

## The Queen Mary: Take Part In The Brunch In Style

by Mary Kraemer, PassPorter Guest Contributor

In 1934, when the Queen Mary was launched, cruising was not the same business that it is today. Ships were called ocean liners and mainly transported passengers on transatlantic crossings. More people crossed the Atlantic by ship than by air in those days. [In 1934, only zeppelins flew passengers across the Atlantic.] Romanticized for contemporary audiences by the movie Titanic, ocean liners epitomized glamorous, stylish, lavish transportation in a gracious era.

The Queen Mary was a distinguished ocean liner, and she had a fascinating history during her years at sea. Pressed into service as a troop ship during WWII, she transported 765,429 soldiers between 1940 and 1946. The ship even survived a mysterious and terrifying rogue wave in 1942. Royalty, statesmen, military troops, prisoners of war, passengers, and stowaways all have had berths on the Queen Mary.

Today, the Queen Mary is docked in Long Beach, California, a reminder of the grand tradition of ocean liner travel. Guests can stay in restored staterooms onboard, and visitors can tour the ship to learn about its history as well as some of its ghosts! It is a popular place for weddings and receptions. Besides the hotel, there are several restaurants, and the ship hosts events throughout the year.

One of the treasures of the Queen Mary is its spectacular Champagne Sunday Brunch. Held in the Grand Salon, the ship's first class dining room, the selection of food is dazzling and the experience is nothing short of wonderful. At \$39 for adults, \$12 for children 5-11 years old, the prices are quite reasonable, considering the expansive selection of food (tax and gratuity are extra, of course). Brunch begins at 9:30 a.m. and lasts until 2:00 p.m. If you arrive close to the start of brunch, it is not crowded, allowing you to appreciate the multiple stations of food with the wide variety of offerings, not wait in line, and savor the peacefulness of the dining room. This is the optimum time to appreciate the harpist's talents, as she sits on a platform atop a large central food station. After the dining room fills with several hundred people, the atmosphere changes to a busy hum. The experience begins as you arrive at the Queen Mary. Somehow, just looking at the massive sides of the ship and coming onboard is extraordinary. As you walk down the hallway to check in for the brunch, you enter a different place, a bit quieter and slower paced than outside. The dark wood paneling and the art deco styling immerses you in the charming timelessness of the ship.

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Before entering the main dining room, you walk down a hallway where the light comes in through the portholes. The stately dining room has beautiful wood paneling, featuring the route chart that shows the location of the ship as it crossed the Atlantic, and you can begin to feel as if you are part of a gilded age.

As you are seated at a table, your server pleasantly pours a glass of champagne (or sparkling cider--a big hit with my kids) that is constantly refilled during your meal, and invites you to explore the splendid brunch offerings. Other beverages such as orange juice, water, and coffee are readily available.

I'd be amazed if anyone could leave this brunch hungry, considering there are more than 50 delightful choices of food. There are numerous themed stations in the dining room, starting with the pint-sized children's buffet that features fruit, pizza, grilled cheese, chicken nuggets, and cookies. There's classic breakfast fare, with made-to-order omelets; a waffle station with fruit syrups, whipped cream, and maple syrup; blintzes, sausage, bacon, and Eggs Benedict. There's a pasta station, with a selection of noodles and sauces, garlic bread, and seafood linguine. The salad station starts with basic greens and salad makings, and expands into tortellini salad, grilled marinated vegetables, seared ahi tuna with wasabi, and antipasto. If it's carved meat you want, then you can find roast beef and turkey at the carving station as well as potatoes, grilled chicken, and Seafood Newburg. Seafood offerings include shrimp, mussels, bay shrimp salad, smoked trout, and pickled herring. There are also Mexican and Chinese stations, as well as a tower of rolls, croissants, and pastries.

Be sure to save room for the dessert station, where you'll find made-to-order crepes, chocolate-dipped strawberries (my daughter assures me these are the best in the world), a variety of cakes, tiramisu, mousse, and petit fours.

Even when the tables are full and the dining room is bustling, there is still a sense of order and calm, and even though there are several hundred people, it does not feel terribly crowded. The staff is attentive and friendly, and even at its busiest, your water is refilled, your plates are removed, and the whole experience is smooth.

Reservations are recommended [call (562) 499-1606]. Dress nicely for the occasion (business casual--no beach wear, flip flops, or tank tops allowed in the dining room). Also, strollers are not allowed in the dining room.

After brunch, we like to take some time to meander around the ship,

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strolling on the promenade deck, exploring the wooden paneled hallways of the hotel, visiting the ship's gallery, and learning more about its history (and our kids like to see the WWII guns that are still on the deck). The Queen Mary is not in perfect condition because restoration is ongoing, but somehow, that adds to its unique charm.

While the Disney Magic is on the West Coast, with its week-long itineraries to Mexico, visiting the Queen Mary is ideal because the Magic embarks/disembarks on Sundays from San Pedro, a short drive away. You might consider spending Saturday night before your Disney cruise onboard the Queen Mary to experience a stateroom with classic history and then begin your morning before embarking on the Magic at the Queen Mary's splendid brunch. Or, if you've just disembarked the Magic, brunch is an excellent idea, prolonging your vacation time just a while longer.

The Queen Mary is located at 1126 Queen's Highway, Long Beach, Ca. 90802. Call (562) 435-3511 for more information.

*About The Author: Mary Kraemer, a travel consultant with CruisingCo/MouseEarVacations, loves to travel with her husband and four children. She is an avid Disney fan who visits Disneyland several times a year and is looking forward to a fall trip to Walt Disney World and a week on the Disney Cruise Line!*

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