

CUNARD - QUEEN MARY 2

Queen Mary 2, or QM2 as she is affectionately known, is Cunard Line's flag ship and arguably the grandest ocean liner ever built. Since her launch in 2004 when she was named by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, she has been voted "Best Luxury Ship" by readers of Travel Weekly magazine each year. She combines the most modern amenities with the refined, sophisticated ambience for which Cunard is known.

Queen Mary 2 is one of the few ocean liners remaining in any cruise line's fleet, and her season of transatlantic crossings routinely sells out months in advance.

With her unique design as an ocean liner, Queen Mary 2 is able to glide through the waves as you cross the Atlantic, while you enjoy the amenities onboard.

The Queen Mary 2 is famous for making her regular transatlantic crossings from London (Southampton) to New York. During these crossings passengers are welcomed to participate in tons of activities. During the day you can take acting classes hosted by performers from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art or get some exercise playing a tennis match on the Sports Court. The liner's piece de resistance is the full-scale planetarium, where you can gaze above as you learn about the mysteries of the universe. At night get ready to break out your dancing shoes when you attend a formal ball. All throughout your cruise you'll be meet with helpful staff and taste some of the finest food at sea. It's truly a royal sailing experience.

Ship Stats

- Crew Members 1,253
- Entered Service 2004
- Gross Tons 151,400
- Length 1,132 feet

- Number of Cabins 1,310
- Passenger Capacity 2,620 (3,090 max)
- Width 135 feet
- Last Refurbished: 2020

And at least the first couple of nights allow time for getting lost; as the longest, widest and tallest passenger ship ever built, QM2 can be fairly tricky to navigate. Keep in mind that there are four different main staircases, marked A - D, and rejoice in the fact that, as a convenience, the ship's daily program specifies the deck number and stairway for each place of event or public room.

Art Deco ambiance, stellar enrichment, afternoon tea offerings

Passengers wanting to experience cruising at its most elegant and formal will love QM2

Public Rooms

The full wrap around promenade deck is deck seven. Decks two and three are the heart of the ship, where one moves from one public room to the next, including the Royal Court Theatre, Illuminations (Planetarium), Britannia Restaurant and the Queens Room.

In the tradition of the older Cunard liners, the Queens Room is especially regal, and is the **largest dedicated ballroom on any passenger ship**, and also features the **largest dance floor afloat. Cunard provided Dance Hosts for the single ladies!** There is ballroom dancing at night to the ship's orchestra, and during the day it hosts horse racing and afternoon teas.

G32, the ship's two-level disco, is secreted away behind the Queens Room which you must actually cross to enter. Despite or because of its odd location, it gets packed almost every night.

For regular bars there are the Golden Lion Pub, Sir Samuel's Wine Bar and the Chart Room. The best place to enjoy the horizon (and/or sunset) is in the Commodore Club on Deck 8, which offers also piano entertainment during the evening. For something different, Queen Mary 2 features the first-ever Veuve Clicquot Champagne Bar at sea. It serves seven different Veuve Clicquot Champagne labels.

Alcohol indulgence aside; Illuminations is the only planetarium at sea, and it is used for lectures, movies and of course planetarium films. Or there is the huge, well-stocked library with a nearby book and souvenir shop for all things maritime.

For those of us with a personal connection to ships and the sea, there is a viewing gallery for the bridge open between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to only eight people at a time. You can wander up there and watch the officers on deck in action. Or go to Deck 2, forward, where there are windows just above water level, and watch the bulbous bow cut through brine.

The wraparound promenade on the QM2 is the longest at sea, one-third of a mile. Wooden deck chairs line the rails. There are five pools, one for kids and one under a Magradome.

Dress Code:

QM2 has one of the most rigorous and formal dress codes at sea. This is a ship where passengers appreciate formality; even informal nights require jackets and dresses. If dressing up isn't your thing, it's not the ship for you, unless you are OK being restricted to the buffet at night.

During the day, it is recommended that passengers dress in stylish casual wear, including shorts, smart jeans or chinos and collared or casual shirts. Swim and leisurewear are suitable around the pools.

On a seven-night transatlantic crossing, there are typically three formal nights, which means dinner jacket, tuxedo or dark suit with a tie for men or evening or cocktail dress for women. Men tend to stick to tuxedo on formal nights, and on themed nights, such as the Roaring Twenties, women go all-out. (Think feather boas, decade-appropriate headgear and tasseled dresses galore.)

On informal nights, men are still required to wear jackets, although ties are optional. Women are advised to wear cocktail dresses or two-pieces. After 6 p.m., shorts and blue or worn denim (for men and women), sandals and sleeveless tops (for men) are not appropriate in certain areas of the ship, such as the main dining rooms. Passengers wishing to dress more informally in the evening are recommended to dine in the Kings Court buffet and use the Carinthia Lounge.

Queen Mary 2 Dining:

The ship really excels in its specialty dining, both at Kings Court Specialty A La Carte -- the ship's daily changing themed restaurant -- and its new addition, The Verandah.

Cuisine

Food and the serving thereof have both improved almost beyond recognition since Queen Mary 2 entered service. In the lovely Britannia (minimum category) Restaurant, servers deliver consistently delicious Continental cuisine. Make a reservation the moment you board for celebrity chef Todd English's wonderful restaurant; his Mediterranean-style menu features such delights as lobster and baby corn soup and duck breasts in ginger sauce.

Those paying higher fares dine at a single seating in the intimate Queen's Grill and Princess Grill, where caviar, jumbo shrimp and smoked salmon are yours for the asking, as they're not in Britannia.

The King's Court Lido buffet area with separate food stations, will appeal to British tastes as well as American, but not both at the same time, unless you like beans and black pudding for breakfast.

