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# People, Ocean, Learning, Food, and Fun...All in One!

## Holistic Holiday at Sea V

David Briscoe

Having never been on a cruise of any kind, I wasn't sure what to expect at the outset. As the first day of the cruise approached, my imagination started projecting ideas and images of what I might experience, but they didn't even come close to the wonderful reality that awaited me on Holistic Holiday at Sea V held March 30-April 6, 2008 and sponsored by A Taste of Health and Vegetarian Times.

### THE PEOPLE

For me the people were by far the most enjoyable and fascinating part of the cruise. From all walks of life, ages, and backgrounds, they gathered in one place for seven days. There was open seating at meals, so almost each meal found me at a new table with new people to get to know. I had surprising encounters with so many different kinds of people. There was the Indian gastroenterologist who decided to change to a vegan diet after our conversation, and the humorous doctor from Canada who teaches qigong to patients as a healing adjunct to his practice. I met couples from all over the world and many singles, too. The names, various personalities, in-



YOGA ON BOARD THE COSTA FORTUNA

terests, and conversations are just too numerous to recount here. I heard healing stories that will never make it into a book but are just as impressive and encouraging as those that are well known. I met people with expansive hearts—friendly and outreaching—so open to knowing all about the others at the table, making us all feel welcome. There were people of a wide variety of dietary preferences. A myriad selection of vegan, veg-

etarian, and macrobiotic views were present at meals, and the discussions, questions, respect, and interest being shown for these many food differences were heart-warming. Occasionally I was introduced to a spouse or friend who had come along reluctantly, only to find the classes, food, and social encounters unexpectedly enjoyable. Learning from these mealtime friendships, I came away feeling refreshed and renewed by so many hopeful sto-



**VIEW OF THE COSTA FORTUNA FROM SHORE**

ries, interests, and views of health and life.

## **THE OCEAN**

The changing colors of the water were mesmerizing. There was a color of blue—a very dark and deep blue—when we were out on the open sea that I have seen nowhere else. Always before when I read the term “deep blue sea,” I thought of it as the depth of the sea, but now, for me, it refers to the water’s color when out on the open sea—a very different blue from that seen from shore. I will never forget that deep blue. Sometimes it made the waves appear as “liquid rock”—an astonishing combination of movement and solidity all at once. And then there were the various shades of aqua blue as we approached each of the islands that were ports of call on the itinerary. As we came upon an island, I imagined a ship of ancient explorers seeing it for the first time, gazing at demure water lazily lapping the pristine beach; that azure water—like mysterious, exotic eyes calling “Come to me.” In some places on certain islands, the blue became softer and lighter the closer it came to the shore, and here and there a snorkeler bobbed relaxed at the sur-

face transfixed by the view beneath. Try as I may, I simply cannot find the words that fully describe the changing beauty of the ocean whether from onboard the ship, or when approaching the shore or wading and swimming in the warm waters. Those waters must be seen and felt for oneself to be believed.

## **THE SHIP AND CREW**

The Costa Fortuna is a massive ship upon a first outside view, but once inside, it was not overwhelming. A grand hotel on water, there were lounges, bars, piano nooks, intimate music venues, casino sections, theaters, disco, pool-side parties, boutiques, restaurants, buffets, and more. Passengers not part of the Holistic Holiday at Sea group passed by speaking many different languages on their way to bingo, dance lessons, the spa, and many other places, and events. Here and there I encountered a musical or dance vignette being presented by the entertainment staff. All of it could be enjoyed no matter what cruise group you were with.

The Italian cruise line has designed The Fortuna with typical Italian passion for life and romance, coupled with that unique architectural

blend of modern pizzazz and ancient touches Italians are famous for. The public areas of the ship are a visual gusto of color, swirls, bold lighting, and charming alcoves. The halls where the cabins are located are calmly colored and easily navigated after a day or so of getting one’s bearings. Once I learned where the “aft” of the ship was I found my way around with ease. I soon noticed myself taking on a sailor’s gate as I adjusted my walking to harmonize with the movement of the ship. For a few days after returning home I was convinced I looked like Popeye when walking down store aisles. I could have sworn I still felt the movement of the ship!

The swank Michelangelo Restaurant where we had all of our meals was quite comfortable even with one thousand people being served. The waiters were attentive, many were especially pleasant and cheerful, and the meals were served in a timely and steady manner. From time to time the servers would surprise the group with singing, dancing, and crowd participation. One night a long conga line of servers and diners snaked its way through the dining room to the sound of Dean Martin, with all of us singing along, “When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that’s *amore!*” The room was awash with laughter and fun. The last night was “Toga Night,” where we were supposed to wear a toga and Caesar’s crown to the dining room. I wasn’t so sure about this. I’ve never been a toga-party person. When I went to my cabin prior to dinner, I found that the steward had uncharacteristically forgotten to leave the sheet and crown for me to wear, but I was relieved that I would not have to wear a toga. When I arrived at the dinner table my friend insisted on me wearing her toga! In the end, it was really fun, I think.

