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MARCH | APRIL 2017

VIRTUOSO LIFE

MEXICO CITY › PARIS › SYDNEY › TOKYO › NEW YORK › BUENOS AIRES › HONG KONG › LONDON

» URBAN ESCAPES: OUR INSIDERS' GUIDE TO THE WORLD'S GREATEST CITIES

Oculus,
World Trade Center,
New York City





Night lights:
Hong Kong's Central
Business District.

On the Cover

DOWNTOWN DARLING: The Oculus, centerpiece of Lower Manhattan's new World Trade Center Transportation Hub. PHOTOGRAPHY BY BALL & ALBANESE.

74

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG ADVENTURE

Virtuoso travel advisors share their can't-miss highlights in seven great cities.

BY AMY CASSELL

86

OCEAN CITY, POPULATION 8,955

Life's a sunny, scenic day at the beach on the world's largest cruise ship. BY SARAH KHAN

92

HOORAY FOR (WEST) HOLLYWOOD

The rising star of California cool buzzes from brunch through late night.

BY KIMBERLEY LOVATO

100

TAKE NOTE

Montréal's dining scene is the talk of the town.

BY DAVID HOCHMAN

DESTINATION INDEX

Amsterdam 116
Bologna 52
Buenos Aires 78
Cartagena 112
Croatia 113
Dallas 23
French Polynesia 38
Hong Kong 76
London 79
Los Angeles 92
Mexico City 60
Montréal 100
New York City 84
Paris 82
Perth 108
Riviera Maya 48
Sydney 77
Tokyo 80
Toronto 26
Versailles 32
Vienna 66

Complex TRAVEL — Made — SIMPLE



Contributors



Writer
David Hochman
Los Angeles

"Take Note," page 100
THE REPORT: "I wondered if Montréal could possibly live up to the hype, particularly among the well-fed, that the city is North America's culinary capital. After nearly a week there and way too many calories, I completely understand the fuss. The food scene is lively, loose, mega creative, and impossibly cheap by metropolitan standards."

ALSO SEEN IN: *Food & Wine*, *Forbes*, and the *New York Times*

MONTRÉAL PRO TIP: "Locals know you can bring alcohol into a park as long as you have food. Make a picnic of that city code."



Photographer
Joe Schmelzer
Los Angeles

"Hooray for (West) Hollywood," page 92
THE REPORT: "West Hollywood is a true melting pot of L.A. You can find everything from high-end shopping and affordable boutiques to chic, celebrity-beloved restaurants and amazing casual taco joints, all within a few-mile radius."

ALSO SEEN IN: *House Beautiful*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*

L.A. PRO TIP: "Find a local and ask for their favorite off-the-grid spot. L.A. has so many neighborhoods and hidden finds. You should always ask around."



Writer
Sarah Khan
New York City

"Ocean City, Population 8,955," page 86
THE REPORT: "Despite its size, I was surprised by how intimate *Harmony of the Seas* felt at times. I began seeing familiar faces over and over again, and it helped me feel like a local."

ALSO SEEN IN: *Condé Nast Traveler*, the *New York Times*, and *Vogue*
CRUISING PRO TIP: "Plan ahead. Scope out which shows, restaurant reservations, and activities to book well in advance, so you can spend more time relaxing instead of fretting over what you might be missing."



Writer
Chadner Navarro
Jersey City, New Jersey

"Fish Out of Water," page 60

THE REPORT: "I love that anything can be a fine-dining experience in Mexico City. Even grasshoppers, ant eggs, and *aguas frescas* show up in the city's most exclusive restaurants."

ALSO SEEN IN: *Bloomberg Pursuits*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, and *Rhapsody*

MEXICO CITY PRO TIP: "The city is an international hub. If, for some reason, you've tired of Mexican food, there's also fantastic sushi and world-class fresh pasta."

