

# Disney Magic Dreamified: Review of the Renovated Disney Cruise Line Ship

by Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebooks Author

The Disney Magic returned from her summer in Europe a changed ship.

After her last cruise from Barcelona, Spain, Disney Cruise Line's grande dame stopped in Cadiz, Spain for a 5-week make-over, a process that continued as she made her way back across the Atlantic to Miami for the start of her fall cruising season. Alas, weather-related delays cost the contractors and crew precious time, and the cruise line had to cancel the Magic's first departure from Miami on just two day's notice. My daughter and I (PassPorter authors Dave and Allison Marx) had reserved space on (what had been) the Magic's second Miami sailing, and found ourselves, instead, among the first members of the public (and press) to step foot on the renewed ship.

They call it, "Re-imagining the Disney Magic," but I prefer, "The Dream-ification of the Magic." That's not to say there isn't plenty of fresh Imagineering in evidence--there is--but the goal all along has been to bring Disney Cruise Line's original ship up to contemporary standards. I'm happy to say that, with minor quibbles, they've succeeded admirably. The improvements are both functional and aesthetically pleasing, and disappointments are few. Not only are there many functional improvements, but the two areas whose decor I've always felt detracted from the ship's elegance (Parrot Cay and Beat Street), are now fully up to snuff. There's also a slight tilt towards "lighter and brighter" in the decor, which is especially noticeable in the atrium and elevator lobbies and the kids clubs. The updates list is loooong (and so is this article), including changes that didn't even make it to the cruise line's press kit, with changes on every deck from the waterline to the top of the stacks. Let's take it (literally) from the top!

## Deck 13

[AquaDunk](#) - It don't matter whether you're a four-year-old contemplating the big playground slide for the first time, or a 50-something with a lifetime of thrill rides under your belt; the view from the top of the big slide is scarier than you imagined before you made the climb. AquaDunk, the ship's new thrill slide, is no exception; you start at the top of the aft stack, and splash-down 37 feet below, on deck 10. Before climbing the stairs, you happily realize that the initial steep drop is brief, maybe 8 feet, before the slope moderates. Compared to the big slides at Blizzard Beach and Typhoon Lagoon? No big deal!

---

The real kicker, as with every thrill ride, is the anticipation of possible doom--in this case, the launch (and I do mean 'launch') platform looks down 160 feet to the ocean waves, and the slide makes a big loop out over the side of the ship!

The biggest fear factor, though, is knowing that you'll drop through a trap door! When it's finally your turn, you step into a [tall, black, upright housing](#) resembling the sleek photon torpedo used as Spock's coffin<sup>Å</sup> at the end of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (Geeky? Moi?). You step in and onto a clear plastic floor, lie back against a torrent of water, cross your arms over your chest (as if you've been laid to rest), cross your legs at the ankle (extreme water slide-style), and lean your head back. A clear, plastic lid closes over you, and the crew member coaches you to, "Stare out at the horizon, take a deep breath, and scream!" There's a loud ka-chunk when the gallows trap door opens beneath you... And just 10 seconds later you climb from the splash-down zone, very much alive and seriously considering another go.

Will you leave your stomach behind on the platform? No. For me, at least, the sensation was zoom and swoop--a fast start, a high-speed banked turn... and it's over! Worried that the slide hangs out over the edge of the ship? Once you're in the tube, you see nothing but the inside of the tube.

The ride restrictions are not at all unexpected: Minimum height 48", maximum weight 300 lbs., and the usual health warnings. Plus, one restriction that's not so common at Disney; body shape may disqualify you (it is a narrow tube).

### Deck 12

The [Twist 'n' Spout slide](#) is not your child's Mickey Slide. The splash-down zone is in otherwise kids-only Aqua Zone, but the expected maximum age and height limits have fallen by the wayside (maximum height was blocked-out with masking tape, presumably awaiting a more permanent revision). While no match for AquaDunk, its 20-second spiraling trip is not just a kiddie ride. The start was slow, but acceleration was constant, until I was zooming around the last two curves like a luge rider (if you lie on your back as I did, you go faster). Should you worry about your child? No. Speed is directly related to weight - the smallest riders move at a moderate rate. If you can remember, hold your nose at splash-down--I got a snootful!

