

Let's Get Nauti!

VIRGIN VOYAGES' SCARLET LADY IS BRIGHTER, SHINIER, AND WAY COOLER THAN THE COMPETITION



When you're raised in Florida, cruise ship vacays are the obvious choice due to our proximity to the cruise ports, affordability, the opportunity to visit a couple of tropical islands, and unlimited food. I had been on a handful of cruises in the past, so my attitude about cruises was, "Been there, done that." However, when Virgin Voyages reached out, I was intrigued. Richard Branson *did* make flying more enticing with Virgin Atlantic, I had to experience his take on cruises.

Spoiler alert: As I predicted, VV does cruises WAY better!

With VV, expect *more*. Sailors receive a list of perks (\$600 in value) aboard the adults-only (18+) cruise ship – all gratuities, Wi-Fi, essential drinks, and group fitness classes are covered in the voyage fare.

On a Sunday in late September, we boarded the Scarlet Lady at PortMiami for a five-night "Mayan Sol" voyage to Costa Maya and Virgin Voyages' signature Beach Club in Bimini. That was the plan until Hurricane Ian had us reroute to Dominican Republic and Nassau instead. No big deal, we were game for whatever and there were great excursions (aka "Shore Things") to choose from at our destinations (we zip-lined and slid down waterfalls in Dominican Republic and snorkeled at Pearl Island in Nassau).

After grabbing the requisite vacation cocktail, we retreated to our Sea Terrace room. Cabins exude a chic boutique-hotel-room vibe. Designed by a Creative Collective comprised of some of the most respected interior designers, artists and architects, including Roman and

Williams, Tom Dixon's Design Research Studio, Concrete Amsterdam, Softroom of London and more, rooms were outfitted in a modern decor with subtle nautical touches, a 43"+ 4K flat-screen HDTV, mini bar, glam area, wardrobe, and of course, splashes of red.

Our comfy European king bed was dressed in white premium linens, and the bathroom featured a rain shower head and was stocked with shampoo, conditioner, and body wash. In support of VV's commitment to sustainability and quest to conserve energy, the blinds close and the air conditioning adjusts to an eco-saver temperature when you leave the cabin. Cabins also feature mood lighting that automatically adjusts to enhance the time of day based on where the ship is in the world. On the terrace were two patio chairs, a mini end table, and a red single-person hammock, handwoven by artisans from Yellow Leaf, a social enterprise that fosters women's empowerment and community transformation in rural Thailand.

Each ship features 78 luxurious suites, including, but not limited to the Massive Suite, Fab Suite, Posh Suite, Gorgeous Suite; XL Sea Terrace cabins; Sea View cabins; Insider cabins; Social Insider cabins; and Solo Insider cabins. RockStar Quarters Sailors receive a few extra perks, including first dibs on entertainment, restaurant reservations and Shore Things; an exclusive VIP pathway to the ship during embarkation; are designated their own agent to assist with requests; and have exclusive access to Richard's Rooftop, a private outdoor space to sunbathe and enjoy drinks. Suites also have a full bar and cocktail kit, with the first round on the house.



The Scarlet Lady boasts 20+ eateries, exciting live shows, fitness classes, a spa, shopping, and so much more. The other thing that sets VV apart from other cruise lines is their “come as you are” motto. The VV crew are encouraged to show off their tattoos and express their individuality. And, they have the first ever tattoo studio on a cruise ship with two resident tattoo artists, and the occasional guest artist from the World Famous Tattoo Ink Pro Team.

On to my favorite part about vacations – the cuisine. As a foodie, I was excited to discover that the menus onboard were created by a Michelin-starred chef collective. Here are my dining tips. Once your cruise is booked, download the VV app and check out the list of restaurants onboard. I recommend making reservations ahead of time as the earlier time slots fill up quickly (I recommend this for the live shows too!). The Wake is their most glamorous restaurant. Decked out in a mid-twentieth century vibe, this was my favorite dining spot for its view, decor, and decadent cuisine. Their impressive menu boasts steak, lobster, seafood towers (this is an extra cost), and more. They also have a raw bar, table-side drink cart service, and Champagne poured by the glass from a magnum bottle. The oysters and chilled lobster tail were so fresh and delicious, and my lamb chops were prepared perfectly – they even had mint jelly.

The Test Kitchen is a must! This notable restaurant serves sailors several small “laboratory-like” courses. The presentation, flavors, ambiance, and

service were top-notch. Pink Agave serves elevated Mexican; Gunbae serves Korean BBQ on specially engineered flameless grills built into each table and has sailors participating in lively drinking games; Extra Virgin serves regionally inspired, hand-crafted pasta and Italian fare; and Razzle Dazzle offers vegetarian contemporary American fare, and meat add-ons for those feeling carnivorous.