AvantiTM
DESTINATIONS

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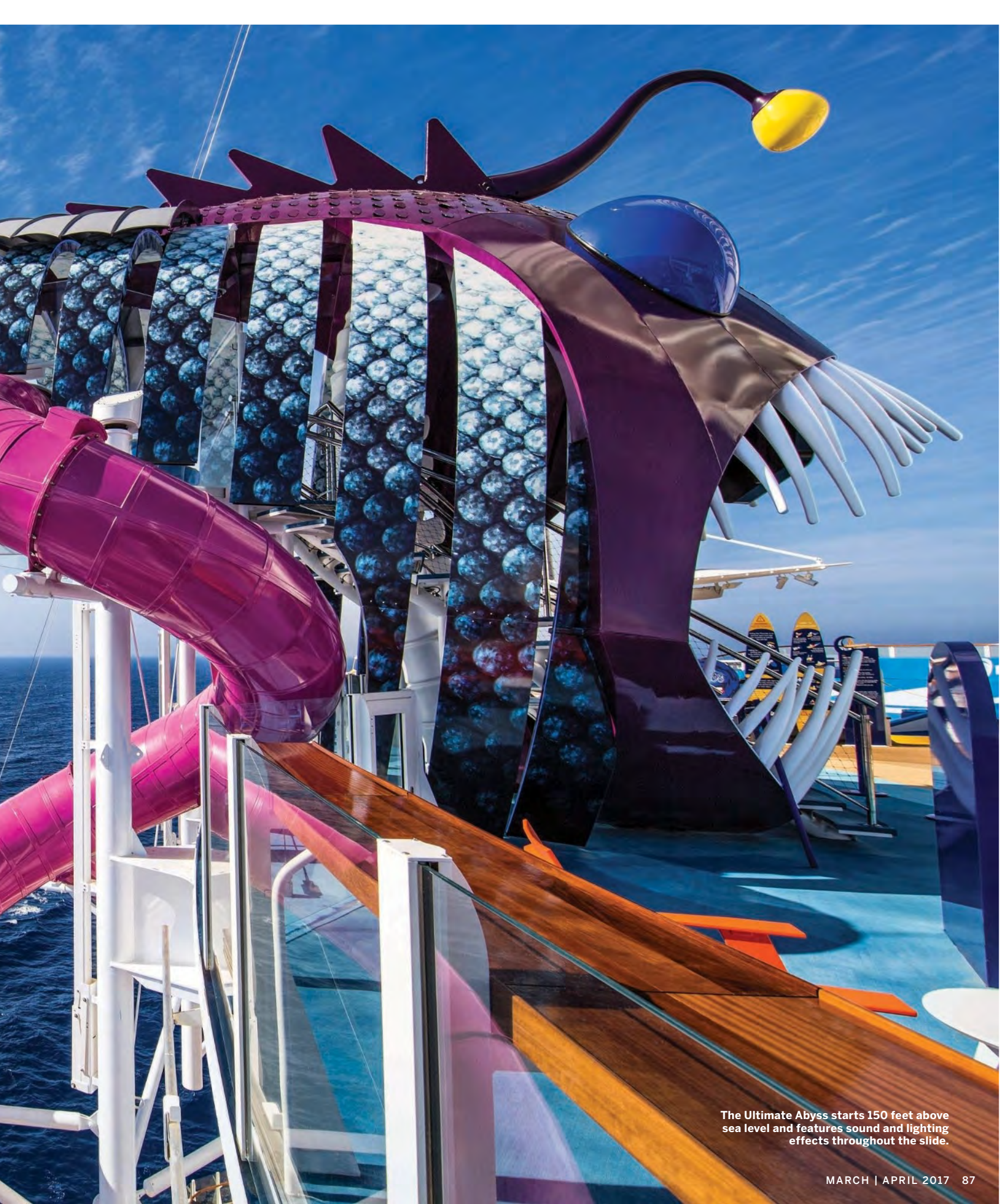


OCEAN CITY

POPULATION 8,955

Life's a sunny, scenic day at the beach
on the world's largest cruise ship.

BY SARAH KHAN



The Ultimate Abyss starts 150 feet above sea level and features sound and lighting effects throughout the slide.

LONG

before reaching my destination, I glimpse its skyline on the horizon. The distinctive tangle of spires, curves, and jagged edges forms a shimmering silhouette against the subdued gray morning as steel and glass reach skyward. And soaring amid it all: a ten-story purple slide.

Some seek Zen in the mountains or at the seaside; others, like me, prefer to lose themselves in the by-lanes of a frenetic metropolis. But my hideaway for the coming week isn't a suite or vacation apartment in New York, Hong Kong, or Sydney; instead, it's a cozy cabin in Fort Lauderdale – or one that's presently resting there – on Royal Caribbean's gleaming new *Harmony of the Seas*.

The floating city debuted to much fanfare last year as the world's largest passenger ship. As a cruise virgin – and, to be frank, something of a cruise skeptic – I assumed I knew what to expect from a week on board: micromanaged schedules, aggressively smiley staff, bottomless prawn cocktails, and a brigade of towel animals awaiting me on my bed at turndown each night. But the promise of eight days of sun and an island-hopping adventure in the midst of a New England winter proved impossible to resist.

My curiosity about life on a megaship intensified right up to departure. How much food is consumed daily across 20 restaurants by *Harmony's* 6,780 guests? How can performers ice-skate and pull off aqua acrobatics gracefully while cruising at 22 knots? A rundown of the ship's stats reads like a chapter from *Guinness World Records*: 18 decks, 23 swimming pools, 28 bars, 2,175 crew members, 5,500 tons of fuel, more than 10,500 plants, 12,600 pounds of flour per sailing (along with 15,000 pounds of beef) – 30,000 meals served a day.