### Deck 10

New sun shelters overlooking the Quiet Cove and Goofy pools add a

.....

dose of [welcome shade](#).

Palo, the adults-only, extra-cost restaurant, received refreshed decor; carpeting, new ladder-back chairs, lanterns atop the low room dividers; and the red, white, and turquoise-striped Venetian gondola mooring-poles that gave the restaurant its name. The most striking addition is a long, sinuous ribbon of recessed ceiling lights. Overall, the changes are subtle, the excellent food and service remain the same.

## Deck 9

Huey, Dewey, and Louie-themed [AquaLab](#) has replaced the iconic Mickey Pool and Slide, and judging by the delighted kids, Mickey will not be missed. There are now far more ways to get dunked and blow off steam, with spouting, sprinkling, and cascading water throughout the soft-surfaced play area. Though Mickey's ears are gone, a round wading pool remains. Altogether, the changes have also greatly increased the usable play area and are likely to draw a fair number of 6-10 year-olds away from the usually over-crowded Goofy Pool. Kids must be toilet trained to play here.

In a glassed-in, shaded area adjacent to AquaLab, [Nephew's Splash Zone](#) provides gentler water-play for the littlest ones (up to age 3), away from their boisterous older siblings.

[Cabanas](#) is the completely-overhauled and re-themed deck 9 buffet. Prior to the re-design, Topsiders Buffet was, in my opinion, the worst public space on board, with far too little indoor seating and cramped quarters. These problems have been solved by bumping out the port-side and aft walls and reconfiguring the buffet lines. The Finding Nemo theme is also far more distinctive and, well, "Disney."

Two of deck 9's three snack bars have also been reconfigured and re-themed, in part to make more space for the kids areas. Menu-wise, there's nothing new at [Daisy's De Lites](#) (formerly Goofy's Galley), Pete's Boiler Bites (Pluto's Dog House), or Frozone, the now-free-standing smoothie bar and self-serve ice cream counter.

[Senses Spa](#) (formerly Vista Spa) has been completely redecorated and expanded, and is it gorgeous! I'm not particularly a spa person, but had the cruise been longer, I'd have been tempted! I'd heard that it was 725 square feet larger than before, and I expected they'd steal a bit of that space from the fitness center, but no! They pushed out the sides a bit, gaining a solo spa villa, two-seat barbershop, a one-room teens-only Chill Spa, Smile Spa (teeth whitening) ... The expanded [mani-pedi area](#) has expansive views through starboard-side windows, and the always popular Rainforest Room has been brightened, with new tiled loungers

---

that resemble reclining armchairs.

### **Stateroom Decks (8, 7, 6, 5, 2, and 1)**

As advertised, the [stateroom decor](#) was refreshed. Suites received upgraded, sculpted carpeting, and all rooms have new, queen beds with padded headboards and wall-mounted storage that are identical to those on the Dream Class ships. On the plus side, these provide more under-bed luggage storage and floor space (as the night tables are gone), and there are several much-needed electrical outlets bed-side. Though the bed can no longer be separated into twin beds, most cruisers will appreciate the extra comfort that comes from a one-piece mattress. The big, unheralded change is a new chest of drawers that replaces the former "steamer trunk." This takes up less floor space while providing much [more useful storage](#). New upholstery, carpeting, and decorative touches round-out the changes, making these rooms almost identical in appearance to the Dream Class ships. The bathrooms are unchanged, yet in our stateroom they looked as good as new. Other cruisers report less-than-sparkling condition. We suspect the deep-cleaning of the baths is running a bit behind schedule. One final "touch" are the new door locks, which, like guest room doors at Walt Disney World and on the Dream Class ships, now use tap-to-unlock sensors, rather than card key slots.

