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Foodies Enjoy Top Vacation Experiences on Culinary Cruises (Video)

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One 1970s' joke was that cruisers spent their vacation "pigging out" on the high seas and sauntered off the ship a week later and 20 pounds heavier. Today's travelers, though, are more enticed by quality, not quantity. That said, you have a huge range of options.

For all you "foodies" out there, the ocean lines have specialty dining experiences, healthy spa cuisine, cooking classes, culinary demonstrations, celebrity chefs and voyages themed around food. The choices are almost endless, so here's just a small sampling of culinary options afloat.

Celebrity Chefs' Restaurants at Sea



You might already love celebrity Master Chef Nobu Matsuhisa's trendy restaurants in New York, London or Tokyo. Do you know about Nobu's Silk Road and The Sushi Bar restaurants on **Crystal Cruises**? You can order Nobu-style sushi and sashimi as well as Japanese fusion dishes. Chefs preparing the on board cuisine have personally trained with Nobu, who sails a few

times a year to ensure quality. This experience is complimentary.

Earlier this year, **Norwegian Cruise Line** welcomed the new Ocean Blue by Geoffrey Zakarian restaurant on Norwegian Breakaway. Iron Chef Zakarian plans to personally interact with the restaurant's diners on the ship's November 3 and December 1 sailings.

Chef Michael Schwartz, a James Beard award winner, is the culinary star creating fine-dining menus for 150 Central Park on **Royal Caribbean International's** Oasis of the Seas and Allure of the Seas. Fielding a farm-to-table philosophy, Chef Schwartz not only designs the menus, but also sails at times to interact with diners and host demonstrations.

Some celebrity chef experiences are just plain fun. **Carnival Cruise Lines** guests head for the complimentary Guy's Burger Joint, a creation of Guy Fieri, a well-known TV personality and chef. At Guy's fixing station, guests top their customized burger with caramelized onions, jalapeno peppers, fresh bacon, fresh veggies and savory mushrooms.

Culinary Affiliations

Foodies will discover the benefits of culinary partnerships. **Silversea Cruises** has partnered with Relais & Chateaux, so guests dining at on board restaurants may order certain dishes from Relais & Chateaux's fine hotels and shore side gourmet restaurants, as well as new creations from the organization's renowned chefs.

Similarly, Seabourn Cruise Line is a member of Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, a gastronomic society devoted to the art of fine dining. And **Oceania Cruises** taps into the expertise of Master Chef Jacques Pépin, as its executive culinary consultant.

Taking a bit different approach is Holland America Line. It has appointed a team of top chefs to guide all aspects of the culinary experience at sea. Signature recipes from its Culinary Council are incorporated into all 15 Holland America ships' dining venues. Council members are HAL's Master Chef Rudi Sodamin and international chefs Jonnie Boer, David Burke, Jacques Torres, Charlie Trotter and Elizabeth Falkner.

Food-Themed Voyages

Culinary enthusiasts will likely savor the industry's foodie-themed voyages. Windstar Cruises has an eight-day "Culinary and Wine Delights of Spain" onboard Wind Surf, departing April 19. It's a partnership between Windstar and SAVEUR, an epicurean brand for culinary travel content. The ship calls at Cádiz, Malaga, Almeria, Cartagena, Valencia, Seville and Barcelona.

Michelin-starred chefs and sommeliers will sail onboard Compagnie du Ponant's Le Boreal on a culinary themed cruise from Lisbon, Portugal, to Bordeaux, France, on May 4. Expect Helene Darroze, Jean Sulpice, Nicolas Magie, Philippe Faure-Brac and Olivier Dauga; tastings and culinary workshops; and foodie-friendly calls at Porto and Viana do Castelo, Portugal; Vigo, La Coruna and Bilbao, Spain; and Le Verdon, France.

