

INSIDE INTERVIEW:

THE NEW CELEBRITY CONSTELLATION

A conversation with Hotel Director Ryan Kingston.

by

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Celebrity Constellation has undergone a transformation - - a multi-million dollar refit designed to give this popular ship a new style. As the ship's Hotel Director, Ryan Kingston plays a crucial role in implementing this new style, I spoke with Mr. Kingston about what guests should expect from the new Constellation.

To establish a frame of reference, I asked Mr. Kingston to describe the cruise experience that Celebrity offers.

"The style of Celebrity - - quality and service - - certainly caters to an affluent clientele. Our clientele does not come back all of the time because they think it is not consistent with their lifestyle. The style of our ships suits their lifestyle. It is how they enjoy their life at home and when they come on a ship they have the same level of expectation. That is really what we deliver everyday."

Celebrity's cruise experience has an international appeal with significant numbers of Europeans and

other nationalities in addition to Americans and Canadians on most cruises. "That makes it so exciting for every one who comes here. They meet different people from different cultures and hear about things that are going on all over the world."

The Celebrity fleet can be divided into the Solstice class, the Millennium class and the Century class. (There is also a small expedition ship that does cruises to the Galapagos Islands). The critically-acclaimed Solstice class ships are Celebrity's newest and largest ships (122,000 gross tons). The four Millennium class ships, of which Constellation is one, are smaller (91,000 gross tons) but have long had a reputation for providing a sophisticated cruise experience.

"In the past, [the four Millenniums] were very similar experiences. Obviously, every ship has a different feel and depending on the group that is on the ship, it can have a different focus."

Constellation, however, underwent a two-week re-fit in the Spring of 2010 during which it was

"Solsticized" *i.e.*, altered to be more like the Solstice class ships. "If you were to compare this ship to Infinity, Summit or Millennium, it has obviously had some changes. So the experience on this ship versus other Millennium class ships is a little bit different."

"Certainly the Martini Bar is an example. It is very different on this ship versus its sister ships. It really creates a different level of energy and a different environment. It is more consistent with the Solstice class."

"It is a change in direction. I think that is what people will notice the most when they come on the ship. The style of the ship is a different style. This has a different feel to it. It has a different energy level to it. It has a different vibe to it. Clearly the energy level and the style of the ship have changed significantly."

The most prominent alterations to Constellation were the addition of two new dining venues - - the Tuscan Grille and Bistro on Five. These additions give Constellation more "options and a more diversified program. I think that is what people want. They do not want to be locked into a style of cruising that is main dining room every night. That may be fine for shorter cruises but when you get into longer itineraries, it is great to have other options. For example, this cruise is 14 days and not everyone wants to sit in the main dining room and have a two hour dinner every night. Sure the menus change every day and we are continuously trying to freshen the main dining room but at the same time people want something different."

Prior to the refit, Constellation did have more than one dining venue. In addition to the main dining room, it had a buffet restaurant for those guests who wanted a casual, informal meal and the Ocean Liners Specialty Restaurant for those times when guests wanted a formal fine dining experience. Thus, there were options but "you had a big jump from each dining option."

Now, the new additions fill in the interstices. Guests who want to be served but who "would like a lighter meal, can go into Bistro on Five and have wonderful salads, sandwiches as well as the crepes. People love those whether they are breakfast, lunch, dinner or late night. It is a great option and it is a nice price point



Hotel Director Ryan Kingston

as well."

Similarly, guests who want a sophisticated meal but not the formality of a French-style fine dining restaurant can go to the Tuscan Grille. "It is a wonderful Italian steakhouse, people rave about the food and the service. On this ship, it is in a fabulous location. It sits up on Deck 11, top of the ship, surrounded by glass and has views that are fabulous. When we were up in the Norwegian fjords, where it is light until two or three in the morning, you could have dinner up there and it was absolutely spectacular."

The refit also added two new venues to the ship's line-up of bars and lounges. "The wine bar, Cellar Masters, is a completely different environment than what was there before. In the past, it was one environment; one bar on one side [of the area], one on the other, and some type of entertainment in the middle.

Now you have a very distinct, different environment. It has a lot more character. It is a warmer more inviting environment than we presented in the past."

A feature of Cellar Masters is vending machines that dispense fine wines by the glass. "It is a wonderful experience for those who enjoy wine. You have enomatic machines that allow people to do a lot of wine tasting independently without having a lot of engagement from staff. If they just want to try things and taste them or if you always wanted to try a little bit of this or that, you can do that at your leisure."

One of the bars that Cellar Masters displaced was the ship's Martini Bar. Constellation's new Martini Bar is not simply the old bar in a new location. "The one we have today is very different. It is a much more upscale, typical high-profile martini bar that you would expect to see in the major metropolitan cities around the United States and elsewhere. [The old Martini Bar was] more of a classical martini bar where it was a lot more subdued and a lot more quiet."

"It has a lot of energy. People get in there and enjoy it." With its ice covered bar, high energy music, wide variety of martinis and the flare of its performing bartenders, "it is a show. That is what we have been able to deliver on Solstice and bringing that to this ship has been very popular. It is a fun environment, a very active engaging environment."

Another transformation was the ship's specialty coffee bar. Café al Bacio occupies the same location that once was the site of the Cova Café but it is not just a name change. Café al Bacio "has a different style. It is a lot more contemporary in style than what we are used to the ship. Cova Café was a very traditional style. Café al Bacio is more upscale. I think it is more engaging for people."

"You have the Gelateria, which we did not have in the Cova Café. Gelato is very popular. All the accompaniments that go with it and candies are very popular as well. The coffee and light snacks that we are providing from Café al Bacio are different than the Cova Café. The dessert selection and sweets that we produce are significantly different than what we are providing in the Cova Café."

Adjacent to the Cova Café used to be the glass-enclosed Card Room. That area has now been opened up and has tables and chairs as part of Café al Bacio. "It is a wonderful seating area. People do play cards and drink coffee but at the same time you'll find just as many people with their laptops having a coffee or just sitting privately having a conversation or enjoying the views out the window. It is a very different."

The Solsticization of Constellation was not limited to the public areas "The staterooms have all been

completely re-done. Again, [the goal was to make them] more consistent with the Solstice style of ship."

"All of the staterooms received flat screen televisions. They upgraded the interactive television system so it is [similar] to what we have on the Solstice class. All of the soft-goods -- carpet and drapes, all the bedding, all the headboards, all the upholstery on the couches -- everything was completely re-done. All the bathrooms were re-done and updated. Primarily, it is a complete re-refresh of the stateroom itself. The stateroom product is completely upgraded "

Solsticizing involves more than physical changes to the ship. "We program it a little bit differently in the lighting, sound, music and entertainment. It is more consistent with the Solstice class."

"The feedback that we have received on this ship since its revitalization has been nothing short of spectacular. Sure things are different but I keep hearing the word that it is very, very 'comfortable.' They love seeing the diversity of food and programs."

Celebrity intends to Solsticize Constellation's sister ships as well. "At the end of it all, you will have four ships in the class that have all the features and amenities and services that you would typically have on a Solstice class ship just on a smaller scale for those people who really enjoy this style of ship."