

The Art of *freestyle* Cruising

BY MIRA TEMKIN

A Beautiful New DAWN Awaits You

I ADMIT IT. The idea of “Freestyle Cruising” intrigued me. Having earned my stripes on several other cruises, I was more than curious about this innovative new concept. After seven days of carefree sailing the Caribbean aboard **Norwegian Cruise Lines’ Dawn**, the answer is a resounding, “YES!”

NCL pioneered Freestyle Cruising in 2000 to create a more relaxed, resort-style cruise experience. The new 2,224-passenger Norwegian *Dawn*, sister ship to the Norwegian *Star*, was designed and built for the ultimate in flexibility. Very simply, more restaurants, open seating and extended hours give you the freedom to choose the night, the time and with whom you eat. The beauty of this concept is that we never felt rushed through dinner and always had time to linger over coffee.

The same flexibility is true with traditional formal nights. While the dress code is resort casual, those who love “dressing up to the nine’s” needn’t worry. You can still enjoy the optional formal night in the main dining room or head to dinner without a jacket in another restaurant.

More Choices

With three main restaurants and seven alternative dining venues, the hardest decision was determining our international cuisine of choice. One night it was *Salsa* with its fabulous menu of Tex-Mex and tapas specialties. Another evening we opted for veal chops at the 1930s steakhouse, *Cagney’s*. Later in the week, *La Trattoria’s* pizza fit the bill. *Aqua*, a contemporary restaurant offered a lighter menu and interestingly, all the waitstaff were women. An elegant Asian restaurant, *Bamboo* featured Japanese, Thai and Chinese fare. The sushi and a teppanyaki table provided a touch of the exotic. For a quick bite after a day on the islands, the *Garden Cafe’s* buffet was just perfect. Literally, we ran out of nights before we ran out of restaurants to try!



Right: *Cagney’s*.
Below: *Salsa*. Bottom
Bottom: *Garden Villa*
Guest Suite. Bottom
Right: *Le Bistro*



START SPREADING THE NEWS

Starting in May 2003, Norwegian Dawn will sail exclusively from New York on seven-day roundtrip cruises, calling on four ports in the Bahamas and Florida. These ports include: a fifteen-hour stopover in Orlando (Port Canaveral) with additional stops in Miami, Nassau and NCL's private island, Great Stirrup Cay in the Bahamas.

One of the advantages of "Homeland Cruising" is that East Coast passengers can embark on a cruise closer to home. Colin Veitch, President and CEO of Norwegian Cruise Line said, "We've received tremendous response from travelers who appreciate being able to take a cruise vacation without traveling too far. We expect this new itinerary to be even more successful year round out of New York." In addition, passengers will have an opportunity to extend their stay, either pre-or post-cruise; taking advantage of all the entertainment and culture New York City has to offer.



Dining with the Masters

Most ships boast a multi-million dollar art collection. On Norwegian Dawn, one restaurant alone, *Le Bistro*, features four original oil paintings from 20th century masters Renoir, Matisse, van Gogh and Monet. The artwork is currently on loan from Star Cruises Chairman Tan Sri Lim Kok Thay's personal collection. According to Pasi Ojala, Hotel Director, "Many of our passengers come aboard the Dawn specifically to enjoy a meal and sit next to the works of these masters. This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Dining at *Le Bistro* was in a word, amazing. The ambience was reminiscent of an intimate Parisian restaurant with classic French cuisine. We were seated in front of Renoir's "The Bather," feasting on filet mignon and salmon a L'Oseille. Toasting with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc was the perfect accompaniment. Between courses, we stared at the complexity of Monet's "Landscape in the Sun" and van Gogh's "A Park in Spring." These works represent outstanding examples of impressionistic art and made for wonderful dinner "companions."

But the art is not just contained in restaurants. A collection of original signed works by Andy Warhol is displayed throughout the ship. And the ship's hull also showcases reproduced signatures of the masters as well as dynamic images of dolphins playing in "Technicolor" waves.

Suite Dreams

The Dawn lets you cruise in comfort and style, offering a wide variety of accommodations from luxurious Garden Villas to spacious mini-suites. Pasi Ojala commented, "Almost fifty-percent of our staterooms have private balconies. When you look at the Dawn from the outside, you see four levels of balconies. That's quite impressive."

Our ocean view stateroom was designed with all the latest amenities as well as floor-to-ceiling windows; even an Internet connection. My own private balcony had me singing the Dawn's praises, where I could step out and gaze at the Caribbean's azure blue waters. From morning coffee to savoring those nighttime chocolates, the balcony was my little corner of paradise!

Service continues to be key in all of the staterooms. Our cabin stewards were more than attentive, indulging our every wish with warm, friendly smiles. Another NCL advantage is their emphasis on staffing, which provides a crew-to-guest ratio similar to that level typically found in a land-based resort. Amazingly, we discovered the ship's crew members come from 64 countries.

NCL also offers the ultimate in luxury with two Garden Villas. Positioned high atop the vessel in a private aft on the main sun-deck, these suites offer an unprecedented 5,350 square feet of living space at sea and panoramic ocean views. Inside, the suites feature large living room, dining room, and three bedrooms. On the outer deck, guests will find rooftop terraces with lush, private gardens and secluded areas for relaxing. Of course, a butler is on hand, catering to each guest's needs.

Island Fun

One of the most spectacular experiences NCL offers is an opportunity to "mix with the locals." Hands down, the most popular tour is the Dolphin Encounter where you stand waist high in water, getting "up close and personal" with these animals. Gail Smith, Shore Excursion Manager said, "Adults and kids alike are enthralled with the tour, which allows them to interact with the dolphins. One guest told me, 'you haven't lived until you've hugged and kissed a 500-pound fish!' I guess he was right!" She continued, "Many people tell me the Dolphin Encounter was the highlight of their trip." NCL allows passengers to pre-book their shore excursions. Gail suggests that passengers take advantage of this option and pre-book the Dolphin Encounter because "it tends to fill up fast."

Carefree Departures

NCL has streamlined the tipping process by adding the gratuities to your onboard account. This was one more way NCL incorporates the "freestyle" concept into almost every aspect of the cruise.

All too soon it was time to leave, but even "Freestyle Disembarkation" was handled with the utmost ease. Looking towards the future, another new ship is planned for launch in 2004. I, for one, would be more than happy to sail on its inaugural voyage!

For more information and brochures, call Norwegian Cruise Line at 1.800.327.7030 or visit www.ncl.com