

INSIDE VIEW:

THE AIDA REVOLUTION

**A conversation with Harald Bernberger,
Club Manager of AIDAluna**

by

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Harald Bernberger speaks about AIDAluna with the passion of a zealous revolutionary. "It is refreshing, it is colorful, it is inspiring"

Indeed, Bernberger is on the front line of a revolution. AIDA Cruises has done away with many of the traditional mainstays of cruising and has developed a new model. As Club Manager - - a position that more traditional cruise lines would call hotel manager or executive purser - - of one of the newest and largest ships in the AIDA fleet, Bernberger has firsthand experience with this new model in action. "Everybody says how can you do that on a ship; that will not work. Then all of a sudden it works and goes off like a bomb."

The objective of this new model is "to create a vacation environment where the people do not want to leave; they want to come back here. They are addicted.

There are people who come two or three times a year. It is a happy place."

There are several elements to this model. The first is visual. Outside, the ship is painted not in the traditional passenger ship manner but rather with colorful, light-hearted murals that include large ancient Egyptian eyes and ruby red Hollywood lips. Inside, the visual concept is also designed to make people happy.

"The whole color concept is different to other ships. It is warm, friendly. Here, it is AIDAluna - - the moon. So the architect concentrated on the moon, whatever color water and air makes when the moon is shining at night. You see purple and silver-ish kind of accents. 24 hours and [the guests] are also in that mentality of colorfulness, brightness, freshness, vitality. That's what makes a big difference."

The interior design is also a departure from traditional cruise ships. The public rooms are large open spaces, there are few small intimate venues. Indeed, even the traditional theater that is the focal point for entertainment on most ships is gone. In its place is a theater built into the ship's atrium. This construction allows the guests to move freely between the shows and the bars and other entertainment venues that occupy the open spaces surrounding the atrium. "You can stay as long as you want. There is always activities all over the ship."

In addition to fostering a sense of freedom, the ship is designed to encourage people to socialize. "All the bars and the restaurants are made up to meet people. [The buffet restaurants have] large tables and in the bars someone always sits opposite you. You can be as grumpy as you want but sooner or later you are going to lift your glass and say 'how are you? Maybe, you make a friendship out of it."

Another departure from tradition is that AIDAluna has no main dining room. Instead, it has seven dining venues. "You can go wherever you like, you don't have an assigned seat. At 6:30 or at 9 o'clock, it does not really matter. We have a dress code - - nobody should go in shorts to the restaurant - - but otherwise in the evening, if you wear a jacket and tie or jeans, for us it does not matter. You can but you do not have to. If you are a jacket and tie person, be a jacket and tie person. If you are a jeans person, be a jeans and t-shirt person."

Three of the dining venues are buffet restaurants. "The cutlery, the coffee, are on the table. It is like at home." A carafe of house wine is also on the table and guests can have as much of the free draft beer as they like.

Each of the buffet restaurants is different. The Buena Vista "is Mediterranean kind of style. You would have prosciutto and pasta, Mediterranean food. There is one called the 'Market Place,' it is like all markets. One is called 'Wide World' with all different stations - - a South American station, an Indian station."

"There are also three restaurants where there is a surcharge, for which you have to make reservations. The Rossini Restaurant is fine dining, eight course, eleven course, where you have your goose liver pate, Morgan Ranch steaks and caviar. But for the quality of the food you get, people who know that way of dining know that for the soup and appetizer you pay that much. It is really Michelin Star fine dining. There are people that come here with plenty of money and they go up in the fine dining and reserve a table for seven days so each



Harald Bernberger

night they eat their six, nine, or eleven course meal."

"You also have your Buffalo steakhouse. It is a classically American kind of steakhouse. You order a steak, baked potato, and a side dish of black beans and spinach or whatever."

The third specialty restaurant is a sushi bar.

Unlike most specialty restaurants on other lines' ships, the amount charged for a meal in the specialty restaurants on AIDAluna varies. "Like a regular restaurant, there is no fixed charge where everybody pays the same. It is not a surcharge for being in the restaurant, it depends upon what you eat. It is not like Celebrity, for example. They have fine dining and it costs 25 bucks to go in there. It does not matter what you eat."

Another departure from the traditional is the lowering of the barrier between the passengers and the crew. Whereas most cruise ships restrict crew members from using the public rooms, the crew on AIDAluna routinely spend their off hours amongst the passengers.



AIDAAluna

"If they want to go for a beer in a public room, they check in and get this pin and they can go up. It is part of the concept. They can party with [the passengers], they can dance with them, have fun with them. They should actually. We encourage them. Everybody working with us is a host."

The average age of the passengers on AIDAAluna is between 40 and 45. Most are middle class or upper middle class. However, "I think it attracts everybody - - everybody who knows about it. 95 percent of the people who go here do not go anywhere else. Everyone who knows of it because it is a fantastic way of vacation."

The vast majority of the passengers on AIDA ships are from Germany, Austria and the German-speaking part of Switzerland. However, a guest need not speak German in order to enjoy a cruise on AIDAAluna. "What is there to read? There are no menus in the buffet restaurants and the little menus in the [specialty] restaurants, the wait staff can translate to you. The bar menu - - what do you want to translate in Pina Colada? The majority of the shows in the world are in English. If we have a Beatles show, we are not going to translate the songs [into German]. What do you have to speak German for? The safety announcements are done in English and in German. If there were a large number of English speakers, we would make [all the] announcements in English. But [in any case] you get your papers and the crew would explain to you when your tour starts. The daily program - - travelers are cosmopolitan and they can understand roughly."