

Anchors A-whey

Cruise lines have upped their offerings for cheese-hungry passengers

WRITTEN BY JUDY COLBERT

If your ideal getaway includes a cheese spree, then a cruise vacation may be just the thing to float your proverbial boat. Modern cruise ships are often destined for dairy lands around the world. At Viking River Cruises, marketing executive Julie Rosoff says cheese lovers “will be in heaven aboard ships that sail through such ‘cheese’ countries as Holland and France. Passengers can find cheese at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with each dinner offering a cheese course option that often includes one or two local cheeses and one classic cheese. The ten-day ‘Tulips and Windmills’ cruise includes the famous Gouda region, while a France itinerary will feature Comté and Roquefort.” The Holland and France itineraries also offer cheese-tasting experiences on board with a local artisan cheesemaker. And there are other cheese delights on the menu, says Rosoff. “Two of our most-requested recipes from passengers are for our Dutch cheese soup and French gougères.” She also notes another telling sign of the (cheese) times: last year every Viking River Cruises chef completed a course in cheese tasting taught by an expert, so they can better choose products and create pairings.

On French Country Waterways cruises, passengers can find themselves gliding past the cows, sheep, and goats whose milk has made the cheeses being served at dinner. Each boat usually has a selection of three dozen regional cheeses. The assortment varies by destination and the pref-

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ferences of the chef and captain. During mealtimes, servers provide an explanation about the origin and the type of each cheese, as well as local cheese lore.

When cruising aboard a Tauck tour, especially the Rhône river cruise on the MS *Swiss Emerald*, guests can expect stellar cheeses locally sourced. Cheese is an alternative to every dessert in the main restaurant and at the buffet during onboard lunches. Likewise, at Avalon Waterways,

a cheese plate is available for guests to order off the menu, with a selection available for breakfast, lunch buffet, and dinner. Generally, says managing director Patrick Clark, the selections are from a region on the itinerary.

Guided tastings by cheese celebs are also part of the "entertainment" aboard various cruise lines. Max McCalman, dean of curriculum at Artisanal in New York City, cheese writer, and master fromager, has been a presenter on several cruises traveling through western Europe and the Mediterranean. "On a ten-day cruise," he explains, "I generally do three one-hour sessions about cheese with tastings and pairings, sometimes along with a winemaker. I try to make these presentations less academic than the ones I do at Artisanal. These folks are on vacation, after all." McCalman always handpicks the cheeses to be featured on board, sometimes shopping in the ship's ports of call to look for local cheeses to include. "I'll take a short excursion to a farm or at least a cheese shop to see what's available

from the region." Occasionally, he adds, passengers want to tag along. "When I was in France on a cruise, some of the passengers wanted to see how to shop at a French cheese market. It wasn't part of the itinerary, but I took them along with me."

Aboard the two mega-yachts of the SeaDream Yacht Club line, guests can choose to go shopping with the chef in several ports where cheese is often a feature of the local markets.

SeaDream passengers are encouraged to buy cheeses in port and bring them on the ship. Avalon Waterways, Tauck, and Cunard also allow passengers to bring their cheese booty aboard.

But other cruise lines have a stricter policy for purchased food. Janet Diaz, a representative of the Royal Caribbean ships, states unequivocally, "No food, including cheeses, can be brought on board by any guests."

Visiting cheese shops along the watery way, it's tempting to take some home. According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency, you can bring in solid cheese (hard or semisoft) that does not contain meat. Examples of what's permissible. However, cheese with liquid (cottage or ricotta cheese) or brine may be confiscated. Any cheese that pours like heavy cream is not admissible. Check the website help.cbp.gov for details. And bon voyage *avec fromage!* **c**

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