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BIG SHIPS VS SMALL SHIPS
Which ultra-luxury cruise style is right for you?
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Icon of the Seas, Royal Caribbean

Emerald Azzurra

Big ships vs. small ships: Which ultra-luxury cruise style is right for you?

If you've been cruising for any time at all, you'll know that there's no such thing as a standard cruise ship. Not only is there a whole spectrum of luxury, but there's a huge range of size too. From small, yacht-style cruises, with fewer than 100 guests, all the way up to the Royal Caribbean Icon of the Seas, which holds 7,600 passengers.

As a rule of thumb, bigger ships offer more choice: more food options, more places to drink, a variety of entertainment and a greater array of facilities. On the flipside, they're often noisier, more packed in and can be a bit hectic.

Small ships offer something entirely different: a quieter, more intimate experience. You're far more likely to get to know other people on board, the atmosphere is generally a little less frenetic, and while your dining options are probably less expansive, the focus is often on quality rather than quantity.

But if you think it's a binary choice, think again. For many cruisers, it's not either/or. A growing number of our customers opt for the Big Ship Suites range, allowing them to enjoy a genuinely luxury, boutique experience within a suite, but aboard a larger ship with all the amenities.

Where do your preferences best sit on the spectrum?

Let's dive in and have a look at some of the pros and cons of both big and small ships, and whether Big Ship Suites could be for you.

Getting on, getting off and getting around

On smaller ships with fewer than 1,000 passengers, it's much easier to get on and off, there's less competition for space on board. You're much less likely to have to wait in line for the breakfast buffet or to order a drink. These aren't trifling factors either. Getting off when you get to a port can take quite a long time, so if you're not someone who likes waiting in line, a smaller ship could well be worth considering.

You've also got the fact that the ship itself is smaller, which means you're probably not going to have to hike far to get from your room to the pool.

When it comes to getting around and getting on and off, smaller ships are quite clearly ahead.

Eating and drinking

Big ships generally offer more plentiful dining options, all the way from grand dining rooms to niche eateries. Smaller ships have fewer venues with a higher focus placed on culinary excellence.

Really, the difference is in the aim of the cruise line. Bigger ships typically aim to offer variety, so you're able to sample lots of different cuisines and access more choice throughout your voyage. Smaller ships aim to provide a fine-dining style experience while on board.