Silversea offers a variety of culinary-themed cruises including a Far East voyage on Silver Shadow from Hong Kong to Tokyo, departing November 25. Crystal's 2014 wine-and-food themed cruises sail with expert chefs, wine experts and mixologists and offer culinary classes, demonstrations and tastings. Among the voyages are Hong Kong to Beijing on April 19 and Southampton to Boston on November 5.

A 14-night, "Food and Wine Voyage" from Southampton to Lisbon on Azamara Journey departs August 20.

Azamara Club Cruises guests explore the Loire Valley and Bordeaux, France; Bilbao, Spain; and Porto, Portugal. Guests will sip Sancerre and Pouilly-Fume while tasting shellfish, mussels and cheeses. They'll visit Arcachon for fresh oysters, Bayonne for fine chocolates and San Sebastian for tapas.

Culinary Centers and Cooking Schools

Oceania's Marina and Riviera have the industry's largest, multi-station Bon Appétit Culinary Centers; they've provided in partnership with the culinary magazine. Expert master chefs provide "hands-on" cooking lessons in a professional kitchen atmosphere. Cruisers learn at 12 individual cooking stations with two guests using each station. All classes cost \$69 each.

During **Oceania's "Passion for Pasta" culinary class**, clients will make pasta and fresh sauces from start to finish. Those taking the "Love of Lemons" class will learn to create limoncello at home, master how to preserve fresh lemons and make a semolina almond cake soaked in limoncello.

Holland America also has a dedicated Culinary Arts Center, consisting of a professional demonstration kitchen on stage; guests sit in theater seating to watch. Expect both free demonstrations and fee-based culinary classes.

Culinary trainer David Bilsland, a former instructor at London's Le Cordon Bleu culinary school, is hosting **Silversea's "Relais & Châteaux L'École des Chefs" interactive cooking school** this year. The complimentary program is being offered on Silver Wind's November 26 voyage from Malaga, Spain, to Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain, and December 3 cruise from Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain, to Cape Town, South Africa.

Workshops cover everything from basic knife skills to kitchen terminology, sauces and baking. Also on tap are cooking lessons, Q&A sessions, “Lunch and Learn” events; cooking competitions and “Take It Home” recipes.

Reality Show-Style Contests

Part of the **“Taste” experiences offered by Celebrity Cruises** within its Celebrity Life Activities, the “Star Chefs Cooking Competition” is a fun, engaging and complimentary onboard program. Using two cooking stations, two chefs from the ship engage in 15 minutes of friendly competition.

Two willing guests don aprons and chef’s hats to assist the chefs; those helpers have two minutes to quickly choose ingredients from the fresh foods displayed. The teams prepare their best, most creative dishes. Three guest judges chosen from the audience award “best chef” honors based on presentation, originality and taste.

Costa Cruises’ Costa NeoRomantica is now sailing on its 122-day world cruise; the voyage—with many upcoming segments of that cruise yet to sail—will end in Savona, Italy, on January 21. Chefs will perform cooking demonstrations and Costa will launch its first-ever cooking competitions between two guests. The ship’s chefs will provide support and judge the competitions.

Special Dinners in the Main Dining Room

For \$75 per person, Carnival’s guests can book “Chef’s Table,” a VIP experience with cocktails and hors d’oeuvres for a group of 12. It includes a galley tour and multi-course dinner of dishes not found on the dining room menu. The dinner is hosted by one of the line’s master chefs.

Princess Cruises offers a Chef’s Table experience hosted by the ship’s executive chef. What’s unusual? Up to 10 guests go into the galley during the height of the busy dinner preparation period. They chat and tour with the executive chef, enjoy champagne and hors d’oeuvres, and then enjoy a multi-course tasting dinner paired with selected wines in the dining room. They also receive a cookbook and photo. The cost is \$95 per person, or, alternatively, \$115 on Royal Princess as guests dine in the Chef’s Table Lumiere, a lovely private space within the main dining room.

