



OASIS OF THE SEAS

This Central Park of the seas, says **Carol Gardner**, is a floating garden of exotic tropical plants.



The ship's Central Park includes dozens of specimen trees, climbing vines, cascading green wall plants, and understory flora. Central Park is a magical oasis at night. The atrium overlooks a foliage-covered canopy.

IMAGINE CRUISING THE CARIBBEAN while luxuriating in a tropical garden the size of a football field. That's what you get when you book passage on Royal Caribbean's newest cruise ship — Oasis of the Seas. The world's largest cruise ship, the Oasis can carry 5,400 passengers in 2,700 staterooms and has 16 decks and a multitude of restaurants, including a seafood shack, a pizzeria, a steak house, an Italian trattoria and a wine and tapas bar. Imagine a chic small town full of delightful shops and restaurants, built around a garden.

The garden — called Central Park — is 19 metres (62 feet) wide and 100 metres (328 feet) long and is located right in the heart of the ship, on the eighth deck. By installing it there, the designers managed to shield the garden from much of the wind and salt that could cause serious problems. Plants are set in over 2,000 aluminum modules with small drainage holes and are filled with a soilless mix. Excess water drips into a holding tank beneath and is recycled. The aluminum modules fit together like puzzle pieces and can be removed to install or replace plants. The drip-line — a low-volume irrigation system — is controlled by computer and programmed to give each plant the exact amount of water it requires. The horticulturist, who is also a ship's officer, can make any necessary changes to the programming. Four full-time gardeners maintain the garden (imagine the lineup for that job!) and conduct tours.

The construction of the garden was just the first part of the challenge. After the structural features were put in place, Ambius Landscape Interiors was hired to plant the live material — the more than 12,000 trees, shrubs and flowers that grow in the garden. The research required was enormous. Senior Project Manager Denise Eichmann had to find plants that were unlikely to transport pests and diseases and then conduct trials to ensure that the plants

could deal with salt and wind. Just like a landlocked garden, Central Park has both sun and shade areas. Accent plants are rotated through the garden seasonally and replacements are kept on board so that there are never any bare spots.

Although the garden's location provides a good deal of protection from the elements, planners were surprised by a downdraft coming from a glass wall at the back of the ship. However, that turned out to be a good thing; though not strong enough to harm the plants, the downdraft encourages the many bamboos to do a slow and seductive dance on a breezy tropical night.

The garden will become more dramatic as it matures. Some of the trees, including black olive (*Bucida buceras*) and Cuban laurel (*Ficus microcarpa*), are expected to be two-and-a-half decks tall in time. Bougainvillea, star jasmine, and black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) clamber up garden structures and a green wall contains mandevilla, clerodendrum and trumpet vine among its denizens. Calla lilies, ginger and giant elephant ears add more exotica to the already magical mix.

For information about Oasis of the Seas sailings from Florida to Caribbean locations, check www.oasisoftheseas.com.

Carol Gardner is an award-winning garden writer, TBG volunteer extraordinaire and member of the Tellis committee.

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Botanical Gardens and Robbie Burns country for a fortnight (2 weeks) of Scottish hospitality. \$3,989.99 per person double occupancy. Daily itinerary and booking forms on our website.

Floriade, April 2012 (thinking ahead) Marjorie will again host our Holland Floriade Exhibition Tour which occurs every 10 years. We will explore Amsterdam area and Maastricht, continue to Brussels and Bruges (Venice of the North). Tour concludes with 4 days in the peaceful Garden of England, Kent. Itinerary on our website. Kindly confirm your interest in these tours by contacting Lorna at 905-683-2838 e-mail lorna@gardenersworldtours.com. Visit our website www.gardenersworldtours.com.

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