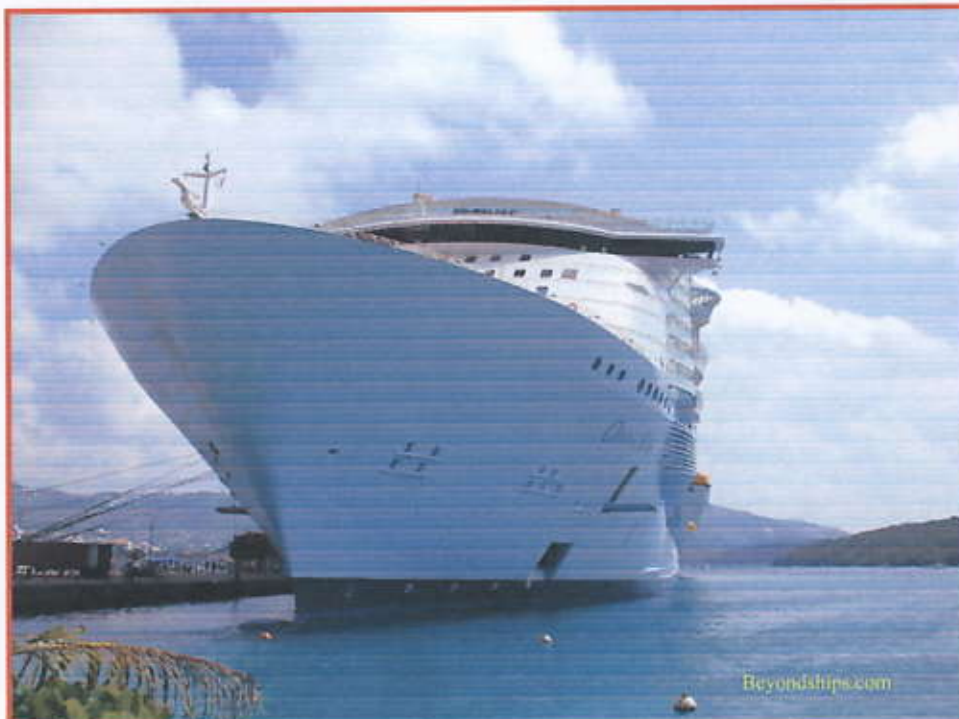
particularly attractive to guests who like organized sports and competitive activities.

"We have a Beach Pool. You can lounge in the water. It is also the one salt water pool that we have."

The fourth pool, called the Main Pool, presents "a regular pool environment" with a large pool, two big Jacuzzis and deck chairs.

"In addition to that, we have the Solarium area, which is for adult guests only. That is a very serene environment - - a little toned down, nice and relaxing."

At the other end of the ship and at the other end of the activity spectrum, Oasis has a large sports area with everything "from the rock walls to the zip line, to the Floriders, to a full size mini-golf course. The pool deck is amazing. It is a neighborhood, a sports active neighborhood."



"Neighborhoods" is another revolutionary concept implemented on Oasis of the Seas. The public spaces are grouped into areas which follow coherent themes, some of which are functional such as sports, while others are idealized urban communities such as a seaside boardwalk, a city park or a city street. "I think the initial thought was to offer several different experiences within the same ship. Neighborhoods are distinctly different one from another, so [the idea of having] neighborhoods on the ship came to mind." Once there was "a core understanding" of the theme for each neighborhood, "the surrounding areas were tailored around it." As a result, the Boardwalk area, for example, includes not just seaside entertainment facilities such as the AquaTheater and a full-sized carousel but also casual dining venues including a Johnny Rockets diner and a seafood restaurant and shops geared toward a childhood day by the sea.

#### *The passengers*

**W**ho is Oasis designed to attract? "The marketing for Oasis is not different than the marketing for the remainder of our fleet. The ships are designed for a more active mindset."

Still, that does not mean that Oasis is only for the young. "We are a cruise line that provides a fantastic vacation experience for all ages. If you are retired couple who want to enjoy quiet time,

you will find your space onboard this ship just as will the young family with a six and an eight year old who want to try everything there is to try. We get a lot of multi-generational families traveling with us from the grandparents to the kids and all of them find something to do onboard Oasis."

