

Holland America Line – Viking Sagas

Famil Report by Katarina Rookes, Business Development Executive for Francis Travel Marketing

Introduction

At the end of June 2018 I was very lucky to be able to experience one of the most beautiful cruise ships – the *Koningsdam*, Holland America Line's newest ship. I did the Viking Sagas cruise which starts in Amsterdam and goes up to Norway, visiting some fantastic ports along the way including Oslo and Flam. It was my first time travelling by myself and I thoroughly enjoyed it!



ABOUT KONINGDAM

Koningsdam is currently Holland America Line's newest ship. She joined the fleet in 2016 and is the biggest of the fleet, at 2,650 passengers. This ship has lots and lots of different activities, restaurants, cafes, lounges, bars that are all incredible! On the Plaza deck you will find the incredible show lounge! It's so grand and beautiful and all the shows I saw were fantastic; ranging from Orchestra to dancers to magicians!

Koningsdam also has an area on the Plaza Deck called the "Music Walk", which includes Lincoln Centre stage – a beautiful orchestra, Billboard On Board – the crowd favourite piano bar which is guaranteed to be full of people singing along by the end of the night and the Queens Lounge, which has the B.B. Kings Blues Club (with actual musicians from the B.B. Kings Club in Memphis) playing every night! In between all these is BLEND – a Whiskey tasting bar!

Restaurants on this deck are the Pinnacle Grill, which is the fine dining restaurant and always a good choice for a special occasion with beautiful steaks and seafood on the menu at only US\$35 per person for dinner! This ship also has Rudi's Sel De Mer – a French seafood brasserie which is absolutely amazing and you pay for this a la Carte. Just along from this is BLEND, where you can try wines and blend your own unique wine!

America's Test Kitchen is in the Culinary Arts Centre on *Koningsdam*. This is where you can enjoy cooking demonstrations and learn new recipes (that you can take home as well!). In the evening the Culinary Arts Centre turns into an amazing restaurant with "Farm to table" style food, great drinks and a relaxed atmosphere! This is also for a small nominal fee!

At the end of this deck is the amazing Main Dining Room which goes over Deck 2 and Deck 3; Deck 2 for As-you-wish-dining and Deck 3 for those who like to have the same table/ waiter throughout the cruise and have set times!

The Promenade Deck has the Grand Dutch Café – a beautiful little café with great coffee (normally impossible to find on a cruise ship!) and with little Dutch goodies like Poffertjes (mini pancakes). This Deck also has the casino on it ☺.

On the Lido Deck you have the gym and spa area, the Lido Pool which has a retractable roof, and also the Lido buffet. Other special food areas here are the Canaletto, which is a delicious Italian Restaurant at a nominal fee of US\$15 for dinner, the Dive In Burger bar which has amazing burgers and the best chips I have ever eaten and the New York Pizza Bar, which does delicious pizzas whenever you want them (this was very dangerous for me as I LOVE Pizza and did have one most days ☺). The *Koningsdam* also has a Gelato bar on the Lido Deck, which is amazing with so many different flavours to choose from!!

On Deck 10 is my favourite restaurant, the Tamarind! This delicious specialty restaurant is an Asian-fusion restaurant with amazing curries, sushi, seafood dishes and also beautiful desserts!! This ship also has kids clubs on board, a running track and sports courts!

Now, let me go through my itinerary and what I got up to on board ☺

Day 1

My trip started in one of my all-time favourite cities, Amsterdam. I was sitting in my taxi and could see the incredible *Koningsdam* from quite a few kilometres away! She looked absolutely amazing. The check in process was the easiest I've ever experienced. I got out of the taxi at around 11am and was expecting to just drop my luggage off and have to leave again before boarding (as my last experience took quite a while!) but it was so quick that I was in my cabin by midday which was fantastic.

I stayed in one of the single cabins – an Ocean-view. Only the *Koningsdam* and the *Nieuw Statendam* (joining the fleet in December 2018) have single cabins on board. It was very spacious with a nice double bed and a walk in shower in the bathroom! The room was very contemporary and bright.



