

## Best Cruise Ship Food

Celebrity chef-crafted menus, dramatic dining rooms, and exotic ingredients: cruise-ship dining is seeing a wave of improvements.

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 By Fran Golden

The carefully sauced quail with truffle stuffing is a savory delight. The wait staff is both friendly and unobtrusive. And the contemporary restaurant with water views features a striking two-story glass wine tower. Where is this fine culinary experience? Not on land, but at sea, in the main dining rooms on the new Celebrity *Solstice* and Celebrity *Equinox* ships.

Cruise-ship cuisine has come of age, with spectacular new dining rooms, ultra-creative menus, specialty restaurants, and even creations from some of the world's top chefs.

So forget the cruise-ship buffet. Foodies at sea can now enjoy the innovations of Charlie Palmer of **New York City's** acclaimed **Aureole** restaurant on the Yachts of Seabourn, including tasting menus. And on Crystal Cruises' *Serenity* and *Symphony*, passengers can experience the sushi extravaganzas of famed chef Nobuyuki "Nobu" Matsuhisa without the hassle of waiting weeks for reservations at his landside restaurants (and passengers in Penthouse suites can even order Nobu from room service).

Palmer, who has worked with Seabourn for six years, says shipboard dining has advanced to the point where he can now prepare anything on a Seabourn ship that he can on land. "And maybe more," he adds. At his urging, the line added a larger-than-normal galley space, ordered equipment designed to Palmer's specifications, and introduced a dedicated small-plate tastings restaurant on its newly debuted 450-passenger Seabourn *Odyssey*.

The new facilities and new attitude have helped Palmer attract talented young chefs to work shipboard, further enhancing the offerings. Cruise lines like Seabourn, he says, now understand they can remain competitive by focusing creatively on cuisine.

Jacques Van Staden, vice president of food and beverage operations for Celebrity, agrees the cruise industry can toot its horn much more loudly when it comes to food these days. On the new *Solstice* and *Equinox*, options encompass not only dramatic main dining rooms but specialty restaurants serving up Italian grill, classic Continental, Asian fusion, and even "clean cuisine" (healthy gourmet).

On shipboard menus, "elements of surprise" are in, though you can still get meat and potatoes if you want to, says Van Staden. Preparing dishes to order is more common, too, though, he adds, it's not an easy task when you're talking 1,000 guests per seating. Old-style hotel catering is out.

That cruise ships have taken a giant leap forward in wooing gourmet palates is evident even on Carnival ships, known for raucous fun but now offering pleasantly upscale steak houses featuring aged beef, fresh seafood, and music for dancing.

But perhaps the new status of shipboard cuisine is best exemplified by the fact that master chef Jacques Pepin (whose several PBS TV shows include *Julia* and *Jacques Cooking at Home* with Julia Child), at age 73, is opening his first namesake restaurant ever next year, a French bistro, at sea, on Oceania's newest ship *Marina*. And the timing couldn't be more perfect—cruise-ship passengers everywhere are saying "bon appétit."



Courtesy of Celebrity

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