



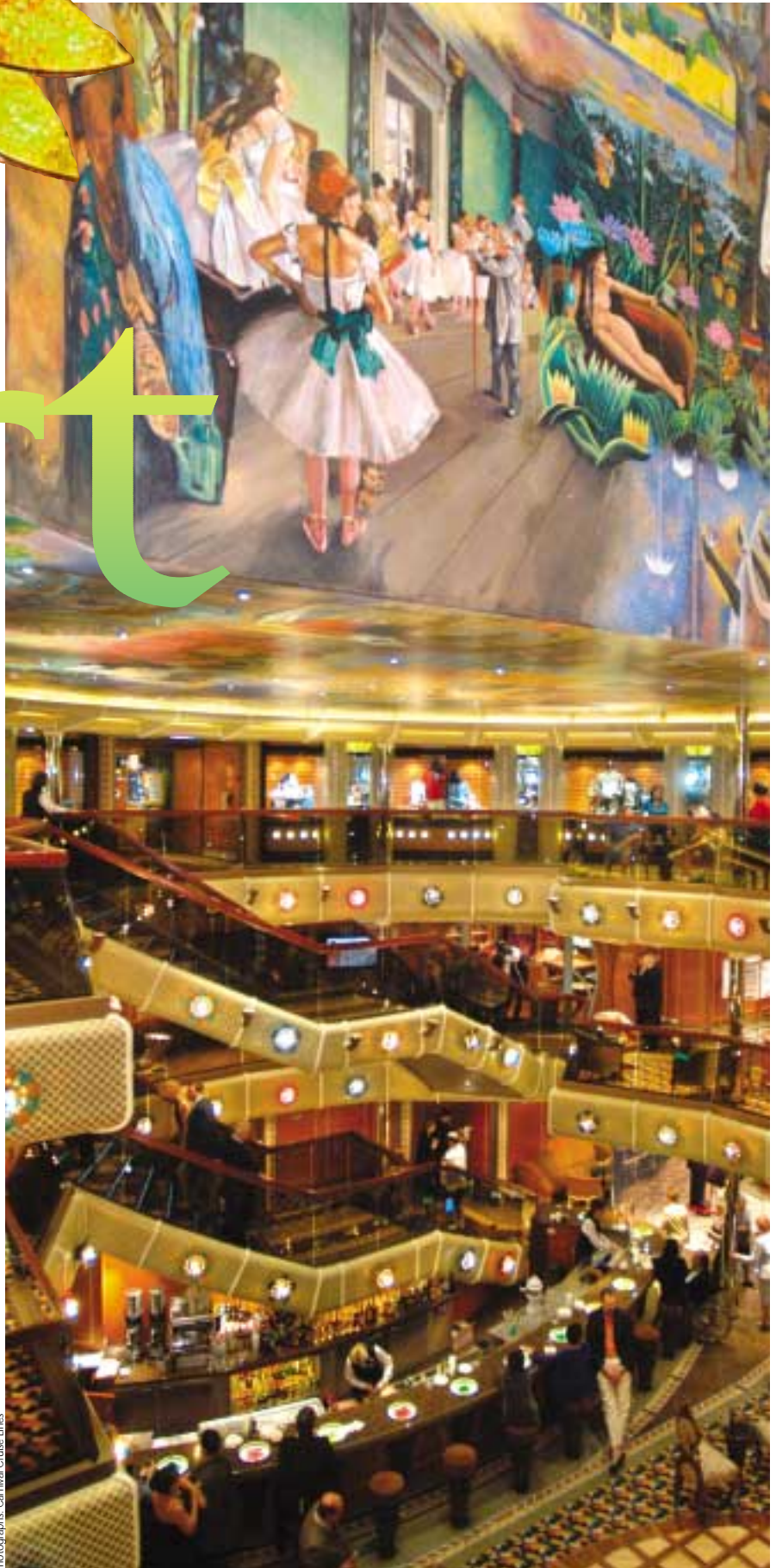
IMMERSED IN Art

BY SUSAN B. BARNES

Cresting over a rise on I-10 on my way into New Orleans, I caught a first glimpse of the magnificent ship. Smokestacks rose mightily over the Mississippi River, making its presence known. Wandering around the French Quarter the day before departure, I couldn't wait to board.

Up close, the sheer enormity of the ship spoke volumes. At more than two-and-a-half football fields in length and 13 decks, the *Carnival Conquest* is Carnival Cruise Line's largest ship to date and the first in its new Conquest class. Nearly 1200 international crewmem-

The new Carnival Conquest impresses cruisers with its many artistic touches.



Photographs: Carnival Cruise Lines

bers work hard day in and day out to ensure that the 3000 guests enjoy their cruising experience.