Mr. Gschaidner acknowledged that older people tend to like smaller ships for ease of movement. However, on Oasis, the neighborhood concept makes it unnecessary to walk back and forth the length of the ship all day. The neighborhoods combine entertainment venues, dining and shopping in relatively small areas. "You can do everything you want to do in Central Park. You don't even have to go out of Central Park."

Although the ship is based in Fort Lauderdale (Port Everglades), Florida, the guests are not exclusively from America. "Oasis really got a lot of publicity all around the world. This week we have around 60 different nationalities on the guest side. Approximately 50 percent of our guests right now are non-US guests. Every cruise has slightly different nationalities but it is very international."

Oasis has the flexibility to adjust to such changes in the mix of nationalities. "Last week, we had 1,700 Brazilians. We know their day starts a little later and lasts a little longer. We know they like to party. There is a very social aspect in the Brazilian culture so it is always larger groups. We created a couple of Brazilian parties and geared our

activities program towards them. They were happy. Fortunately, this ship is so big that we can target programming in one area to say the Brazilian aspect and the other areas maintain their more traditional and international programming."

Inasmuch as Oasis is a new and different experience, do people who cruise often on other more traditional ships feel comfortable on Oasis? "This cruise alone we have 60 guests who have been with [Royal Caribbean] for more than 25 cruises. We have a thousand guests who have sailed more than five cruises with us. It is the same every single week. It is fair to say that a lot of these people are very traditional - - they prefer or like the traditional element. But even they - - people who have been on 50, 80, 100 cruises - - are amazed and intrigued by what Oasis has to offer. It is simply because it flows; it is nice; you do not feel the people."

### *Dealing with the numbers*

**T**he notion of more than 6,000 guests on one ship does seem intimidating but the reality is that there are seldom any significant lines or crowding on Oasis. This includes boarding the ship for the first time.

"Port Everglades has done an amazing job in building Terminal 18. Their promise of a 15 minute curb-to-ship embarkation time is actually a reality. That is unique anywhere in the world. So yes, we have more people but the infrastructure was adjusted accordingly."

"Onboard the ship, the secret is clearly the neighborhoods and the design of the neighborhoods. If you are within those spaces, you will never experience or even get in contact with that many people. There is so much going on at all times. There are distinct neighborhoods which offer their own experiences and which are busy all day with programming and with culinary availability. So all this together is the guarantee that there are no lines. 6,000 guests onboard will never be an issue in terms of having your privacy and enjoying the experience."

"For us on the operating end, we really have to keep a keen eye on the schedules. Our guests always tell us they want to understand what is happening during the cruise before they come onboard. They do not want to be surprised with tomorrow's schedule. They really want to plan on what they are doing and know what they can do. So we have provided outlines. You can go on the website or you

can get it at the beginning of the cruise. You can plan your shows, plan your activities." As a result, there is less aimless wandering around the ship to see what is happening.

In addition, RCI encourages guests to reserve spaces for the shows beforehand. Utilizing a technology called "Show Ticketing," this can be done either online before the cruise, through the interactive television in the guest's stateroom or at the Box Office in the ship's Entertainment Place. "It enhances your experience because you know there is going to be a reserved seat for you." At the same time, it helps to ensure that there are not "too many people showing up for a certain event. It balances the attendance" at the various events.

Royal Caribbean has also worked to ensure that there is good passenger flow when the ship arrives at her various ports of call. "Most ships operate with one or two gangways. We have three gangways that operate all day long. Those gangways are double width to anything which exists on other ships. So we have more than tripled the capacity of the ship's entry points."

Another bottleneck that often delays passengers returning to a ship from a day in a port of call is going through the security screening process, which is usually done once the passenger re-enters the ship. "We have worked with our ports of call and we have taken the security aspect off the ship. We have built special screening buildings [on the piers]." These buildings have more space and as a result there are "more arches and more security machines. It is much quicker and we have done that with every single port of call that we touch with Oasis of the Seas."

Ensuring that guests can get on and off the ship quickly in each port would have been a waste of effort if the ports of call had not also acted to ensure that they were able to handle large influxes of passengers. "The ports of call have very much wanted us to go there. They have done their part in ensuring that the immediate infrastructure within the port, the access to the port and also the transportation support is what is required."

"We have advanced the infrastructure in all the ports. I think it is something we will continue to do for Oasis and the Oasis class no matter where we go in the future."