

Floating luxury — dining aboard Silversea

Dining Adventures

By David Rottenberg

The names of the exotic destinations sparkled on the map — Copenhagen, Helsinki, St Petersburg, Tallin — cities of northern Europe where history competes with modernity, where old stone buildings in which world shaping events occurred stand side by side with new glass and steel structures. These cities were all on the route of popular Baltic Sea cruises that a number of cruise lines operate. I was fortunate to be sailing on Silversea Cruises vessel *Silver Wind*.

Cruising is one of the most enjoyable ways to visit interesting ports of call. One needs to unpack and settle in to a cabin only once. Food is generally good. And the moving hotel usually stays in port long enough for passengers to get a taste if not the essence of each stop.

Sailing on Silversea is special. Perhaps that is why I'm on my third voyage. The quality of the experience is among the best.

The vessels carry fewer passengers even though the ships are large and comfortable. The ratio of staff to passengers, by contrast, is high. In the dining room, where white



Silver Wind is part of the Silversea Cruises fleet.

gloved servers hover beside their table stations, glasses are filled quickly and empty plates disappear. Ladies are escorted by maitre d's to their tables and waiters quickly appear to carry brimming plates from buffet lines to diners' seats.

The large cabins, with walk-in closets and roomy full baths alongside the sitting room and bedroom areas, are beautifully maintained by housekeeping staff. Rooms are made up quickly in the mornings and beds are turned down at night, usually with delicious chocolate left on the pillow for sweet dreams.

It isn't as far to walk from cabins to dining rooms and other areas. Yet, the vessels offer a choice of restaurants, stores for shopping, casino, bar, gym and spa areas. A theater is the venue for nightly entertainment, featuring sophisticated acts and informative daily lectures.

Being smaller and not drawing as much, Silversea vessels often can enter and moor where larger vessels cannot. That means that more unusual exotic destinations can be scheduled. Once moored, Silversea staff prearrange a selection of tours

that are appealing and fascinating. For example, in St Petersburg, passengers visited the Hermitage on a private tour after hours (avoiding the crush of daytime crowds) and, after touring the magnificent art collections, they were entertained by a private concert played by a full, talented orchestra.

Each of the cities visited featured unique history and attractions. Copenhagen had its canals and Tivoli Gardens. Helsinki offered unusual churches and homage to

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son. Tallin glowed with a sense of freedom from Russian rule and combined the history of its "old town" with an emphasis on "greenness" and ecology. St Petersburg reflected the squandered wealth of the Romanoffs, czars who grew so rich by exploiting their semi-slave serfs, they could build over 150 palaces in the city and fill the Hermitage with the finest art of the Western world.

The cuisine on board the *Silver Wind* was so good that most passengers ate on board even on days when they went ashore. One could eat dinner in the main dining room, or in a theme Italian restaurant that featured each night the cuisine of a different region of the country. Many passengers also paid a small premium to dine at a Relais & Chateau restaurant where special dishes were astonishingly paired to superb wines. Food, whether fine dining or simpler fare, was usually available somewhere on the ship all during the day. Room service was available round the clock.

Executive Chef Laurent Austrui trained in France and worked at major hotels in Switzerland, England and Canada before being called to the sea. He has worked on vessels for over 17 years, six of them with Silversea.

It is quite a task to prepare several thousand meals a day in the somewhat small galley and with the small kitchen staff. "It is hard work, but you

he said. "We can anticipate how many dishes of each menu item we need to prepare, how many bottles of wine we will serve, even the number of eggs we use."

Nightly cuisine included such fine dishes as King Prawns Marinated In Indian Spices and Roasted Filet of Beef With Jalapeno and Cilantro Dressing. Menus were large and changed daily. And, if a passenger wanted something special, every effort was usually made to accommodate.

One of the nicest features of a Silversea experience is that it is all inclusive. All food, drinks, wine and even liquor are included. There are no extra or hidden charges. Passengers are not concerned with signing chits every time they order a drink. Tipping is also not on the agenda. All tips are included in the price.

When it comes to accommodation, cuisine, entertainment and destinations, Silversea Cruises offers floating luxury. I certainly experienced it all on the *Silver Wind*. For more information and a list of upcoming cruise opportunities, visit silverseacruises.com.

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Source Code: 20080828tbi