

Cruising for the 1%

Steve Beaudet/Regent Seven Seas Cruises •

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From grand staircases to the top-notch room service, every square inch of Regent's Seven Seas Explorer has been engineered to impress its patrons.

Steve Beaudet/Regent Seven Seas Cruises

Two days into the maiden voyage of the Regent Seven Seas Explorer, which bills itself *The Most Luxurious Ship Ever Built™*, I felt I had found a kindred spirit.

There I was, in the \$10,000-a-night Regency Suite. Within arm's reach was a custom-made, half-million-dollar piano. To my right was the master bedroom, home to a \$150,000 mattress. All around me was a panoramic patio looking out over the Mediterranean. Directly across from me, ready for his interview, was Frank Del Rio, chief executive of Norwegian Cruise Lines,

Regent's parent company.

Ever since signing up to take the inaugural voyage on this most opulent of ships, I had been thinking a lot about the word “luxury.” As an English professor, I couldn't help but be fascinated by the word's strange history. In its original sense, it was an insult. Usually prefaced by words such as “foul” or “filthy,” it stood for the full range of forbidden sensual pleasures. Now, it means more or less the same thing, but our attitude toward the term has shifted. Far from an insult, it has become a pursuit, a goal, a reason to live.



Cruising on the Regent Seven Seas Explorer, which bills itself as The Most Luxurious Ship Ever Built.

Filippo Vinardi/Regent Seven Seas Cruises

So I started with a question about luxury. The word is so prominent in the marketing of the ship, I began.

But before I could get to my point, Del Rio interjected.

“Luxury,” he said. “The most overused, abused word in the English language.”

This is where the kindred-spirit feeling came from.



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Encouraged, I continued.

Luxury has such different meanings for different people. What definition of luxury guided the construction of this ship? How did he choose what to include, what to leave out?

His answer was a simple and unexpected “No.”

“No?” I asked.



Wine service on the Regent Seven Seas Explorer.

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“No,” he repeated. “We didn’t need to pick. This has everything. It’s got space. It’s got good taste. The glassware is Lalique. The silverware is Christofle. There are two sets of dishes: Bernardaud and Versace. Take me to any city in the world, take me to Paris, take me to New York, take me to Toronto. Compare my menus to those restaurants’ menus. I’m sure that if our restaurants were on land, we’d earn one, two, maybe more, Michelin stars.

“So you tell me,” Del Rio concluded, “where did we drop the ball?”

He had a point. It’s quite a challenge. Every square inch of the ship has been engineered to impress, to please and to reassure you that the tens of thousands of dollars you’ve spent are being put to good use. It’s the sort of luxury you can’t help expressing in brand names and quantities. Preciosa chandeliers and Murano glass are everywhere. Walking into the bathroom is like entering a L’Occitane cosmetics shop. The Tibetan prayer-wheel

sculpture outside the Pacific Rim restaurant weighs as much as three cars and cost \$500,000.



The library aboard the Regent Seven Seas Explorer.

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And yet, faced with a whopper of a slogan like The Most Luxurious Ship Ever Built™, you can't help but try to poke holes. In the coffee bar one day, drinking a cappuccino that was perfectly fine but nowhere near as delicious as the one in my favourite café back home, I asked myself whether the muzak version of *Circle of Life* playing over the sound system was particularly luxurious. In the bathroom, I couldn't help but notice the toilet brush was made of white, IKEA-style plastic rather than something exotic such as marble or pearl. It seemed a little offensive, one morning at breakfast, to find that my banana had a big bruise. On a shore excursion to a picturesque town in Provence, I noted with disappointment that the bus was just an ordinary bus, and that the town we visited, filled with tourists, was not especially exclusive. Biting into my dessert of mochi ice cream at Pacific Rim one

evening, my heart sank when I realized it tasted exactly like the ones from Trader Joe's.

I am hardly a foodie, but even I could see that Michelin stars were unlikely. Some dinners were thrilling, and the Versace dishes were pretty. Others, such as the ramen at Pacific Rim, from which ramen noodles were mysteriously absent, were genuinely mediocre.



Every dish served in the Seven Seas Explorer's eateries can also be delivered to patrons' rooms at any time of day.
Preston Mack/Regent Seven Seas Cruises

But perhaps it was, after all, a question of different definitions. Maybe this ship wasn't built for bohemian snobs such as myself, who'd rather have a perfect cup of coffee in an Esso cup than a decent one in Lalique.

So I asked Del Rio, who is the Explorer for?

"I'll give you a quote," he said. "This is a ship for the one-per-centers. And we're not embarrassed about it. Everything has a time, and the time for

unabashed luxury is back. The time not to be apologetic for your wealth is back. The period of some conspicuous consumption is back. This ship is the way to break all those misguided, self-sacrificing, self-torturous points of view. We should celebrate success, not make excuses for it.”

He continued, “This is not a cruise for those who need to save for it. This is not a penny-pinching cruise. This is not the cruise you save all year to buy.”