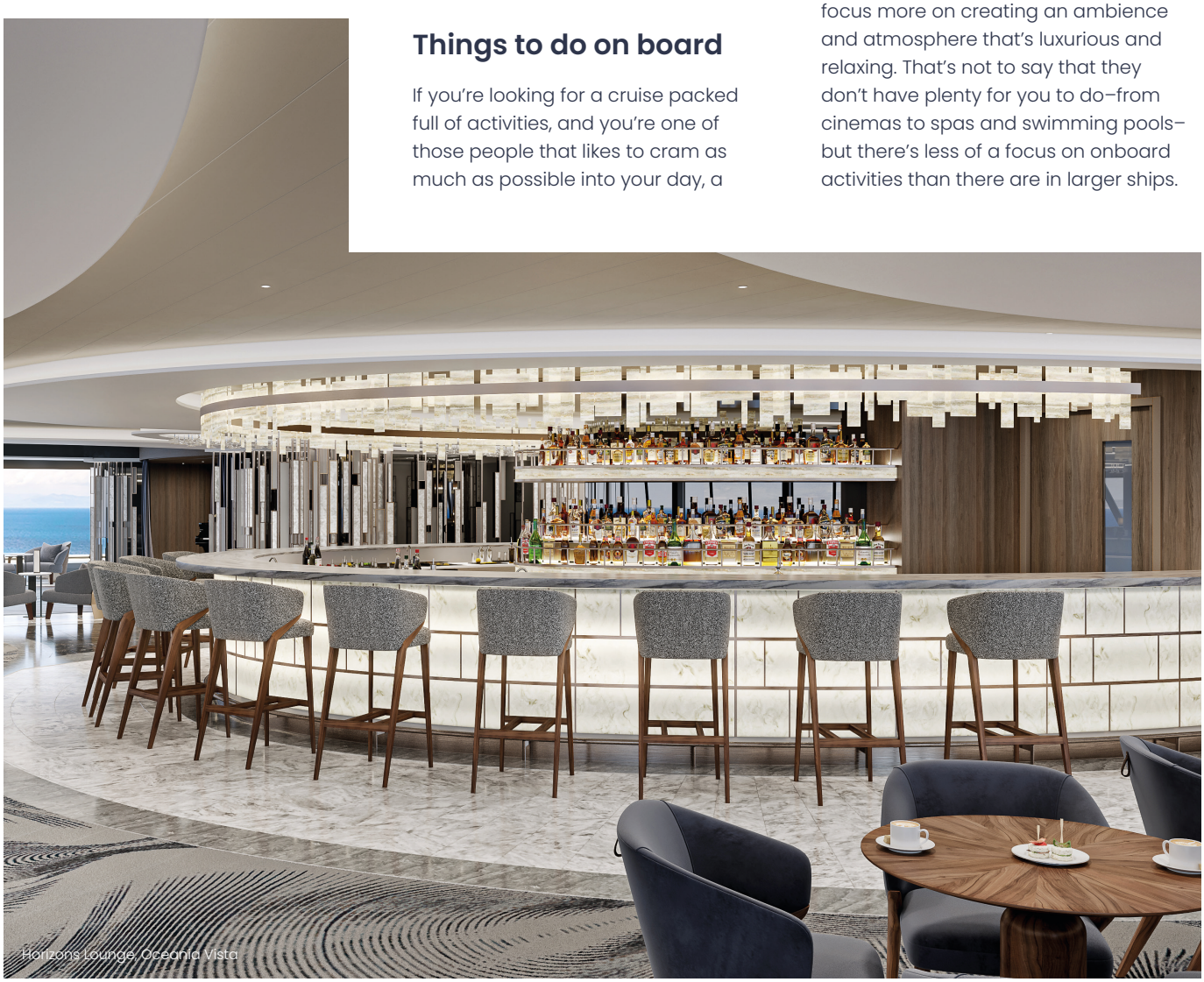
There's no right answer here and it all depends on what's important to you. For many of our customers who like the finer things in life, small-ship cruising wins here again. Quality is one of their most important prerequisites.

Things to do on board

If you're looking for a cruise packed full of activities, and you're one of those people that likes to cram as much as possible into your day, a big ship cruise is likely better for you. The bigger ships aim to offer it all: lots of food options, loads of entertainment, a variety of pools, the list goes on. And there's a good reason why—they've got a lot of people to keep happy!


Thermal Suite Relaxation Lounge, Norwegian Joy

In contrast, smaller ships tend to focus more on creating an ambience and atmosphere that's luxurious and relaxing. That's not to say that they don't have plenty for you to do–from cinemas to spas and swimming pools–but there's less of a focus on onboard activities than there are in larger ships.


Horizons Lounge, Oceania Vista

Best for families

If you've got a young family and you're looking for a ship that's appropriate for all ages, there's a strong chance that a big ship is the right choice for you.

Big ships provide plenty of opportunity for families to spend time together, with swimming pools, play areas and arcades. There's lots for both adults and kids to do on their own too, from kids clubs and teen-specific hangouts to adult nightlife options.

Conversely, the small-ship experience is a little less family-oriented. There's often less for the children to do, with fewer activities specifically designed for kids, and sometimes none at all. For cruisers who prefer an experience centred around adults, that's another tick in the box for a small-ship cruise—you're less likely to end up on a boat full of kids running around for a week. If that's not your idea of a holiday, small ships may well be a better bet!

Big Ship Suites come into their own here, especially for multi-generational families.