If you’re seeking a more casual dining experience, The Galley Food Hall offers a myriad of eateries, including a bakery and pastry shop, a panini shop, a burger grill, a taco shack, a sushi bar with bento boxes, a noodle bar, a soup and salad stand, and a 24-hour American diner. Simply take a seat and one of the friendly servers will take your order. I suggest ordering a couple of different dishes from each place. For example, for lunch one day, I ordered the spicy pork ramen bowl and a salmon avocado sushi roll. For pizza or ice cream, or both, head to The Pizza Place and Lick Me Till...Ice Cream (seriously, how clever and naughty are these names?) on deck 7. There are so many easy, delicious, ready-to-go options at your fingertips.

My favorite casual dining spot was The Dock, a beach club-inspired outdoor restaurant that serves Mediterranean-inspired small plates, dips, and mezzes on daybeds and seating on the aft of the cruise ship. Even now I am daydreaming about their refreshing watermelon and feta salad, grilled octopus, polenta skewers, and shrimp I indulged in while lounging on a daybed overlooking the sea.





There are a variety of bars, lounges, and entertainment for whatever mood you're in. The Manor nightclub allows you to let loose on the dance floor and boasts a sparkling, Insta-worthy entryway. Draught Haus offers eight beers on tap, a wide range of bottled artisanal beers...and is a casual hangout to play games. And Sip is their super posh lounge featuring a diverse curation of Champagne labels, including Moët & Chandon. They also serve afternoon high tea here. You can book The Groupie, a karaoke, gaming, and movie lounge, to belt out your favorite songs while sailing the high seas. And if you're feeling lucky, pop by the casino to play the slots, roulette, and craps. What's more fun than playing craps when you're winning?

As for the entertainment, it is spectacular. Scarlet Lady features six original, entertaining shows developed by some of the world's best producers, directors, and artists, including Jenny Gersten, Randy Weiner, Sam Pinkleton, Ani Taj, PigPen Theatre Co, The 7 Fingers, Roslyn Hart and Alfredo Guenzani and the Spark Cooperative. *Ships in the Night* awes with their fantastic choreography coupled with cutting-edge digital projection, while *Duel Reality's* modern take on *Romeo & Juliet* with a cirque- acrobatic twist had me on the edge of my seat as I watched the cast perform their death-defying stunts. Bravo, VV, I was entertained.





For some pampering, book a day at Redemption Spa, which houses a hydrotherapy pool, mud room, salt room, cold plunge pools, quartz beds, and spa treatment rooms. I indulged in a relaxing deep tissue massage here. Also onboard, Stubble and Groom barber shop and The Dry Dock for your hair care needs, and a nail salon if you want a mani and/or pedi. You're on vacation – treat yourself.

For the athletes and fitness enthusiasts who adhere to the “no days off” lifestyle, VV has you covered. The Athletic Club, inspired by 1920s New York sports clubs, is fully loaded, and features oversized outdoor gaming, an outdoor training zone with a boxing ring, strength and gymnastics equipment, gyms equipped with Technogym ARTIS, and more. And there is a standalone running track, aka The Runway, that forms a halo-like vision over the ship. The Well-being Pool features

a large whirlpool, two plunge pools and MyBeast, an artistic adult playground and fitness apparatus designed by Equilibria.

When I am on vacation, I prefer to lounge around, soak up some sun, and forget about my diet. Scarlet Lady has endless options for lounging, including the largest daybed at sea, numerous cabanas, tons of loungers on every level, and The Aquatic Club pool deck, where sailors can listen to the resident DJ spin energizing music as they bask in the sunshine on daybeds and chase lounges surrounding the pool. The lively pool deck is where you could find me when I wasn't at an exhilarating show, exploring, or eating my way around the ship. VV exceeded my expectations and made me look at cruises in a whole new light. This isn't your parents' cruise ship – it's brighter, shinier, and way cooler. I see another VV cruise in my near future.





Virgin Voyages Fleet Facts

- VV's first fleet, known as the "Lady Ships," (a nod to Virgin's British heritage and a play on the term "your ladyship") includes Scarlet Lady, Valiant Lady, Resilient Lady, and Brilliant Lady.
- 86% of Virgin Voyages' cabins feature a balcony and 93% feature an ocean view.
- Ships can host 2,770 Sailors and 1,160 amazing crew from around the world.
- There are 1,330 cabins and 78 RockStar Quarters aboard VV ships.
- Scarlet Lady appeared on one of the earliest planes to fly for Virgin Atlantic.
- VV has banned single-use plastics on its ships, including straws, bottled water, other beverage bottles, condiment packets, shopping bags, food packaging, stirrers and take-away coffee and teacups. Instead, VV emphasizes the use of recyclable and reusable materials across the ship.
- VV's fleet of ships were designed to the latest energy-efficiency standards with state-of-the-art equipment and has committed to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- All of the fish and seafood found in VV's signature restaurants and eateries has been sustainably sourced, and sunscreens for sale are all reef-safe.

*For more information on Virgin Voyages, visit: www.virginvoyages.com
Words by Vanessa Pascale Rust | Photo Credit: Virgin Voyages*