### **Deck 5 -- It's a kid's world, after all!**

The kids clubs, [Oceaneer Club](#) and [Oceaneer Lab](#), received a complete make-over, and are now consistent with the design of those spaces on the Dream Class ships. We don't have the space to describe the changes in detail, but they are dramatic! Both areas now have a large, open, central "hub," with themed, activity alcoves surrounding the hub. The Oceaneer Club, aimed at younger children, is the more elaborate and fanciful space, with areas themed to Toy Story, Pixie Hollow, Mickey Mouse Club, and Marvel Avengers (which hosts an incredible, interactive adventure). Oceaneer Lab, aimed at older kids, has little character presence, with alcoves dedicated to animation, crafts, pirates, and navigation simulators. One feature of the Dream Class that's not present is the electronic play floor. Flounder's Reef Nursery has also been totally re-made as It's A Small World Nursery, themed for the famous ride. The room's appearance is delightful, and small improvements can be found throughout. The sleep/nursing area is especially nice, with distinctive cribs and cushy rocking chairs.

### **Deck 4 is Dreamified from stem to stern!**

Starting near the bow, the [Walt Disney Theatre lobby](#) (with the mural of Walt Disney) has new, sculpted carpeting with a bold, colorful pattern that is, to my taste, a bit over the top. It's one of several spots where the carpeting detracts from the otherwise elegant surroundings. During

.....

this brief cruise, Captain America did all of the meeting-and-greeting.

Completely unheralded is the complete make-over of the [retail shops](#). Moderately-priced Mickey's Mates has become Mickey's Mainsail, and adult/upscale Treasure Ketch is now Whitecaps, and now have the same spacious and airy feel of the Dream Class shops. The closed display cases that lined the central promenade are gone, replaced with floor-to-ceiling glass walls and doors. The sales counters have been moved from the inside to outside walls, and Whitecaps now has large portholes to add to the expansive feeling. Though they may be just slightly larger in actual area, the impression is quite different.

D Lounge is a make-over of Studio Sea, the family night club/activity space. A dramatically lighter color scheme, new furniture and carpets, and a wide-open floor plan combine to make this space seem far more spacious and appealing than before. Again, the decor comes straight from the Dream Class ships. [Shutters Photo Studio](#) now mirrors the Dream Class approach, with electronic photo kiosks and a wall lined with bookcases containing photo storage folios, one for each stateroom. No more scavenger-hunting for your family pictures on photo-lined walls!

[Animator's Palate](#) has been brought up to date tech-wise, the walls now lined with large video screens. The decor, happily, has barely changed, sporting the same black-and-white sketch pad motif. On cruises of 5 nights or less, guests will experience a re-vamped version of the original Animator's show, now called "Drawn to the Magic." The show follows the same pattern as before, though with a different line-up of Disney characters. Black-and-white sketches are in evidence through much of dinner, and color is gradually added. During dessert and afterwards the show again follows the "Fantasmic!" story line, with a soaring musical score, dramatic conflict between Heroes and Villains, and the tear-jerking segment when the Heroes, apparently vanquished themselves while overcoming the Villains, revive. The show's finale, however, is dramatically changed (spoiler alert!!!). The familiar Fantasmic! theme music kicks in, and Sorcerer Mickey appears, to make his triumphant way around the dining room! The dining room staff then parades around the room. though they no longer wear the colorful, reversible vests. On 7-night and longer cruises, guests will also experience "Animation Magic," the show seen on the Disney Fantasy (as all guests will have at least two nights in Animator's). Altogether, I'm delighted that the cruise line maintained the show's original spirit while still refreshing the Palate.

