

RESTAURANT REVIEW:

FOUR STARS ON NORWEGIAN STAR (Cagney's, Teppanaki, Moderno Churrascaria, La Cucina)

by

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Norwegian Star has 15 dining venues including seven specialty restaurants that have a cover charge or for which there is an extra charge. These venues are quite different in their concepts, style and cuisine. The following reviews of four of these venues illustrate some of the diversity of Star's dining experiences.

Teppanaki is one of several Asian-inspired restaurants on Norwegian Star. It is a quite popular venue, booked to capacity most nights.

The Star has one Teppanaki table located in its own room on the port side of Deck 7. The guests sit on three sides of the table. In the middle of the table is a pair of electric grills, which two chefs work from the remaining side of the table. One chef cooks for the guests at one end of the table while the other chef cooks for

the guests at the other. Approximately a dozen guests can sit at the table at one time and there are typically three seatings during the course of an evening.

Guests come to Teppanaki in order to have a good time. It is casual and given the fact that everyone is seated together around the same table, it is not unusual for strangers to start talking to each other. However, other times, the guests just talk with the people who they came with, respecting each others privacy despite the physical proximity.

Each guest receives the same appetizer, soup and salad. There is a choice as to the main course and the dessert, however.

Teppanaki is very much a show and the stars of the show are the chefs. They enter wearing traditional Japanese costumes and begin a light hearted banter with the guests as they prepare the grills

and the ingredients for the main courses. Of course, the highlight is the knife flourishes, slicing and flipping items at a dazzling pace.

Even though the chefs are performing, there is some serious cooking go on here. Each item goes from the raw state to fully-cooked in seemingly just a few minutes before your very eyes. The freshness of the ingredients and of the cooking enhances the taste.

The Land and Sea combination brings together bite size pieces of filet mignon and butterflied shrimp. The beef is tender and flavorful just by itself. However, each guest receives a dish of creamy mustard, which really brings out the flavor. Similarly, the flavor of the shrimp is enhanced by the ginger dipping sauce each guest receives.

Following the chefs' performance, the servers bring dessert. A specialty of the house is the Green Tea Cake. Everything about this dessert is green - - the cake, the accompanying ice cream, even the honey that is drizzled over the plate. It would not look out of place at a St. Patrick's Day celebration. But do not let the color give you pause. The ice cream is quite refreshing and the cake moist. The drizzle adds sweetness as well as character.

The meals at Teppanaki are not heavy meals. Unless one fills up on the tasty fried rice, you will not leave feeling stuffed. The meals are satisfying, not too much, not too little. At the same time, you get to see a fun show.

The cover charge is \$25.

La Cucina is the Star's Italian-inspired specialty restaurant. It is not designed to be a fine dining venue such as Princess' Sabattini's or Royal Caribbean's Portofino restaurants. Instead, it is casual

Italian dining, offering familiar favorites that have found international popularity.

At one time, Star's Italian restaurant was a section of the ship's buffet restaurant that was cordoned off in the evenings to become a separate venue. However, this arrangement was not very satisfactory and seeing that there was a demand for Italian cuisine, the restaurant was moved to its present location on the port side on Deck 6, displacing a South Seas restaurant that had not caught the public imagination.

There are hints of an Italian country house in the room's décor and the lighting is kept romantically low. Most guests were wearing smart casual clothing when I was there. Thus, the atmosphere is relaxed but not that of a fast food venue. Rather, it is the type of restaurant you would go to for a nice evening out.

Along the same lines, the food is a notch above. The calamari had a crispy outer crust but moist and tender inside, not at all rubbery. The pizza is gourmet-style rather than commercial delivery standard. On the Margarita pizza, for example, the crust was thin and wafer-like and the cheese was in large slices nestled amongst the fresh tomato sauce rather than spread across the face of the pie. The vegetable lasagna went beyond comfort food, light, not oily, and the freshness of the tomatoes, potatoes and zucchini was apparent in the taste.

There is a \$10 cover charge for La Cucina.

In the evenings, Cagney's is Star's traditional steakhouse. Perched high on Deck 13, the main room has views of the ocean through the floor-to-ceiling windows on either side. The annex, which is accessed through the Star Bar, overlooks the ship's main pool area.

The décor of both rooms is conservative and done in various shades of earth colors. Somewhat puzzling are the photographs of Prohibition Era gangsters and actors who have portrayed them that adorn the walls in a few locations. But then you think that James Cagney first became famous for playing gangster roles and the connection is made.

There is nothing frivolous about this venue, however. Rather, it is the place to come for a serious steak. The quality is first-class as is the preparation. I especially liked the filet mignon with the house pepper-corn sauce.

As noted earlier, Cagney's is a steakhouse in the evenings. During the day, it is open to guests staying in certain cabin categories for breakfast and lunch. The opportunity to have ala minute meals prepared for you each morning and at mid-day plus the personalized service is certainly a strong incentive for booking a suite. I found myself addicted to their mango and marinated berries lunchtime dessert.

Cagney's has a \$25 cover charge for dinner. There is no cover charge for breakfast and lunch.

The Moderno Churrascaria is Norwegian Star's latest dining venue. The concept upon which this venue is based was first made popular by steakhouses in Brazil. Thus, Moderno could be called a steakhouse but it is a much different experience than the traditional steakhouse experience of Cagney's.

The meal begins with a trip to Moderno's salad bar. This is not a lettuce and tomato salad bar but rather one with cheeses, Portobello mushrooms, and combination items such as potato and

shrimp. There is also a choice of soups (bean soup and seafood chowder). You could easily make a whole meal out of what is offered here.

But do not do so. The secret to maximizing your enjoyment at Moderno is moderation. Many tasty things will be offered during the course of the meal and if you indulge too much at the beginning you will not be able to enjoy the good things that come later in the meal. Also, if you get to the end and find that you wish that you had had more of some item, you are free to go back and have more of that item. Indeed, it is encouraged.

When you are finished with the salad/soup course, the server will bring a set of side dishes for the main course. These are to be shared amongst the table and include butted rice, black beans, garlic mashed potatoes and fried sweet bananas.

Then a procession of servers will start arriving at your table with meat selections. There are ten in all and they include various preparations of chicken, pork, lamb and beef. You tell the server how much to carve off of the skewer. You can also control the pace with which the selections arrive by turning over a card that you are given - - red side means stop, green side means bring the next selection.

I particularly liked the sirloin beef that had been marinated in garlic and sea salt. When combined with the fried banana side dish, there was a very good contrast of saltiness and sweetness.

Moderno occupies one of the balconies overlooking Star's lobby. As a result, live music from the lobby enhances the atmosphere. As with La Cucina, most guests opted for smart casual wear.

The Moderno's cover charge is \$20.