

MS Europa Review

Rating: ★★★★★+

Size Ship:.....28,437 tons
Lifestyle:..... Luxury
Cruise Line:..... Hapag-Lloyd Cruises
Former Names:..... none
Builder:..... Kvaerner Masa-Yards (Finland)
Original Cost:..... DM260 million
Entered Service:.....September 1999
Registry:.....The Bahamas
Length (ft/m):..... 651.5/198.6
Beam (ft/m):..... 78.7/24.0
Draft (ft/m):..... 20.0/6.1
Propulsion/Propellers:..... diesel–electric (21,600kW)2 azimuthing pods (13.3 MW each)
Stablizers:.....Fineantieri 2 x 11m²
Speed:.....21 Knots
Passenger Decks:..... 7
Total
Crew:.....264

Passengers (lower beds/all berths):.....408/450
Passenger Space Ratio (lower beds/all berths):.....69.6/63.1
Crew/Passenger Ratio (lower beds/all berths):.....1.5/1.7
Navigation Officers:.....German
Cabins (total):.....204
Size Range (sq. ft/m):.....355.2-914.9/33.0-85.0
Cabins (outside view):.....204
Cabins (interior/no view):.....0
Cabins (for one person):.....0
Cabins (with private balcony):.....154 (10 Penthouse Deluxe Suites and 2 Penthouse Grand Suites)
Cabins (wheelchair accessible):.....2
Cabin Current:.....110 and 220 volts
Elevators:.....4
Casino:.....No
Slot Machine:.....No
Swimming Pools (outdoors):.....1
Swimming Pools (indoors):.....1
Whirlpools:.....1
Golf Simulator:.....Yes
Fitness Center:.....Yes

Sauna/Steam Room:.....Yes/Yes
 Massage:.....Yes
 Self-service Launderette:.....Yes (2)
 Dedicated Cinema/Seats:.....Yes/60
 Library:.....Yes
 Classification Society:.....Germanischer Lloyd

OVERALL SCORE 1,857 (OUT OF A POSSIBLE 2,000 POINTS)

BERLITZ’S RATINGS:

	Possible	Achieved
Ship	500	479
Accommodation	200	189
Food	400	370
Service	400	359
Entertainment	100	90
Cruise	400	370

Accommodation: This is provided in four configurations and 12 price categories. It consists of all-outside-view suites: 2 Penthouse Grand Suites (Hapag and Lloyd) and 10 Penthouse Deluxe Suites (Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Handel, Lehar, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Strauss, and Wagner) plus 156 suites with private balcony and 36 standard suites. There are two suites (with private balcony) for the handicapped and 8 suites with interconnecting doors (good for families). Almost all suites have a private balcony (with wide teakwood deck and lighting), and come complete with see-through glass topped by a teakwood rail. However, 12 suites are among the most sought-after accommodation (six on each of two decks); these overlook the stern (they have private balconies with canvas “ceilings” for shade and privacy).

General Information: All Suites: Each suite features a sleeping area with twin beds that can convert to a queen sized bed, and two bedside tables with lamps and two drawers. There is a separate lounge area (with curtain divider) and bird's-eye maple wood cabinetry and accenting (with rounded edges). Facilities include a refrigerator/mini-bar (beer and soft drinks are supplied at no extra charge), a writing/vanity desk and sofa with large table in a separate lounge area. An illuminated walk-in closet provides ample hanging rail space, six drawers, personal safe (this can be opened with a credit card), umbrella, shoehorn, and clothes brush, European duvets are provided, and, in another cruise industry first, so is a full-color daily newspaper: *Die Welt* (*Welt am Sonntag* on Sundays), or in fact, any one of a choice of any one of about 10 different newspapers from a passenger's home region. Almost all suites have totally unobstructed views and excellent soundproofing between the suites, as well as above and below.

In what is a cruise industry first, a superb integrated color TV/computer monitor and "CIN" (Cruise Infotainment System) – 24 hours per day video and audio on-demand – is provided (at no charge), so you choose when you want to watch any one of more than 100 movies, or when you want to listen to a specific compact audio disc (there are more than 600). The infotainment system is provided by a full-sized computer located in a cabinet that also houses a refrigerator and the TV set, with a full keyboard that is located in a drawer in the adjacent vanity unit).

Restaurant seating plans, menus, ship's position and chart, deck plan, shore excursion video clips, plus other informational video clips and items are featured. The keyboard also allows you to access e-mail sent to you aboard ship and to write your own e-mails. Your own private e-mail address is provided with your tickets and other documentation (there is no charge for incoming or outgoing e-mails, only for attachments, and for internet access). A modem (data) socket is also provided should you decide to bring your own laptop computer (the ship can also provide a laptop for your use). Online connectivity is 24 hours a day, anywhere in the world.

