

RESTAURANT GUIDE:

DINING ON CELEBRITY CENTURY

An inside guide with
Executive Chef Claudio De Carlo.

by

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Executive Chef Claudio De Carlo confesses "I have a passion for food." Indeed, recognizing that same passion in Celebrity Cruises' approach to the culinary aspects of its business, Chef De Carlo's goal for Celebrity Century and for Celebrity in general is "to be the number one with culinary."

The Celebrity Approach

Celebrity Century provides a Celebrity cruise experience. Dining is an important part of this experience and so the dining on Century must be consistent with the dining on other Celebrity ships. "We run all our ships with the same menus. The menus are decided by the culinary team ashore. They send [the ships] the recipes and the pictures [of the dishes] and we

all follow the same pictures and recipes. It gets the standard and the quality on all the ships the same."

The chefs onboard the ships do, however, have input into the menus. "We work very closely with shore-side, our Master Chef Jacques Van Staten. He comes on the ships and we work with him. [In addition,] the executive chefs meet once a year for a culinary conference and we [discuss] menu trends and what items to change. But, the last word [belongs to] the gentleman who has his name on the menu. That is Mr. Jacques Van Staten. We executive chefs are here to bring his ideas to the plate."

The next step in ensuring that the dining on Century will meet Celebrity's standards is obtaining good ingredients. "We have certified suppliers. We do not take anything onboard during the cruise. We get

everything in [the ship's homeport]."

The ship, however, does not just accept whatever the suppliers send it. "We do quality checks on the pier. If something is not up to our standards - - the tomatoes are too ripe or the fruits are not ripe enough - - we send it back and try and get them the same day. It is difficult but it is possible."

Once the ship has the ingredients, the next step for Chef De Carlo's 120 chef team in ensuring that the food on Century meets Celebrity's standards is to prepare the food themselves. "We make everything onboard. We do all our ice creams onboard. We do all our pastries onboard. We don't open up boxes and take the cake out. We don't open up boxes to make soup mixes. We cook from scratch. We cook all our sauces ourselves. We cook the sauces from the beginning. The same with the bakery - - the bakery runs 24 hours. I have 10 bakers and they do all the bread onboard."

Of course, making the food onboard will not be a guarantee of quality unless the people who are making it know what they are doing. "We have a program for developing all of our chefs. We work together with the CIA in New York - - the Culinary Institute of America in Poughkeepsie. We send people there and we have as well culinary trainers from the CIA on the ships that train our people. [Crew members] can work their way up the ranks. At Celebrity you really can start as a dishwasher and end up as executive chef."

The ship's top chefs act as the final quality control. "Before anything goes out to passengers either one of my assistants or I will taste each item and compare it with the recipes and the pictures to make sure we have the consistency. Nothing goes out before it is checked."

The Dining Venues

Century's main dining room is the Grand Restaurant, which occupies portions of two decks at the stern of the ship. For breakfast and lunch, the restaurant is operated on an open seating basis. For dinner, most guests opt for the traditional two-seating system. However, there is also a flexible dining option in which the guest can decide when to



Executive Chef Claudio De Carlo

come to the restaurant for dinner. The menu is the same regardless of whether the guest is on the traditional system or the flexible dining system.

"We have a menu cycle, we never repeat ourselves. [For each dinner], we offer 10 main courses, three different soups, five appetizers, two hot appetizers and six desserts."

"Everything is cooked fresh for the dining room. We don't pre-cook. We cook the steaks to order. We cook the fish to order. OK with prime rib, we know from historical figures how many we have to pre-cook. All other items we try and cook ala minute. That is why we have the amount of cooks onboard. Compared to

some other cruise lines in the same size ship, I have 30 chefs more. That is the quality."

"We have a lot of special orders - - ethnic food, kosher food, diabetic, gluten-free. We have a special order station in the kitchen where four guys especially trained in dietary foods work. When you have a requests, either [you can] pre-book it with your travel agent or when you come onboard, speak right away with the assistant maitre 'ds. We can provide almost everything".

As an alternative to the main dining room, Century has a specialty restaurant. "The Murano is a French-influenced fine dining venue. Silver service. There is a lot of tableside cooking. It is very exquisite from soufflés to tableside Dover soles, filet mignon with lobsters. It is an experience."

"It has a totally independent kitchen from the main dining room. I have ten chefs working there under my supervision. They produce everything fresh from scratch. Starting in the morning they cook all the sauces, all the soups - -, everything, they make it fresh."

"You pay a \$35 cover charge but if you go in a restaurant somewhere ashore, you will pay for that menu \$150 I would say."

For an additional charge "we have the Five Senses menu. The Five Senses is a six course menu with wine. It is a high experience."

Century also has several casual dining venues. The largest of these is the Islands Café, the ship's buffet or lido restaurant. "We always have the Asian station. We have the pasta station running almost 12 hours, a salad bar. At dinner time, we have the curry station and a grill station. We have sushi in the evening. We have the international buffet at lunch time. There is a lot of choice."

While buffet restaurants offer a lot of choices, the trade-off is often a loss of flavor as the food is often sitting in trays under warming lights for long periods. On Century, the buffet is operated so as to maximize flavor. "We have a separate kitchen that is just producing up there for the lido restaurant. Fresh cooking - - that is the whole secret. I have seven cooks in the kitchen there that are just producing fresh and fresh and fresh. When the paella runs out they start cooking paella fresh again. It's a big operation but I think that is why Celebrity is well known for its culinary arts."

Just forward of the Island Café is the Poolside Grill providing light fare al fresco. "We have tacos, we have chicken breasts, we have kebobs, and we have chicken wings. Every day, [there is] a special. So it is not just burgers and hot dogs."

Further forward on the same deck is the Aquaspa Café, just by the entrance to the ship's spa and fitness

area. "The spa café is light and healthy food. You will find nothing there that is cooked with butter. We do not use any MSG or any preservatives at all. We cook just with olive oil, with non-saturated fats and stuff like that. [There are no] high calorie items. It is a nice change. You can go to the Poolside Grill and have a burger or go to the Aquaspa and have a healthy dish there. It is your choice. It is very popular and the people like it."

Guests can also have a light meal at the ship's specialty coffee bar, the Cova Café on Promenade Deck. "In the morning, we serve Danish and savory Danish as well. We have pastries over lunch. We have sandwiches. From five o'clock until late, we serve different types of tappas. You can enjoy your morning coffee; in the afternoon, your tea time; and in the evening, your wine in the Cova Café. It's a nice ambiance. We have nice music going on there in the evenings."

"Variety of food - - nobody can really complain at Celebrity. [One cruise] is not enough to experience all of the food onboard."