Lotus features an excellent Asian sampler menu; The Carvery has prime rib, chicken and fish; and La Trattoria offers an Italian menu with a self-service antipasto course from the buffet. The Golden Lion Pub will do you some fish and chips, bangers and mash, or steak and mushroom pie. The Boardwalk Cafe on Deck 12 serves a grill menu. After a demonstration at the Chef's Galley (\$35 per person) the 26 onlookers get to eat what they've just watched being prepared.

Restaurants

With its lighted dome arcing over a nearly three-deck-high space, the Britannia Restaurant feels like the dining room of a grand hotel. A huge vertical tapestry depicting a giant liner against the New York skyline is the richly colorful centerpiece. The dining room has two seatings for 1,350 each, at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., and is rather more elegant than the single-sitting Caronia or two-sitting Mauretania on the Queen Elizabeth 2.

Passengers in the higher category cabins and suites have access to the 180-seat Princess Grill and 206-seat Queen's Grill, two identical single-level rooms aft on Deck 7 somehow lacking the distinctiveness of the Queen's, Princess and Britannia Grills on the QE2. The big name restaurant, Todd English, levies a charge of \$20 for lunch and \$30 for dinner.

For informal dining, the multi-sectioned King's Court offers several serving stations, with minimal queuing, for breakfast and lunch. The four different dining areas all have linen tablecloths and waiter service, with the same menus throughout the voyage. The many bay window tables facing the side promenades provide the best seating and are well out of the main traffic flow.

At night the King's Court is divided into four dining sections that require reservations. The Carvery caters to carnivores; Lotus offers an Asian sampler menu; La Piazza's is, as you've probably divined, Italian; the 26-seat demonstration kitchen Chef's Galley charges \$35 a head. The Golden Lion Pub is popular with British passengers for its pub grub, while the Boardwalk Cafe serves grills, salads and light desserts to those who want to remain out on deck. Featuring spicy lobster wonton, crab cakes, duck spring roll, stir-fried king prawn and chicken with Singapore noodles, the Lotus menu is of particular note.

Bear this in mind about Queen Mary 2's transatlantic sailings: the lack of ports (and the consequent more relaxed approach to dining) means that the restaurants tend to fill quickly. So don't dawdle getting down to dinner.

Queen Mary 2 Entertainment

- Illuminations: Planetarium, lectures, movies
- Winter Garden: Afternoon tea, piano
- Royal Court Theatre: Musicals, stage entertainment (Capacity: 1,105)
- Queens Room: Tea, parties, cabaret, dancing
- Chart Room: Band, bar
- Veuve Clicquot: Champagne bar

In conjunction with Oxford University, QM2 offers seminars on history, politics, fashion and various creative arts. The nighttime theatrical entertainment is provided in the 1,105-seat Royal Court Theater by a unique Cunard program featuring the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, whose players work on an original production bound for the West End or Broadway during the cruise, and show another production at night. During the day, they interact with passengers and give lessons and talks on the dramatic arts. The theater also shows cabaret and other types of entertainment. The Theatre Illuminations, is a planetarium three hours every day, and also serves as a movie theater and lecture hall.

Service

Exemplary staff in all classes of service, especially at Canyon Ranch spa. Bar service, though, can be slow at peak pre-dinner hours.

Tipping

Gratuities are automatically charged to your shipboard account for dining room waiter, cabin steward and other personnel. The per person per day rates are \$13 for accommodation with Grill

dining; \$11 for accommodation with Restaurant dining. Passengers may add or reduce the amounts as they choose, by visiting the front desk to adjust the amount.

For bar and salon services, a 15% gratuity is automatically added to your bill. Other gratuities are at the passenger's discretion.

Cabins

There are two premium "classes" of suites onboard with private dining rooms and deck areas. The top tier is the "Queen's Grill Suite" of people who dine in the Queen's Grill. The second class is the Princess Grill, where dine in the adjacent Princess Grill.

The Queen's Grill suites include the largest staterooms on the ship - while the Princess Grill suites are all about the same size and an upgrade to the average stateroom, but not exactly like suites.

Of the 1,310 cabins, 78 percent have ocean views and 94 percent of these balconies.

Decor

First of all, it needs to be mentioned that when she was introduced as recently as 2004 she was the biggest cruise ship in the world, a title she held for quite a while. However, she carries 1/3 fewer passengers than most ships her size. So, this is obviously reflected in the decor.

What one expects in a modern ocean liner, worthy to carry the mantle of the Cunard name, is grandeur, and how better to accomplish that than with size, and even more so, proportion. The rooms are bigger and grander on QM2, with ceilings that 1/2 again as tall as the normal deck. The public rooms are grand, but not meant to be filled to corner with people. They give the impression of space and openness.

For the actual decor, QM2 favors a modernized version of Art Deco. Handsome sculpture lines the main public room corridors; paintings, many with ocean liner themes, line the foyers and staircases. Cunard history panels, using photos, drawings and text, grace the passages.

Fitness/Spa

Canyon Ranch operates the largest spa at sea, 20,000 square feet on two levels, with a staff of 50. Facilities include a Center, Aqua Therapy and a Beauty and Skin Care Center. Services include a long list of massages, exercise for weight loss, back care, educational workshops, thermal therapies, scrubs, cocoon, and beauty services. There are a gym, weight room, juice bar, Thalassotherapy pool, whirlpool, Finnish sauna, herbal sauna, and steam room. Appointments are taken; charges include gratuities. The therapists don't try to talk you into buying expensive body care products after your treatment, and you're not required to fill out some bogus questionnaire about your health beforehand.