As on any first visit to a new city, I immediately set out to get my bearings: locating the nearest Starbucks (Deck 6, steps from my stateroom's balcony), taking mental notes on restaurants to try, and finding a park for a relaxing stroll. It's in Central Park, one of *Harmony's* seven "neighborhoods," that I start to fully embrace the seabound-city concept. Surrounded by lush vertical gardens and thick bushes, it's easy to forget that you're in the middle of the ocean. In fact, the only place where my preconceived cruise notions and *Harmony's* reality intersect is in the form of increasingly complex animal figures left for me by Irina, a stateroom attendant with a gift for towel origami.

While I'm quickly won over by the ship's abundant charms, the locals prove a somewhat cliquish bastion of families, couples, and large groups. It's not that my neighbors are unfriendly, but they're more content in their own company than eager to befriend an outsider – they've just arrived on vacation

**BY DAY THREE I'VE
FOUND A COMMUTING
SHORTCUT: BOARD
THE ULTIMATE ABYSS
AND ZIP DOWN TEN
FLOORS IN 15 SECONDS.
THE TALLEST SLIDE AT
SEA HAS BECOME
MY SUBWAY.**

together, after all. I happily embrace the familiar comfort that comes with urban anonymity amid the crowds, but find plenty of smiles and friendly banter when I seek them out.

At the American Icon Grill during a busy lunch service, I sit down next to Clive Richards and Pearl Chiu, a Canadian couple on their 23rd cruise. "This vacation was for the ship, not the destinations," Clive says. "We don't intend to get off."

"There are so many open places, so many places to hide," adds Pearl. "It's a city of 6,000 people, but you don't feel like you see any of them."

From top: *Harmony* at sea, surf's up on Deck 15, and the adults-only Solarium.

(FLOWRIDER, CENTRAL PARK, AND BIONIC BAR) ROLANDO DIAZ

But you do, apparently – I run into Clive and Pearl three more times before the week is over: in an elevator, by the waterslides, and at the Solarium Bistro. Even megaships can at times feel delightfully small.

THE SOLARIUM'S THREE CASCADING terraces are an enclave I find myself returning to time and again, a peaceful, child-free zone that's a soothing respite from all the activity. *Harmony* is East Coast in its energy – nonstop at any hour of the day, with rock climbing, waterslides, performances of *Grease* or live jazz shows, an escape-the-room puzzle game, fitness classes, trivia nights, mini-golf, a sprawling casino, and no shortage of fine-dining options, from the whimsical *Alice in Wonderland*-inspired tasting menu at Wonderland to Sabor's fiery Mexican fare. Throughout the voyage, I don't come upon a single midnight buffet, but instead indulge in meals worthy of four-star reviews in any culinary capital. And while I've zip-lined everywhere from Victoria Falls to Costa Rica, whizzing through the air 15 stories above an indeterminate point in the Caribbean is a first.

"This ship is perfect for multigenerational groups," says Chicago-based Virtuoso travel agency president Rob Clabbers. "Rooms range from economical to extravagant, and there's just so much to see and do before you've even gotten off the ship in ports." Clabbers understands luxury cruisers' reservations about joining the gang on a big ship and recommends they book Star- or Sky-class suites. "You'll get priority seating at shows and restaurants, a private sundeck, the suite-only Coastal Kitchen restaurant, and priority boarding and departure," he says. "So you can avoid a crowd if you want to."

After two days of exploring, I feel like I've lived here for years. I can tell you, for instance – if you swear to keep it to yourself – about a great little self-serve fro-yo stand on Deck 15 that's a must after an intense spell of sunbathing. Park Café's cult-favorite Kummelweck roast beef sandwich makes for a quick and easy lunch on the go, while the spa café whips up healthier fare; Johnny Rockets, which usually includes a specialty-dining surcharge, serves a delicious complimentary breakfast. Even teetotalers like me



Nature and the unnatural (from top): Central Park and Bionic Bar's futuristic staff.

TIP

"All *Harmony of the Seas* passengers enjoy a great selection of restaurants and bars, but only **Royal Suite Class** guests get access to Coastal Kitchen, a private restaurant and concierge lounge with floor-to-ceiling windows and fabulous food."

— Rob Clabbers,
Virtuoso travel agency
president, Chicago

don't have to miss out on the Bionic Bar's futuristic theatrics: There are plenty of mocktail options on offer. I tap my way on an iPad to a drink called Candy Candy and watch as the robot bartenders muddle and shake against a tableau of flashing lights and loud music.