All suites have 24-hour room service. Illuminated walk-in closets provide a generous amount of hanging and storage space even for long voyages. Each features a 100 percent air-circulation system. Western European butlers and cabin stewardesses are featured (butlers for the 12 premium suites on "Deck 10, cabin stewardesses for all other suites).

The white/gray/sea green marble-tiled bathrooms are very well designed, have light décor, and include two good size cabinets for personal toiletry items. All bathrooms feature a full bathtub (plus an integral shower and a retractable clothesline)) as well as a large, separate glass-fronted shower enclosure. Thick, 100 percent cotton bathrobes are provided, as are slippers and an array of personal toiletry amenities.

Penthouses (Deck 10): For those desiring even more exclusivity and a larger living space, Deck 10 features two Penthouse Grand suites and 10 Penthouse Deluxe suites. These feature a teakwood entrance hall, spacious living room with full-size dining table and four chairs, fully stocked drinks cabinet with refrigerator butler service, complimentary bar set-up (replenished with whatever you need), laundry and ironing service included, priority spa reservations, caviar (always available on request) hand-made chocolates, canapés, petty-fours and other niceties at no extra charge. In addition, the two Penthouse Grand suites also feature larger bathrooms, with a private sauna, extensive forward views from this prime, supremely quiet location one deck above the navigation bridge, a very large wrap-around private balcony and large flat screen televisions.

Suites for the Disabled (Deck 7): The suites for the handicapped are spacious and feature electronically operated beds with hydraulic lift, while a non-walk-in closet with drawers replaces the walk-in closet in all other suites. The bathroom has a roll-in shower area. All fittings are at the correct height, and there are several grab handles, as well as an emergency call-for-help button. Wheelchair-accessible public toilets are also provided on the main restaurant/entertainment deck.

Dining: The Europa Restaurant is a beautiful dining room that is two decks high, and can accommodate all passengers in one seating, with tables assigned for dinner only (breakfast and lunch are open seating). Passengers thus keep their favorite waiter throughout each cruise (for dinner). There are two sections, forward and aft, with the aft section being slightly higher than the forward section (gently sloping carpeted wheelchair ramping is provided). In common with most German-speaking ships, both smoking and non-smoking sections are provided. There are tables for two (quite a few), four, six or eight. For superb service, a waiter and *chef de rang* (assistant waiter) are provided, so that the waiter is *always* at the station, with the *chef de rang* acting as runner. Plated presentation of food is provided for entrees with silver service for additional vegetables, as well as tableside flambeaus. The size of portions is sensible, and never overwhelming. Just two words can be used to describe the cuisine: simply superb.

Table settings include Dibbern china, 150-gram weight Robbe & Berking silverware and Riedel wineglasses. The cuisine is very international, with many German favorites featured, as well as regional dishes from around the world. The quality of food items is extremely high. Although top-grade caviar is found on dinner menus at least once each week, caviar is always available on request (at extra cost). An extensive wine list is provided, and this includes a good selection of fine French wines, as well as an extremely fine and well-balanced selection of Austrian, German and Swiss wines.

Dining options include two intimate alternative dining spots: the Oriental Restaurant, for Euro-Asian cuisine that is both extremely creative and beautifully presented and Venezia, for Italian cuisine (and an excellent choice of olive oils and grappa). Both are adjacent to and forward of the main restaurant, and provide the setting for a more intimate dining experience, in nicely appointed surroundings. These are available by reservation, and there is no extra charge. The Oriental Restaurant features custom-made Bauscher china, while in Venezia Rosenthal china is featured.

For more casual dining, there is a Lido Café for serve-yourself breakfasts, luncheons and dinners, with both indoor and outdoor seating a long indoor/outdoor bar. Rosenthal china and themed evening dining are featured, when tableside service is provided (at breakfast and lunch, waiters will take your plates to a table for you). Constant variety is provided, and many special lunch buffets feature a number of popular themes and regional specialties.

In addition, *Europa* is also famous for its German sausages, available late each night in the Clipper Bar, and at a special Bavarian *Frueschoppen*.

Other Comments: This new ship's sleek appearance should please even the most critical of passengers, with her sweeping lines, graceful profile, and the well-known Hapag-Lloyd orange/blue funnel. Stand at the aft Lido Deck fantail and you will see (if you look down) the vast sweeping curving lines of a graceful stern – unlike the box-like rears of so many of contemporary ships.