Foreign sourcing of guests has positively impacted menus for foodies with exotic taste buds. While SeaDream Yacht Club is in Asia this winter, it will serve a “Signature Japanese Menu” for up to 28 guests; expect tofu with crab soup, sashimi, duck breast in rice paper and green tea ice cream. Regular menus will

also incorporate such specialties as Singapore beef stir-fry, Nasi Goreng, Aloo Tiki and Malaysian lobster ragout.

Specialty Dining Experiences

Most upscale oceangoing lines including **Silversea**, Crystal, **Regent Seven Seas Cruises**, Seabourn, **Oceania** and Azamara, among others, have one-of-a-kind culinary or wine experiences, often in intimate, exceedingly elegant or trendy alternative restaurants.

Regent celebrates the art of French cuisine at Signatures on two of its ships. One savory entree is rack of lamb with Morel mushrooms and melted potato garnishes. Check out TravelAgentCentral.com for more on upscale dining at sea. Within the contemporary and premium segments, nearly all lines now boast alternative dining options for guests; some are fee-based, some complimentary. Norwegian Cruise Line introduced Freestyle Dining at multiple alternative venues during an era when cruise ships had mostly fixed seatings for dinner. So, not surprisingly, it's taken the concept to the stratosphere with everything from an Argentinian churrascaria to a French Bistro, steakhouse, Italian eatery or an Asian fusion restaurant.

For \$25 per person, diners at Norwegian's popular Teppanyaki restaurant are entertained by flying shrimp, onion volcanoes and twirling knives as they sit around a shared table with a large steel grill. With plenty of sizzle and steam, a Japanese chef slices, chops and grills steak, seafood and chicken.

Holland America's Pinnacle Grill features choice, sustainably raised beef from Washington State's Double R Ranch as well as premium seafood and wines. Once per cruise, though, the restaurant kicks it up another notch with "An Evening at Le Cirque," priced at \$39 per person. Guests savor signature Le Cirque dishes such as lobster salad and crème brûlée, as well as Feudi del Pisciotto wines.

Some foodies prefer light, healthy fare. Celebrity's AquaSpa Café offers SPE Certified menu items. SPE derives from the Latin, sanitas per escam or "health through food." Celebrity's partnership with SPE Certified has also resulted in the introduction of more than 60 SPE dishes in the line's main restaurants; dishes range from butternut squash and cranberry juice to roasted pork loin with smoky red cabbage.

Brunch, anyone? Head for your private balcony and order Princess Cruises' "Balcony Brunch," comprised of room-service-delivered pastries, quiche, smoked salmon, juice, coffee and other yummy fare that's served with a half bottle of champagne. Costing \$32, it's a robust meal, and the scenery, such as when the ship is sailing within Alaska's Tracy Arm, is an added bonus.

For a more upscale brunch outing, MSC Cruises serves up a Galaxy Experience “Luxury Brunch” on MSC Divina; foodies enjoy panoramic views as they sip champagne and dine on oysters, jamon serrano, foie gras and a selection of hot dishes. The cost is \$28 per person.

One unique twist for those wanting both high-end accommodations and crème-de-la-crème dining is the Cunard Line “Grills” experience. It began in 1936 on the original Queen Mary, when guests paid extra to dine and dance in the sophisticated Verandah Grills. In the early 1970s, the fee was dropped and those now staying in Cunard’s Queens Grill or Princess Grill suites dine in intimate, luxurious style in their own separate “Grills” restaurants.

Cruise lines are eager to keep potential clients posted about culinary options on social media and with blogs. Regent Seven Seas Cruises’ “Luxury Goes Exploring Blog” features Mara Papatheodorou, former Bon Appétit editor, as one contributor. She blogs about culinary history, tips for port dining, and how to shop for ingredients and regional specialties.

For “foodies,” life at sea definitely isn’t what it used to be. Yes, there’s still an abundance of food, but today’s creative, diverse choices are enriching, engaging and even entertaining. So next time, instead of sending clients off on their cruise with a “Bon voyage!”, tell them “Bon appétit!”

<http://www.examiner.com/article/foodies-enjoy-top-vacation-experiences-on-culinary-cruises>