

Princess Cruises moves to improve dining options

Buffet features high quality selections

By STEVE SLOSAREK
Special to the Journal Sentinel

The backbone of any major cruise line's dining offerings is the buffet court. This area offers the telltale sign of what the ship really thinks of its food service.

It's easy to pool major resources into moneymaking specialty dining venues, which cater to a select group that often will pay for the privilege. It's not as easy to consistently offer high-quality selections in the main dining room. It's much more difficult to provide superb choices around the clock at the buffet.

"I do think that the premium cruise lines are addressing much more attention to the buffets and they are being well received by passengers," said Linda Allen, a nationally recognized master cruise counselor based in Arkansas.

That is perhaps no more true than on Princess Cruises' newest ships, which are on the verge of dethroning competitors when it comes to best onboard cuisine.

The cruise line's Horizon Court buffet might be its crowning achievement. Morning, noon or night, the buffet sizzles.

With the recent debuts of sister ships Royal Princess and Regal Princess, the cruise line has upped the ante with delicacies all over each ship.

"These two new Princess ships definitely have improved their buffet dining areas," said Brenda Tolson, cruise manager and travel adviser for The Travel Agent in Carmel, Ind. "Every aspect is better."

A new action-station layout at the Horizon Court features food "venues" such as a taqueria, rotisserie, sandwich shop and Japanese hibachi grill. These user-friendly stations are reminiscent of the high-end buffets found in Las Vegas.

"The presentation of the food and variety of stations are wonderful," said Tolson. "Both the selection and quality of food are better."

The variety and quality of food in the Horizon Court impressed, and there is something comforting about watching chefs create food in front of you, an uncommon sight at buffets on some cruise ships.

For lunch, we couldn't resist the taqueria's guacamole and refried black beans. Other lunch highlights included lasagna, pita pocket chipped beef and cheese, vol-au-vent and a multitude of ethnic selections.



PRINCESS CRUISES

The Horizon Court buffet on Princess Cruises' Princess Royal features user-friendly stations.

tions.

At dinner, the buffet morphs into the Horizon Bistro with themed dining that includes a Brazilian-style churascaria, British pub and Argentine gaucho.

Breakfast proved far from ordinary with breakfast burritos, quiches and crisp bacon.

The pastry shop within Horizon Court is the largest of its kind at sea. An array of choices includes cookies, Oreo-crusted mud pie with two chocolate layers, cakes and tarts. At breakfast, this area included chocolate or caramel sauces to spread on waffles and pancakes, croissants and more.

The Horizon Court options on day seven were fresh and new, deterring the inevitable same-ol'-same-ol' blahs that tend to occur at the buffet during long cruises.

The Royal Princess and Regal Princess also shake loose from another negative buffet connotation: congestion. Even though these

ships are by far the largest in the Princess fleet at a capacity of 3,600 passengers each, the Horizon Court never seemed crowded. The Horizon seats 900 indoors and 350 outdoors, double the amount found on Princess' newest ships before the incarnations of the Royal and Regal.

"The stations help the traffic flow much better and do not create long lines like other buffets," Tolson said. "The larger ship allows the buffet to have more space and thus the room to have these various options with food stations."

Observant servers present drink and tabletop service in the Horizon, which is broken into a contemporary area and Parisian-cafe-like section. The former includes tablecloths, the latter place mats and a smattering of counter-height bistro-style tables.

"My returning passengers are very well pleased with the Royal," said Allen, who was recognized by Conde Nast Traveler last year as among the top two U.S. travel agents who specialize in larger cruise ships.

The Horizon also offers nominal-fine dining where the buffet complex turns into either the Crab Shack or Fondues. The Crab Shack is a full-tilt experience — complete with mallets, buckets and bibs — where diners revel in a Bayou-style crawfish boil, mixed steamer pot filled with seafood delicacies, or spiced peel-and-eat shrimp. Fondues include a German cheddar fondue infused with beer as well as Swiss and French cheese options.

These pop-up restaurants are the oceanic equivalent of food trucks on land.

"Normally, I would tell people to eat in the regular main dining rooms instead of the buffets unless there is no other choice," Tolson said. "This new layout and the offerings on the two newer and larger Princess ships have changed my opinion about the buffet dining experience."

The new rollouts of the Royal and Regal prove that Princess Cruises is hungry to improve. And behind that hunger is great food.

Embark on a Journey of Discovery



You Are Invited.

Don't just picture it. Experience it.

Viking River Cruises offers inspiring destinations, thoughtful itineraries, immersive cultural explorations, state-of-the-art ships, fine cuisine, excellent service and remarkable value — thoughtfully designed with personal attention to every detail. Comfortable and convenient, Viking offers the opportunity to go beyond the cities and see quaint riverside towns, breathtaking landscapes and wide-open skies. This exclusive event will give you insight and perspective on river cruising, the fastest-growing segment in the travel industry, and your Travel Leaders agent will be happy to help you get started planning your 2016 Viking River Cruises journey.

RSVP today to confirm your seat at one of these exclusive events:

Wednesday, June 3 at 6:00 pm
Bullwinkle's
20290 W. Bluemound Rd
Brookfield
RSVP: 262-567-6658

Thursday, June 4 at 1:00 pm
Travel Leaders
W62 N244 Washington Ave
Cedarburg
RSVP: 262.375.1900

Thursday, June 4 at 5:30 pm
Travel Leaders
1045 Pennsylvania Ave
Sheboygan
RSVP: 800.444.2963

Thursday, June 4 at 6:00 pm
Nitty Gritty
315 E. Linnerud Dr
Sun Prairie
RSVP: 608.837.7500



TRAVEL LEADERS®
travel better

MAGGIANO'S
LITTLE ITALY
FAMILY
KITE FESTIVAL

Presented by
Renewal
by Andersen
WINDOW REPLACEMENT
and
CEDAR CREST
ICE CREAM

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, May 23rd & 24th
Veterans Park Lakefront - 10am until 5pm

FREE OPEN to all Adults & Children
SPECTACULAR Fest Kick GRAND LAUNCH AT NOON

- World Class Stunt Kite demo by Chicago Fire & Windjammers
- World Class Quad Line demo by Zach Gordon
- Kite Flying Lessons
- Kite photography by Dan Brinnahl
- Kids Mad Dash
- Free Pocket Guide to Kite Flying
- All New MEGA Octopus Kites
- Candy Drop by Everdry Waterproofing

Kites available for purchase daily at Gift of Wings in Veterans Park and our Franklin store at Hwy. 100 & 36 and in Historic Greendale Village

Johnsonville Brats, Red Hot Chicago Hot Dogs, Palermos Pizza
Angus Burgers along with Beverages and a Lot More...

THANKS to the
ParkScape
Our Host Hotel



MILWAUKEE COUNTY PARKS
www.giftofwings.com
277-9121 273-5483
Sponsored by Gift of Wings, Kite Society of WI & IL, Treeding Radio 93.3
FM 102.1 Sounds Different, 100.3 FM / 1290 AM the Party, Milwaukee County Parks