Europa is the first Hapag-Lloyd ship to feature the “pod” propulsion system, designed to improve efficiency and handling, by *pulling*, rather than *pushing*, the ship through the water, while virtually eliminating vibration. Briefly, pods, which resemble huge outboard motors, replace internal electric propulsion motors, shaft lines, rudders and their machinery, and are compact, self-contained units. When going ahead, pod units face with the propeller forward (the ship can go astern either by rotating the pods 180 degrees or by reversing the thrust).

This is a very stable ship in open-sea conditions, and there is absolutely no vibration or noise. The ship also carries seven Zodiac landing craft for use during close up shore excursions. Port and starboard boot-washing/changing rooms are also provided. There is a jogging track for the sporting, as well as an FKK (FreiKoeper-Kultur) deck for those who enjoy nude sunbathing (complete with showers), and a wrap-around teakwood promenade deck outdoors. The deck

lounge chairs are aluminum with teak armrests, and have thick cushioned pads (the name of the ship is embroidered on them).

The swimming pool is long and rectangular in shape (it was modified from its original “bottle” shaped design in December 2000) and, while not the widest, it is certainly longer than the pools aboard most other cruise ships today; it measures 56.7 by 16.8 ft. (17.3 by 5.15 meters).

Europa is simply *the* most spacious purpose-built cruise ship in the world, and the company’s replacement for the previous (larger) *Europa*, which, during its 17-year history, amassed a fine clutch of loyal devotees.

With this new ship, Hapag-Lloyd has been able to reach and maintain the high standards, which the ship’s passengers expect and demand. The ship’s principal measurements (length and beam) are very close to that of the former *Europa*, and, yet the ship carries about 200 fewer passengers. So, the space per passenger is incredibly high, there is never a hint of a line anywhere and both restaurant and show lounge seat a full complement of passengers.

Europa is also beautifully appointed, in the contemporary style so popularly described as “minimalism” in the hotel industry. Only the finest quality soft furnishings have been chosen for her interiors, and these blend traditional with modern designs and materials in a subtle manner. *Europa* has several public rooms and hallways with extremely high ceilings, and these provide an incredible sense of space and grandeur. The colors used in the ship’s interior décor are light and provide a more contemporary “designer-speak” look than one would expect of a ship for German-speaking passengers.

As in the former *Europa*, public rooms include the Club Belvedere (where afternoon tea and intimate classical recitals are regular features), the Europa Lounge (the ship’s main show lounge), which has a U-shaped seating configuration and a proper stage, although there are several pillars. Much of the artwork was taken from the former *Europa*, so regular passengers may be familiar with much of it.

In addition, there is a Clipper Lounge/Bar (with high ceilings) and Atrium Piano Bar (set opposite the reception and shore excursion desks), with Steinway baby grand piano. When the

ship first debuted there was a casino; although this proved to be so little used that Hapag-Lloyd Cruises turned it into a multi-functional space for small cocktail parties, and meetings.

There is also a superb sidewalk Havan Bar Cigar lounge set off to one side of a winding indoor promenade. This is equipped with three large glass-fronted, fully temperature-controlled and conditioned humidor cabinets and carries an extensive range of cigars from Cuba and other countries. Cigars carried include a range of sizes (from 102mm to 232mm) of the following well-known makes: Avo Uvezian, Cohiba, Cohiba Linea 1492, Davidoff, Griffin's, Montecristo, Partagas, Romeo y Julia, and Sancho Pansa. Cigar types include Giant, Double Corona, Panatela (short, regular and long), Churchill, Lonsdale, Torpedo, Toro, Corona, Robusto, Peti Corona and Chico. The bar also serves a fine range of armagnacs, calvados and cognacs, all poured tableside, as well as Cuban beer.

Other features include a business center, an electronic golf simulator room (there are also golf driving ranges and a deck tennis court on the open deck, as well as shuffleboard), and special rooms for hobbies (arts and crafts) and for children (complete with video games). A fully stocked library (open 24 hours) has Internet access via two computers with flat-screen monitors, and per minute billing to your onboard account. There's also a small cinema/meeting/function room, a hobby room (for arts and crafts), children's playroom, an electronic golf simulator room, and two shuffleboard courts.

For personal service, an experienced concierge is available to all passengers, for any special or private arrangements both aboard and ashore.

A seven-deck high central atrium is featured, together with two glass-walled elevators (typically operated by "piccolos" on embarkation day), and a lobby on the lower level that has a Steinway grand piano and lobby bar, reception desk, concierge desk, shore excursion desk and a future cruise sales desk.

Europa excels in its fine, intellectual entertainment program, which includes a constant supply of high quality classical and contemporary music artistes, as well as a program of expert lecturers, poetry readings and so on, together with an occasional colorful production show, and local shows from destinations throughout the world.

