



A TASTE FOR MORE

Cruising the North Sea Aboard Norwegian Aqua

It's not every day you find yourself standing at the foot of a floating city. But there we were - my partner and I - gazing up at the gleaming, glassy silhouette of Norwegian Aqua docked in Southampton, ready to embark on the second leg of her inaugural European sailing. From the moment we set foot on the gangway, we knew this would be a voyage quite unlike any other.



The boarding process for our once-in-a-lifetime inaugural excursion aboard the Norwegian Aqua was as seamless as one could hope – professional and personable, with just enough warmth to calm the nerves, especially when you’re dealing with an unexpected hiccup that could derail your plans before they begin. Fortunately, the staff handled every query – even the more stressful ones – with patience and polish. That first impression would set the tone for

the entire experience: uncompromising professionalism, with just the correct dose of humanity.

As part of Norwegian Cruise Line’s new Prima Plus class, Aqua is more than just a ship – it’s a floating testament to the brand’s bold ambition to offer “more” of everything: space, dining, thrills, and experiences. And more we certainly got.

BIG SHIP, BIGGER PERSONALITY

The first realisation after checking in? The ship is massive. Forget the notion that cruising is all about sedentary relaxation.

By simply navigating our way from bow to stern and back, chasing one activity or meal after the next, we were regularly racking up 10,000 steps a day. Aqua demands to be explored – from its multi-deck atriums and high-tech venues to sun-drenched open decks and tucked-away lounges.

Our balcony stateroom was a perfect fit – smartly laid out, comfortably sized, and a surprisingly peaceful retreat amid the buzz of onboard life. Truth be told, I was glad we hadn’t booked a suite. With so much to see and do, we only used the room to sleep,

freshen up, and steal the occasional quiet moment overlooking the ocean.

THE FLAVOUR OF THE SEA

Food, as always with NCL, is both a centrepiece and an adventure. With 17 dining options on board and 18 bars and lounges, even our best efforts left us short of sampling everything.

For everyday dining, the Indulge Food Hall quickly became a firm favourite – a vibrant, multi-cuisine eatery that felt more like a trendy food market than your typical cruise buffet. It's here that Planterie, NCL's first plant-based kitchen, surprised even the carnivores among us. Light, colourful, and full of flavour, it proved that indulgence doesn't need to mean excess.

Among the speciality restaurants we tried, Sukhothai stood out – NCL's first-ever Thai restaurant, and a brilliant

addition. The tom yum soup had the kind of depth that usually takes a Bangkok back alley to uncover, and the red curry delivered just the right amount of heat to warm our early-spring souls. Another highlight was Le Bistro, where fine French dining met theatrical flair – a place where presentation matched taste and where you're reminded why dining should always be a little bit performative.

But the standout for us was Hasuki, the ship's teppanyaki-style Japanese grill. The "theatre of food" here was pure joy: chefs flipping knives like circus performers, catching eggs mid-air, and sculpting fried rice volcanoes. It was immersive, silly, loud, and utterly brilliant.

THRILLS, THEN CHILL

Aqua's standout attraction – and a legitimate world-first – is the Aqua



Slidecoaster. It's a hybrid rollercoaster and waterslide, which sounds like a marketing gimmick until you strap in and realise: it's fast, thrilling, and just plain fun. That we had glorious sun for most of the cruise was a minor miracle, given it was still early spring – but it meant we could properly enjoy this adrenaline-filled contraption, along with the infinity pools, sun decks, and lounging areas scattered across the ship's upper levels.

For those less interested in high-speed plunges, Aqua's Glow Court – a futuristic LED-adaptable sports venue by day and immersive nightclub by night – and the updated Galaxy Pavilion kept guests of all ages engaged. From retro arcade games to VR escapes, it's the kind of space that captures your curiosity, even if you only meant to walk past.

The entertainment on board was equally ambitious. The Revolution: A Celebration of Prince – a high-energy, soul-soaked concert tribute – delivered big time. It felt more like a headline Vegas show than something afloat. Later in the week, Elements: The World Expanded blended acrobatics, illusion, and motion in a way that felt modern and mesmerising.

Evenings would often wind down with a quiet cocktail – or two – at the Metropolitan Bar, which quickly became our default meeting point. Sleek, airy, and just vibey enough, it also deserves mention for its focus on sustainable mixology, using responsibly sourced ingredients and waste-reducing techniques. It's a subtle but welcome nod to NCL's growing commitment to environmentally conscious cruising.

A BELGIAN BREATH

After the full-tilt pace on board, our stop in Zeebrugge was deliberately dialled back. Rather than heading to Brussels or Bruges with the rest of the day-trippers, we opted for a quieter exploration of the port town and its surroundings. We strolled the quaint local streets, ducked into a few chocolate shops (the proper, handcrafted kind with gold foil and ribbons), and returned to the ship with bags heavier than when we left, mostly





with pralines and truffles that barely made it through the flight home.

Sometimes, less really is more.

DESIGNED TO IMPRESS

Aqua's design language is clean, modern, and noticeably upscale – an evolution from earlier ships in the NCL fleet. The public spaces are spacious and well thought out, with a visual continuity that makes the ship feel cohesive despite its enormous footprint. From sculptural light fixtures to the sweeping curves of lounges and the dramatic central atrium, it's clear that NCL has put significant thought into both the aesthetics and the amenities.

For guests who opt for the premium experience, Aqua's Haven complex offers a ship-within-a-ship experience. Though we didn't stay there, we had a peek – and

it's clear that this tier is aimed squarely at luxury travellers who want the perks of a boutique resort without sacrificing the entertainment and energy of a larger vessel.

MORE THAN A TAGLINE

As David J. Herrera, NCL's president, put it at the Aqua launch: this ship is about more – more thrills, more space, more food, and more immersive experiences. It's a bold promise. And to our delight, one that Aqua mostly delivers on with style.

For a ship that's only just beginning her journey Norwegian Aqua already feels mature, confident, and refreshingly different. She may not be the biggest cruise ship afloat, but she might just be the boldest.

One thing's for sure, cruising aboard Aqua has reset our expectations of what a holiday at sea can be. 