Entering the Artist's Lobby and Atelier Atrium, I quickly realized the sheer grandeur of the ship. The theme this go 'round is Impressionist and post-Impressionist art, and the simple elegance plays out nicely. Van Gogh's bright colors and bold brush strokes; the quiet works of Monet and Renoir (also the names of the two main dining rooms); Seurat's famous pointillist style; Gauguin's Polynesia; Rousseau's jungle; Matisse's blues; Sisely's cityscapes and landscapes; and Degas' ballerinas are all found throughout the ship. To board the *Carnival Conquest* is to be immersed in art.

But the *Carnival Conquest* is a "Fun Ship," and the fun abounds on each Carnival cruise. Each evening I found a copy of *Carnival Capers*, the onboard newsletter, outside my door, providing an activity schedule for the following day's drink specials, spa specials and general information. I could participate in a music trivia contest, art auction, *Saturday Night Fever* dance class, bingo, talent show and karaoke. Add to that the dance club, casino, live music, Broadway-style shows and comedy acts and my days and nights at sea were filled.

Every meal aboard the *Carnival Conquest* seemed to be better than the one previous. Breakfasts were cooked to order. Lunches offered a variety of dishes, from cheese steak sandwiches to salads to some of the best pizza I've ever had. And the dinners...my fellow diners and I enjoyed entrées of succulent lobster tails, filet mignon, prime rib, quail, salmon, shrimp, pasta and vegetarian dishes.

For a nominal fee, I dined in The Point, the reservations-only restaurant found high atop the *Carnival Conquest*. The tables are smaller, service more personal and the food divine. I enjoyed a rich lobster bisque, warm mushroom salad, stone crab claws and a warm flourless chocolate cake to finish the meal.

Others at my table feasted on freshly prepared sushi, 14-ounce New York strip steaks, creamy garlic mashed potatoes and myriad desserts, though no one opted to take on the 24-ounce porterhouse steak.

The *Carnival Conquest* is a wonderful cruise for families; Camp Carnival is ideal for children of all ages. The little ones will enjoy super-

vised activities in Children's World, including face painting, computer games, storytelling, pizza parties and tours of the bridge. Older kids will have a blast in Action Alley, with its own video arcade, teen bar serving soft drinks, and dance club, Montmartre.

While your children are off having fun with newfound friends, sneak away to Spa Carnival, the largest spa at sea, and indulge in a seaweed massage, soothing French facial or any of the other lavish treatments. Or you may want to lace up your tennis shoes and work out in the spacious fitness center. I stopped in the ocean-view sauna to loosen up my weary muscles on the way out. If watching sports is more your style, visit Gauguin's Sports Bar, with its five flat-screen TVs.

With all that there is to do onboard, it's easy to forget that ports of call are included in the journey. One of the ports that the *Carnival Conquest* calls upon is Cozumel, a little island off the east coast of Mexico.

A delightful Mexican state, Cozumel was inhabited by the Mayans as long ago as A.D. 300 and was a significant trade center and ceremonial site. Mayan women from all over the Yucatán Peninsula made pilgrimages to Cozumel to honor Ixchel, the goddess of fertility, at a temple erected in her honor at San Gervasio; Mayan ruins can still be found throughout the island.

In the more recent past, Jacques Cousteau produced a documentary about Cozumel's incredible sea life in 1961. As you might expect, the island offers some of the best snorkeling and diving in the world. The warm crystal-blue waters beckon the novice or most experienced.

Powder-soft white-sand beaches are perfect for lazing away a day in port. For those seeking more adventure, get behind the wheel of a jeep and go on the eco-adventure where you'll visit Pointe Sur, an ecological preserve with a lighthouse built in 1904; snorkel at one of the most protected natural shallow reefs in the area; and go off-roading. Hold onto your hat!

The *Carnival Conquest* offers seven-day Western Caribbean cruises every Sunday from New Orleans, with ports of call including Ocho Rios, Grand Cayman and Cozumel. If you've got the time, take a few days before or after the cruise to enjoy warm beignets at Café du Monde, sip on a hurricane at Pat O'Brien's or simply wander the French Quarter and poke into the antique shops that line Royal Street.

Your experience aboard the *Carnival Conquest* is sure to leave quite an impression. ■

Above left: A Van Gogh-inspired sunflower hovers over the entrance of the Monet dining room. Far left: Young cruisers can break it down in their own night club, Montmartre. Left: The Artist's Lobby and soaring Atelier Atrium mesmerize guests upon arrival and make a great meeting place.



Food Facts
 During an average week on *Carnival Conquest*, guests will consume:

- 2200 pounds of prime rib
- 4500 pounds of chicken
- 2500 steaks
- 15,000 pounds of shrimp
- 1000 pounds of lobster tail
- 4800 hamburgers
- 2200 hot dogs
- 1000 pounds of pasta
- 7000 pizzas
- 22,000 eggs
- 900 gallons of milk
- 1000 pounds of coffee
- 24,500 cans of soft drinks
- 28,150 cans/bottles of beer

Courtesy of Carnival Cruise Lines