So, definitely not for me.



The pool deck of the Regent Seven Seas Explorer.

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After my interview with Del Rio, there were three days of cruising left. I knew I had everything I needed for my article from our little chat, so I decided to take a break from the one-per-center's version of luxury. I went to the onboard cooking classes, which were a blast, but mostly I stayed in my room or on my massive deck, about the same size as my living room at home. I

discovered you could get room service to your balcony at any time of day, from any menu at any restaurant on the ship. I blew off my reservations and started eating all my meals there.



A stateroom on the Regent Seven Seas Explorer.

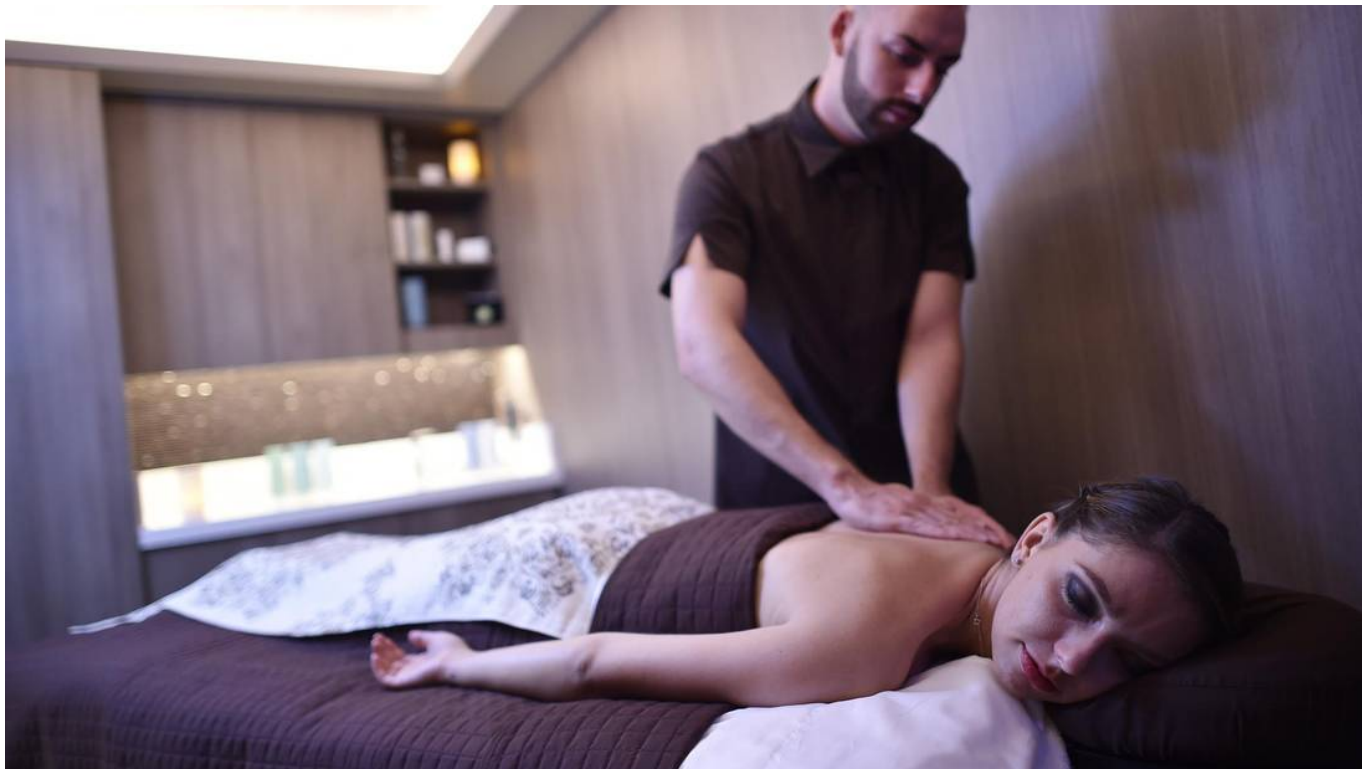
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A couple of days later, I found myself on my deck, looking out at the sun setting over the Mediterranean, dipping a delectable falafel in some delicious tapenade, reclining on my deck chair, dressed in an unfathomably soft bathrobe.

Which is when, of course, it struck me: They got me, too.

This is luxury. Even for me.

That's when I started thinking about the definition of another word: "ungrateful."



The Canyon Ranch Spa aboard the Regent Seven Seas Explorer
Regent Seven Seas Cruises

The Regent Seven Seas Explorer sails to a variety of destinations in North America and Europe. Prices start at \$5,499 (U.S.) a person in a Veranda Suite for a 10-night round-trip Miami cruise, to \$134,999 in a Regent Suite for a 27-night cruise to Copenhagen from London.

The writer was a guest of Regent Seven Seas Cruises. It did not review or approve this article.