After I settled in I went and got myself a New York Pizza which was delicious! I then explored the ship further and explored all it has to offer- Lincoln Centre Stage, the shops, the show lounge, the spa, the Grand Dutch Café and of course all of the incredible art work!





Day 2

The second day was a sea day. After a delicious breakfast in the lido and a coffee at the Grand Dutch Café I decided to go to America's Test Kitchen – Holland America Line's cooking demonstration which is on board across the fleet. On the *Koningsdam* it takes place in the Culinary Arts Centre where there's a huge kitchen so you can really watch and learn how to cook certain dishes.



On the menu today was Salmon! The class was about 40 minutes long and you can take the recipes home after! I love these classes as you just learn so many different techniques that you wouldn't have thought of!

It was formal night on board so I enjoyed a delicious dinner in the main dining room followed by a drink at Billboard on board where you can listen to and sing along to some classics played on the piano!

Day 3

This was our first day in Norway so I was very excited as I had never been before! Oslo – the capital! What an amazing city. I didn't have any shore excursions booked – I just went for a stroll and checked out some famous sights. The Viking Ship Museum was absolutely amazing as they have some actual Viking ships on display that they built back together as well as showed how the Viking burials took place on the ships. I then went to the Vigelandpark, which is a very famous park full of sculptures of naked people by Vigeland. Then I just went for a stroll to the Palace and through the main shopping area! There was so much to see and do and I definitely want to go back some day!

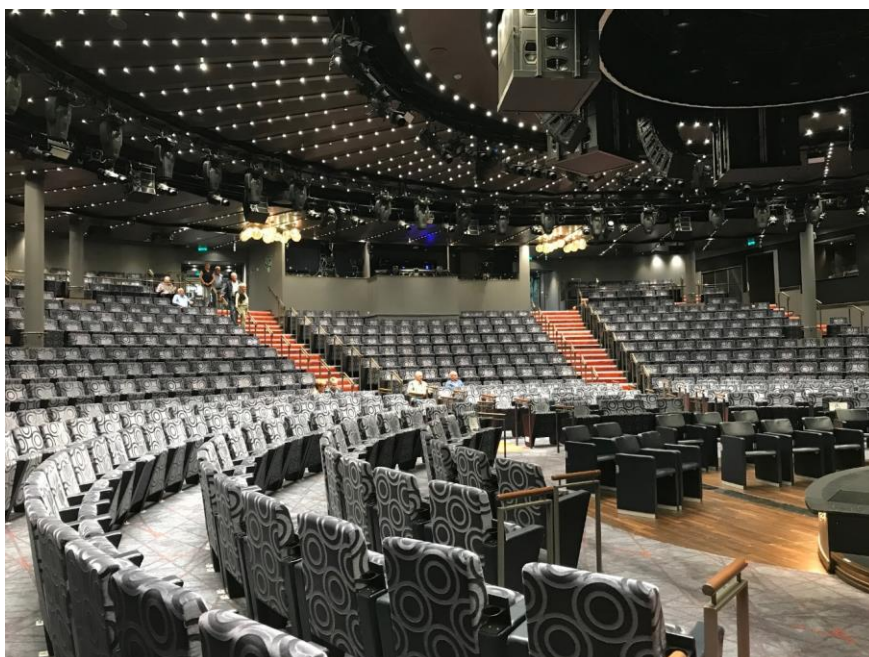
When I was back on the ship I dined at the Culinary Arts Centre. I was extremely impressed!! It's a very relaxed atmosphere which a delicious menu and you can watch the chef cook your food which is great! They also have sports playing in there which helps add to the relaxed vibe.



Day 4

Today we got to a little place called Kristiansand. I was really not expecting too much but it was the sweetest little Norwegian town! I mainly just strolled around – in Kristiansand they have the largest settlement of old white houses in Europe!

In the evening I went to the Planet Earth 2 in Concert show on board. This was amazing! They have an orchestra playing music while they show scenes from Planet Earth on the big screens. A fantastic and fun show!