The Lancaster Health Spa features a wide range of beauty services and treatments, including hot stone massage, and an array of other rejuvenating treatments (including full-day spa packages). Lancaster, the well-known German cosmetics firm, operates the spa and provided the staff. The facilities include a steam room and sauna (co-ed), two shower enclosures and two foot-washing stations, relaxation room and two changing/dressing rooms. There is also a separate gymnasium (enlarged and relocated during a modification in 2000) and a beauty salon. A special Japanese Spa is featured (this includes a cream body massage, gentle steam room and a two-tatami mat relaxation area) which is booked individually for a special 90-minute treatment that will have you floating on air when you leave.

Wheelchair passengers should note that a special ramp is provided from the swimming pool/outdoors deck down to where the lifeboats are located. When the ship was delivered there were several small lips at door thresholds (particularly at fire zone doors) throughout the ship. Some of these have now been ramped or replaced with airtight-sealing rubber strips, so that wheelchair access is now good throughout. When this latest evaluation and rating were completed, only one toilet in the public areas (outdoors on Lido Deck 8) was wheelchair—accessible, although others may be modified in the future.

This ship will appeal to all those who desire to be aboard what is arguably the most luxurious and finest of all the new (small) cruise ships today. For the German-speaking market, little else comes close. Combined with a mostly young, enthusiastic and well-trained crew, whose aim is to serve and please passengers in the most sumptuous manner and in the fine surroundings, the tradition of luxury cruising, in a contemporary setting, is carried to the highest expression. Although a children's' playroom is provided, *Europa* really is a ship for adults to cruise in quiet, refined setting that mixes formality and informality well.

You may ask why the rating for this ship is so high. Well, it's all in the little details and the extra attention to personal comfort and service and this line excels. For example, if you relax at the swimming pool in a hot climate, the deck steward will not only set your deck lounge chair and cover the mattress pad with a towel, he will also serve you drinks, give you a cold towel, and spray you with Evian water to keep you cool while you take the sun. Naturally, only real glasses are used at the swimming pool and on the open decks – no plastic glasses would ever be considered, thank goodness. Flowers, pot pourri and cloth towels (paper towels are not permissible at this rating level) are provided in all public restrooms. Fresh flowers are everywhere. Each passenger has his or her own email address (all emails are free). The insuite infotainment system is simply the best. Details, details, details – that's what *Europa* is all about, and what the ship's many repeat passengers expect. The prices for drinks and wines are also very reasonable.

In addition, excellent port information is provided (both in written form and via the television infotainment system), as are lots of extra touches not found aboard most other cruise ships today. All port taxes and gratuities are also included, although further tipping is not prohibited. The currency on board is the euro. A souvenir logbook of every cruise is provided for each passenger at the end of each cruise. When taking all things into account – the unhurried lifestyle of single seating dining, plenty of suites with private balconies, a fine array of classical music artists and lectures, absolutely no vibration anywhere, and the outstanding cuisine and attentive, friendly, very attentive personal service from a staff dedicated to working aboard the world's finest cruise ship – it all adds up to the very best luxurious cruise ship and cruise experience available today (unless you have your own private motor yacht).

Having said that, there *are* ships with larger penthouse suites, balconies show lounges, health spas and other appointments but aboard *Europa*, everything is in scale, and in relation to the requirements of its passengers. It's not just the ship itself and its facilities and appointments that contribute to the ship's high rating, though – it's also in the extensive array of details and personal attention from its fine, dedicated crew. Believe me when I say that, at present, while there are plenty of imitators, there are no equals.

German-speaking passengers might be inclined to compare *Europa* (Hapag-Lloyd Cruises) with *Deutschland* (Peter Deilmann Cruises). However, some comparisons may be in order; *Europa* has 168 balcony suites, *Deutschland* has only two. *Europa*'s suites measure 355-915 sq. ft. (33-85 sq. meters); those aboard *Deutschland*'s measure approximately 161-366 sq. ft. (15-34 sq. meters). *Europa*'s decor is light and contemporary, and the ship has an open feeling, with high ceilings; *Deutschland*'s décor is dark and heavy (but in a beautiful, well-stated 1920's style).

Food, creativity, variety and presentation, and service aboard *Europa* are far superior to *Deutschland*. Vibration is non-existent aboard *Europa*, while it is still quite evident aboard *Deutschland*, according to passengers.

In 2003, *Europa* will operate a 154 day cruise from Malaga to Monte Carlo commencing November 5, 2003 and ending April 8, 2004.

Weak Points: There are really very few weak points, although perhaps an indoor swimming pool (which was located adjacent to the health spa) may be missed by the many regular passengers who cruised aboard the former *Europa*. The balcony partitions are part-partitions,

but would be more private if they were of the full (floor-to-ceiling) type – although this rarely presents a problem for the ship's passengers