

## THE PERFECT GUIDE TO DINING ON CRUISE SHIPS



Cruises are seen by you as endless, floating feasts with molten chocolate cake and lobster tails. Onboard dining options are typically pictured as a crowded, at-sea Golden Corral location or perhaps a grand banquet hall straight out of the Titanic movie.

It's obvious that you haven't taken a cruise in a while.

It is true that meals can dominate a day on a cruise ship. Can you imagine in three days being a guest on the ship, you start to experience the morning bloated from the previous night and also hungry for breakfast.

My personal resolution to stick to only eating eggs for morning, salads for lunch, and skipping dessert at dinner which is usually fails because you can't resist the dessert tables with tons of sugar, the never-ending supply of pizza, and the meals with lots of cheese.

However, a modern cruise ship is more like your neighbourhood downtown, with a variety of restaurants and cuisines to choose from. You can find everything from fast food burgers to fancy molecular gastronomy delicacies, as well as vegetarian or healthy options. Meals can be brief or time-consuming, formal or informal.

For a first-time cruiser, the options can be too much to handle, as can the complicated restrictions regarding who can eat when and where, and while wearing what. Even if you don't live for food, you should read through this guide on dining and eating aboard cruise ships to gain a sense of the local cuisine before your next voyage.

## **A CRUISE INCLUDES FOOD, RIGHT?**

On a cruise, you are not required to pay for food, but you may like to.

There are two types of restaurants on board a cruise ship, free venues and speciality restaurants that charge an additional fee, unless you're traveling on an all-inclusive luxury cruise ship.

The main dining room or rooms, which are enormous banquet-style halls that offer sit-down meals from an extensive menu, are often the included dining venues. On certain ships, you will be assigned to a specific main dining room; on other ships, like the fleet of Victoria Cruises Line, you will have a choice of two main dining rooms from which to pick each evening. Smaller boats might just have one major dining area.



The buffet, which is often found close to the pool, is the other regular featured choice. The buffet will contain a variety of stations with different themes (such as a salad bar, carvery, deli, pasta station, dessert bar, etc.) and will either be self-service or have staff on hand to portion out food for you from big serving dishes. Once your plate is full, you find your own table, which may be inside or occasionally outside. Up until the point of fullness, you can return for more.

Depending on the ship and cruise line, there are other meals that are included. Many have grills around the pools that serve burgers and hot dogs. Some will have informal cafes and free food counters or restaurants serving pizza, Mexican, Asian, fried chicken, and barbecue.

## WHAT DOES SPECIALTY DINING INCLUDE ON A CRUISE?

The term "specialty dining" used in the cruise industry to describe aboard eateries that require a fee. Some of them have a set cover charge, while others charge a la carte prices like you would find in most land-based restaurants.



There is a vast range of cuisines and styles available at these extra-cost cruise ship eateries. A group meal at a teppanyaki grill, a family-style Italian trattoria, or a French bistro would be ideal for a date night. Although they can have American, Brazilian, or Italian origins, steakhouses are quite widespread. Popular dining options include lobster shack-style and more expansive seafood establishments, as well as sushi and Asian fusion eateries.

If you're a serious food enthusiast, seek for small-group Chef's Table dining experiences where you can have a fine dinner personally prepared by one of the onboard chefs and matched with wine.

Reservations are recommended for speciality restaurants, while walk-ins are welcome if there are still tables available. Try to reserve online reservations for your preferred restaurants before setting sail; if you are unable to do so, make it a top priority to schedule reservations as soon as you can on the first day on board.

Special restaurants on some cruise lines are dedicated for VIP passengers, who are typically a mix of those staying in the best suites and the cruise's most frequent travellers. Even if the cost of the cruise includes these meal options, you might need to make reservations for dinner.

## WHAT DOES ON A CRUISE MEAN BY OPEN DINING VERSUS SET SEATING?

You will often be given the option to select early seating, late sitting, flexible seating, or anytime dining when booking a big-ship cruise. What does this indicate?

Victoria Cruises Line manage the flow of guests in and out of their main dining rooms by assigning cruisers to specific dining rooms and times.



When choosing set-seating dining, guests can pick between a late dinner (between 7:30 and 8:30 p.m.) or an early dinner (often at 5:30 or 6 p.m.). They will always have the same waiters and a specific table assigned to them (no guarantees, unless they come on time). One family of four may sit at a table, or a group of unrelated singles, couples, and groups may be seated at a 10-person table. It can be challenging to locate desirable two-tops.

Victoria Cruises Line designate a certain number of times for a flexible dining choice because not everyone wants to eat at the same time and with the same people every night. These could also be referred to as "Anytime Dining" or "My Time Dining." Guests who select this option are free to show up for dinner at any time during the specified open hours (usually 5:30 to 9 p.m.).