After studying the interactive ship maps on every floor like subway maps, I chart the best routes to destinations and commit them to memory. And like any savvy city dweller, by day three I've found a commuting shortcut from the activities deck to my stateroom: Board the Ultimate Abyss and zip down ten floors in 15 seconds, bypassing long waits at the elevators. The tallest slide at sea has become my subway.

By the time we're docking at our second island, I begin to see the wisdom in Clive and Pearl's dedication to remaining on board. To squeeze in every amenity and activity on *Harmony*, you have to plan on-board sightseeing even on port days. I rise early one morning to jog around Deck 5's track as Sint Maarten's lush hills come into view. After a short tour of Nassau, I return to the ship and beeline for the spa. Water-slides provide the perfect cool-off after a languid sunbaked afternoon on a Saint Thomas beach.

On my final afternoon, I seek out a deserted hot tub to watch the sun arc its way to the ocean as we race back toward Fort Lauderdale. Somewhere all around me there are plenty of people: 8,900 of them, give or take a few. But at this particular moment, their existence is about as plausible to me as that of the tooth fairy. Instead, I bask in my private bubble of serenity – a well-earned break after a week of big-city life.



HEAD FOR THE BURBS

With Labadee, Cozumel, San Juan, and Saint Thomas on various itineraries, *Harmony of the Seas*' "suburbs" are worth exploring.

FOR HISTORY: Book the ship's **Essential Nassau** shore excursion to explore the capital's bougainvillea-draped, candy-colored colonial buildings (and sample Bahamian rum).

FOR BEACHES: The U.S. Virgin Islands have some of the Caribbean's most pristine sand. When you dock at Charlotte Amalie on **Saint Thomas**, take a cab to beguiling Magens Bay beach on the north coast.

FOR DINING: **Sint Maarten** is the Caribbean's culinary capital. For delicious comfort favorites with an island twist – say, calamari with curried mayo or a jerk-chicken Philly cheesesteak – stop by Lazy Lizard in the heart of Philipsburg's boardwalk.

From top: Entering Wonderland, the restaurant's root vegetables on edible pumpernickel and potato "soil," and a Crown Loft Suite.

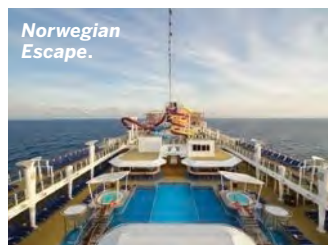
URBAN ARCHIPELAGOES

Big-time dining, entertainment, and adventure on the high seas.

The world's biggest cruise ship, **Royal Caribbean International's** 6,780-passenger *Harmony of the Seas* is built for active travelers, with two surf simulators, ice-skating, three-deck-tall waterslides, and more. Eight-day Caribbean sailings from Fort Lauderdale run year-round. *Departures: Multiple dates through 2017; from \$836.*

The first of **Norwegian Cruise Line's** Breakaway Plus-class ships, *Norwegian Escape* sails seven-day Caribbean itineraries year-round from Miami while wining and dining 4,266 passengers at their choice of 28 restaurants – including not one, but two from *Iron Chef* Jose

Garces. *Departures: Saturdays through 2017; from \$679.*



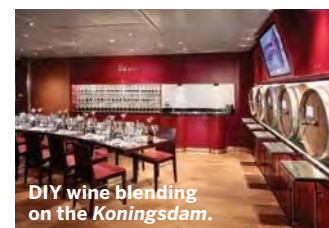
Princess Cruises' Majestic Princess debuts in April with a series of Mediterranean sailings. On its five-day maiden voyage from Rome, the ship's 3,560 passengers can join pickup games on the basketball court, take in movies under the stars, or enjoy French fare from Emmanuel Renaut or Richard Chen's

Cantonese cuisine when they're not exploring Corfu, Greece, or Kotor, Montenegro. *Departure: April 4; from \$609.*

A Canyon Ranch spa, the private cabana-like Alcoves, and the sear-it-yourself Lawn Club Grill make for relaxed yet sophisticated afternoons on **Celebrity Cruises' Reflection**. The 3,046-passenger ship sails eight-day Caribbean voyages from Miami this spring, then heads to the Mediterranean for the summer. *Caribbean departures: Multiple dates through April 15; from \$649.*

Sleek Adam Tihany-designed interiors make **Holland America**

Line's 2,650-passenger *Koningsdam* a standout among its peers. Highlights on the year-old vessel include the dramatic three-story central atrium and the copper-clad wine tower in the main dining room, as well as Blend, a first-at-sea wine-blending venue. The ship kicks off its Mediterranean season with a 15-day sailing round-trip from Rome. *Departure: April 15; from \$1,799. VI*



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