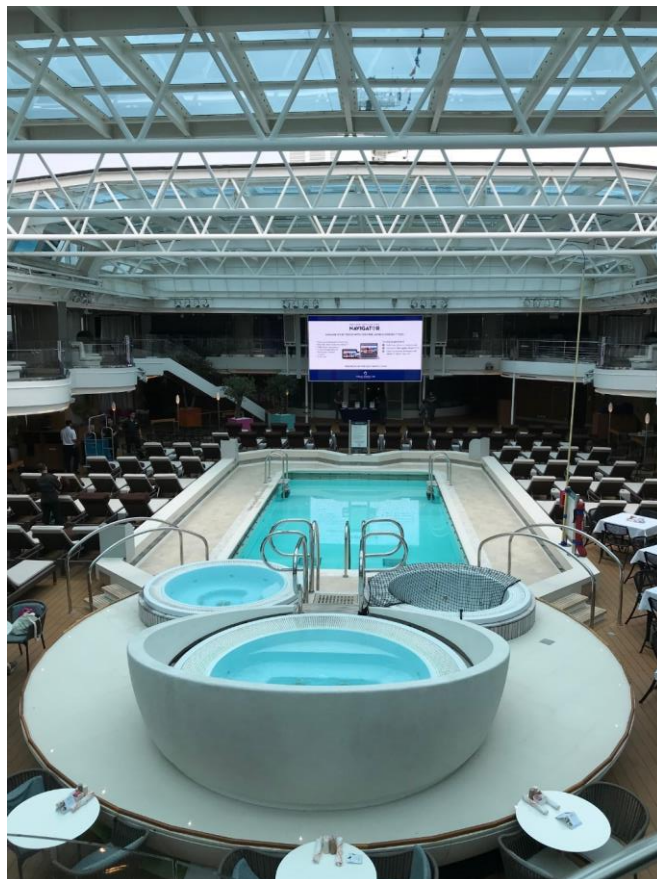


Day 5

Stavanger – what a place! I actually did a shore excursion on this day which was the Pulpit Rock Cruise. Most people go to Norway for the amazing fjords and Lysefjord where we went into for the cruise was absolutely breath taking. It was a beautiful sunny day (every day I spent in Norway was 30 degrees and sun – I could have left my Kathmandu jacket at home!) and the scenery was so stunning. We cruised to the bottom of the famous Pulpit Rock where a lot of people hike up to as well! The shore excursion took about 3 hours so I still had time to explore Stavanger a bit when I got back as well which was nice!



In the afternoon I watched the football World Cup on the big screen by the lido pool – it was such a fantastic atmosphere as everyone was getting super into it! They showed the games every night and afternoon which was awesome.



Day 6

This was our last port day! We went to a beautiful little village called Flam. This is a very small village so I would definitely recommend booking a shore excursion! I had a kayaking tour booked which unfortunately got cancelled due to winds in the Fjord so I went on a hike instead! It was a beautifully warm day so walking around was very pleasant!

In the evening I dined at my favourite specialty restaurant – the Tamarind. This is an Asian fusion restaurant. The food was absolutely amazing and on the *Koningsdam* it is on Deck 10 with fantastic views! After dinner I went to the BB Kings Blues Club which is always a great time! By the end of the performance pretty much everyone was dancing and singing along!



Day 7

My last day on *Koningsdam*! I spent this day (as it was a sea day) going to another America's Test Kitchen, played Trivia with some lovely people I met during the cruise and reading my book.

In the evening I dined at the Sel de Mer – a French inspired seafood brasserie which was, again, absolutely amazing! I definitely ate very well during this amazing week on *Koningsdam* 😊

Day 8

The disembarkation process was very easy – the night before everyone was given a number and on the morning when the number was read out you disembark. This meant no queues and everyone got off at the time they wanted to disembark!

All in all I had a really great time on board the *Koningsdam*. It was a very relaxing week and I truly experienced everything this amazing ship has to offer! I would definitely recommend a cruise up to Norway but most definitely recommend cruising on *Koningsdam* – a stunning ship!