The negative aspect is that you might need to wait for a table and that you might not be able to book the type of table you want at the time you desire. You might get a two-top one night and then have to wait an hour for a seat or eat at a group table the next. On the other hand, it's simple to get together for dinner if you make friends on board who also opted for flexible dining.

## IS FOOD AVAILABLE AROUND THE CLOCK?

You might be wondering why you would want to eat at any other time when there is so much available for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There are a few causes, in my opinion.



Sleeping in and eating a late breakfast on sea days is lovely, pushing your noon meal back to an odd hour. Late shore excursions can throw off your mealtime plans, and sometimes, after a night of dancing or bar hopping, you simply need that midnight pizza.

So, yes, there is always food available on cruise ships, however the selection may be limited at other times.

The majority of ships offer a 24-hour eating option, either pizza or a cafe with prepared foods like cookies and tiny sandwiches. Breakfast options are frequently available from 6 a.m. to 11 or 11:30 a.m., with full breakfasts served during regular mealtimes and continental option served earlier and later. For your leisurely morning, some cruise lines also offer a sea-day brunch.

Snacks might be challenging in the middle of the day. Some cruise lines offer afternoon tea with crustless sandwiches and petit fours, or they have a deli or burger counter that is available from late morning until early evening. A little less fatty food or fruit may be available at some cafes. The self-serve frozen yogurt and ice cream stations are frequently open all day.

## **IS ROOM SERVICE AVAILABLE?**

Yes, room service is available aboard cruise ships, providing hungry guests with yet another 24-hour dining option.

In the past, room service was offered at no additional cost, which was a fantastic benefit of cruising over hotels. But after years of seeing trays of half-eaten cheeseburgers in the early hours of the morning in the hallways of cruise ships, the cruise lines made a change.

Nowadays, the majority of cruise lines include a free continental breakfast via room service. Depending on the cruise line, either the room service menu will contain a mix of complimentary and extra-cost foods, or all orders other than breakfast will be subject to a per-order fee. While some cruise companies provide a hot breakfast, others charge extra to have eggs and pancakes sent to your cabin.

There will only be a small selection of salads, sandwiches, hot entrees, and desserts on the all-day in-cabin dining menus. You might have to wait for your order to be delivered for up to an hour during busy dining times.

To show your appreciation for saving you from having to climb many floors to the buffet or all-night pizza outlet, think about giving your room service delivery person a dollar or two.



## **MY FOOD ALLERGIES AND DIETARY RESTRICTIONS - CAN A CRUISE SHIP HANDLE THEM?**

Cruise lines can typically meet your dietary requirements, whether you're vegan, vegetarian, lactose or gluten intolerant, low-carb, low-salt, kosher, or allergic to particular foods.

Since you don't eat meat or shellfish, you've had no trouble getting enough food from the menu choices offered on board. Although it's hit-or-miss throughout the industry, some cruise companies may place icons on their menus next to vegetarian or gluten-free dishes. If there isn't an obvious option on the menu for your dietary restrictions, the chef may frequently construct a meal to suit them in specialist restaurants. You can always ask the waiters if a dish contains elements you can't eat.

If you have severe food allergies or need specific food items on board (dairy-free milk, gluten-free bread, kosher meat, etc.), you should always get in touch with your travel agent before the trip to let them know about your dietary needs. This allows the cruise line to ensure the ship is provisioned with special food items and flags you in the system for the restaurant staff.



Make sure to introduce yourself to the maitre d' or other authorized food and beverage officer on the first day of the cruise so you can talk about dining alternatives. You may receive the dinner menu in advance on some cruise lines so you can mark the items you want so the galley can cook your food to your preferences. A crew member may be assigned to show you the foods to avoid at the buffet.

Although there is a higher chance of cross-contamination at a buffet, cruisers with severe allergies or dietary restrictions would typically do better in a sit-down restaurant.

## **DOES MY ATTIRE FOR DINNER NEED TO BE FORMAL?**

Since the Titanic, cruise line dress codes have advanced significantly. On a modern cruise ship, you won't need to wear a gown or tuxedo to dinner.

However, there is typically some sort of evening dress code on cruise lines. Most nights are a dressier version of casual, with jeans permitted but no shorts or worn-out T-shirts. (However, on a luxury cruise line, you may anticipate more dressy people and no jeans in the main restaurant.)

There will be one or two nights set aside for nicer wear, picture wedding guest clothes like cocktail gowns and jackets for men. These are typically optional on most cruise lines, and you can always go to the buffet to avoid the dress code.

If you intend to visit one of the more pricey, premium places on board, check the dress code as some speciality restaurants will have one that is different from the main restaurant.



We provide all of the above services for residents of Victoria Cruises Lines and also for those of you who are interested in being part of a successful residential cruise.

*Created by: Okkie Perdana  
VICTORIA CRUISES LINE – Culinary Service Manager*