It's not uncommon for grandparents to take the kids and grandkids on a cruise and opt for a big ship, which offers all the entertainment their party needs, while still giving them the option to retire to the peace, tranquillity and luxury of a suite on board.



Flow rider, Symphany of the Seas
Royal Caribbean

Entertainment

When it comes to entertainment, big ships once again tend to focus on more, while small ships have more emphasis on quality.



Theater, Celebrity Apex

If you're looking for song and dance shows, big casinos, stand-up comedy and so on, you're more likely to find that sort of thing on board a big ship.

That's not to say you won't be entertained on a small ship. Most ships from lines like Emerald Cruises, Oceania, Azamara, Silversea and Seabourn will offer entertainment, from string quartets and pianists to vocalists. Many of them do also feature casinos on board, albeit on a smaller scale to what you'll find on a big ship.

You'll find the choice on board a big ship far wider. If that's important to you, big ships are the way to go. But again, many Panache Cruises customers choose small ships because they prefer a smaller, more intimate feel to their experience, including the entertainment on offer.

Ports and excursions

If destinations are the most important element of your cruise, there's a good chance small ships could be for you. They're usually able to get you closer to where you want to go with less faff.

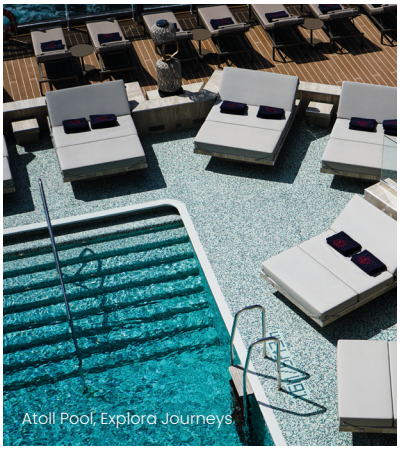
Big ships primarily tend to dock in the larger ports, and they're generally some distance away from the town or city centre, which means getting another form of transport to get to where the action is. In contrast, small ships can get to smaller ports and closer to areas of interest. In many cases, you can walk straight off the ship and into your desired destination.

Similarly, if you're looking for a river cruise, you'll probably need to do it on board a smaller ship. River cruise ships are smaller, and designed to fit under bridges and through narrow locks.

But if you see the ship as your destination and want as much entertainment on board as possible with less focus on getting off, then a big ship could well be the right choice.

Peace and relaxation

If peace and relaxation are what you're after, then a small ship is almost certainly the right option for you.



Atoll Pool, Explora Journeys

There are fewer passengers on board anyway, and they also tend to attract fewer families as there's less for the kids to do. Although if you're travelling during a peak holiday period, you'll still likely see some kids.

Choose the right big ship however, and pair it with a Big Ship Suite experience, and you can still enjoy plenty of peace and tranquillity.

Big ship or small ship - what's right for you?

There's no "right" answer here – it totally depends on what's important to you, and what matters when it comes to your cruise.

Many Panache Cruises customers have a specific desire for luxury and tranquillity, and consequently opt for smaller ships, but there are also plenty who like the breadth of choice on board a bigger ship. Consequently, they tend to opt for a halfway-house style solution—our Big Ship Suites.

Big Ship Suites allows you to experience real luxury on-board some of the most popular cruise lines at sea. You still get access to all the facilities of a big ship, but pair it with top-of-the-range luxury.

Many big ships now offer suite-specific areas which can only be accessed by those staying in suites, which allows you to enjoy peaceful areas on board the ship while still benefiting from the choice.

Whichever option you go for—whether it's a big ship, small ship, or something in between—we'd be honoured to help craft the perfect cruise for you.

Our connoisseurs are ready and waiting to help, so please go ahead and call us on 0161 516 8200 or email info@panachecruises.com. At Panache Cruises, nothing is too much trouble.



Le Voyage, Celebrity Ascent



Pool deck, Silversea Silver Nova

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