### Deck 3

The Atrium Lobby also received a major make-over. Most obvious are

.....

the brightly-colored, sculpted carpeting, and the new chandeliers. Less obvious, but probably more important in the long run, is that the starboard side grand staircase has been removed altogether (the port staircase remains). This change increases usable floor space and also improves the impression of spaciousness in a room that is often cramped at meal times. Considering how little that staircase had been used, it's a very positive trade-off that was introduced on the Dream Class ships. Frankly, I'm sad that the Dale Chihuly chandelier was retired. It was a commissioned work of art, and has been replaced by a pedestrian bit of lighting that could be found anywhere. However, the Chihuly would have clashed with the carpeting. There's actually a back story that goes with the flooring. The carpet on deck 3 has a sea shell motif that evokes the sea bottom. The deck 4 carpet is mid-sea, with seaweeds and coral. Finally, deck 5's flooring represents the ocean's surface, with a bright wave pattern in golds and aquamarine. The overall look is more playful and casual than before, and this is the one case where I think Imagineering went a bit too far in the wrong direction. Still, the impression when entering the lobby after boarding does evoke "fun," and that's a nice way to start a cruise.

Both the Guest Services and Shore Adventures desks have also been touched-up, with very attractive "murals" made with panels of colored, brushed metal.

The adult entertainment district, After Hours (formerly Beat Street), has gone from Zero to Hero, receiving one of the most dramatic re-designs, and achieving a suave elegance that compliments the martini glass incorporated into its logo. The long, curving main hallway is lined in laser-etched stainless steel and rich shades of blue, while Fathoms, the main nightclub, evokes an undersea world. Silver upholstery and wall coverings take on whatever undersea hues are being projected upon them, from the dark blues of the ocean's depths to the turquoise and aquamarine of the shallows, and bright silver of the sun reflecting off the sea surface. Keys is the re-tooled piano bar, with understated decor that includes subtle homage to Mickey. The room was crowded well into the wee hours, which wasn't the case in its previous incarnation. Finally, Diversions, the sports pub, was subtly morphed into O'Gill's Pub. The place is little changed, but added Irish decorative touches (including a wee bit o' Disney character courtesy of Darby O'Gill and the Little People) are a definite improvement. Overall, the adult entertainment zone has gone from zero to hero.

The retail makeover also extends to deck 3 forward, where the former UpBeat duty-free liquor shop is now Sea Treasures, with an expanded merchandise selection. Alas, there was not a single bottle of wine on hand (on the Dream Class, they carry several kinds of bubbly).

.....

Finally, deck 3 aft is now home to [Carioca's](#) dining room (the former Parrot Cay). The room's namesake, Disney character Jose Carioca, is also a parrot. I'm not sure why the cruise line needed to maintain the avian connection, but for whatever it's worth, they've taken the cruise line's least attractive dining room and turned it into its least distinctive. The scene is supposed to evoke Rio de Janeiro, but its dominant colors are white and brown, not what you'd expect for the city known for Carnival (the festival, not the cruise line).

### **Deck O (waterline).**

The Magic is now 20 feet longer, and about 1,000 GRT heavier, thanks to the [new "duck tail"](#) (or DA, for those familiar with 1950s hair styles) added to her stern. The point of this addition is greater fuel efficiency, but in the case of ships the size of the Magic and Wonder, it also makes them too long to sail through today's Panama Canal. While the canal will be opening new, longer locks in the next couple of years, it's likely the Wonder's overhaul is being delayed until the cruise line can be sure she'll be able to make it through the canal for her lucrative summers in Alaska.

You can [view all our Disney Magic photos online \(so far\) here!](#)

*About The Author: Dave Marx is co-founder of PassPorter Travel Press and co-author of [PassPorter's Disney Cruise Line and its Ports of Call](#), and [PassPorter's Walt Disney World](#) guidebooks.*

Article last updated: 10-31-2013

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/disney-magic-ship-review.html>

*Copyright by Dave Marx. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act. Resale of this guide is strictly prohibited without the copyright holder's permission. If you purchased this publication from someone other than PassPorter Travel Press, please call 877-929-3273.*

**View more PassPorter Articles online at <http://www.passporter.com/articles/>**

.....