My cabin, with a window on the ocean, was quite comfortable and very clean. The cabin steward doted over me like a watchful nephew, taking care of my every need and an-



**MARK HANNA, CHRISTINA PIRELLO, AND SANDY PUKEL**

swering all of my questions about the ship, the location of classrooms, and the schedule. He regularly delivered requested items to my room, and one day he knocked at my door when he hadn't seen me for a day to be sure I was okay. I was very surprised and made to feel quite relaxed by his gentle attentiveness that was never intrusive. This kind of personal service is what one would expect at a 5-star luxury hotel for three times the cost.

The Holistic Holiday at Sea staff matched the Italian crew in professionalism, organization and attentiveness. The excellent organizational skills and personal approach of Sandy Pukel, and John and Jan Belleme were evident from the outset—long before the cruise began. Every e-mail and phone call I made received a prompt and clear response. From other cruise participants I heard similar comments about their pre-cruise treatment. During the cruise itself, I found Sandy's staff to be equally responsive to my needs and those of others. It's not at all an easy task to attend to the needs of a thousand people. Sandy, John, Jan, and their crew did it admirably.

## **THE LEARNING**

The opportunity to learn with some of the most experienced macrobiotic

teachers was a highlight for many on the ship. How often do you find, in one place, macrobiotic teachers the caliber of Lino and Jane Stanchich, Denny and Susan Waxman, Warren Kramer, Jessica "The Hip Chick" Porter, Christina and Bob Pirello, Warren and Marquita Wepman, and Bob Carr, Jr.? They deftly covered topics such as bone health, men's health, women's health, palm reading, and much more. There were also a slew of well-received and highly respected holistic health teachers such as the great shiatsu master Ohashi; well-known actress and health advocate Marilu Henner; the always popular Dr. Sherry Rogers; notable vegan researcher and author Dr. Neal Barnard; renown yoga and spiritual guide Yogi Desai; beloved meditation master Bhante G; and others.

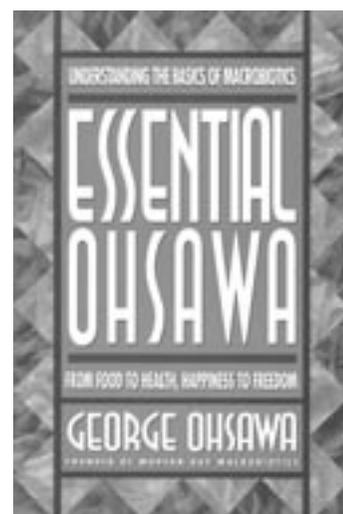
Cooking classes, covering a wide variety of styles and topics from basic macrobiotics to cookies, sandwiches, vegan delights, and more, were presented daily. Among the most popular were the macrobiotic cooking classes taught together by husband and wife Eric Lechasseur and Sanae Suzuki.

In the early morning one could recharge with yoga, do-in, qigong, pilates, and jogging. All day long there was something for everyone.

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**LUNCH BUFFET ON BOARD THE COSTA FORTUNA**

And, private consultation sessions and treatments with the various experts were in heavy demand.

## **THE FOOD**

Head Chef Mark Hanna outdid himself again. I've attended many events where he has been in charge of the kitchen, but this time he rose to the level of "miracle chef," overseeing the preparation of multi-course meals that had to please the palates of one thousand vegans, vegetarians, macrobiotics, and their partners and friends. The lunches and dinners were completely vegan with appetizers, salads, a variety of plant protein entrees, soups, sea vegetables, and whole grains. Breakfasts included an

entire buffet of fresh fruits, cereals, granola, rice milk, and more—and a hot breakfast was served at the table. For those who desired, fish and other foods could be easily ordered from the regular menu, and anyone needing a healing-style of macrobiotic food could get it. Two of the dinner nights were formal affairs, and it was a pleasure to see the women in their attractive gowns and dresses and the men in their suits. But there was no pressure or rigid rules about dress. Individuals could still come in casual attire if they wished. The desserts were delicious, many spectacular, and most of them created and prepared by my friend and vegan macrobiotic chef to the Hollywood stars, Eric Lechas-

seur, author of the gorgeous dessert cookbook *Love, Eric*.

## **MORE FUN**

Along with all of this were visits to the various islands of Puerto Rico, St. Maarten, Tortola, and Grand Turk, traveling the route of famous explorers and pirates. One day we passed near to San Salvador, the first island encountered by Christopher Columbus on his New World explorations. At every port of call there were numerous pre-arranged excursions, including sailing, scuba diving, van tours, and shopping tours, and, many set out on their own to explore the towns and shops or lounge on the beach. Passengers returned with stories about fascinating tour guides and colorful cab drivers who took them to places off the beaten track. There were tales of interaction with friendly locals, and feasting on coconuts and exotic fruits chopped open and presented by smiling native vendors.

The cruise left me with a treasure trove of memories, new friendships, inspiration for continued health and well-being, and a greater sense of the magnificence of this beautiful planet and the ocean. But the most valuable treasure that will remain for me is the memory of the depth of humanity in each person I encountered in classes, at meals, and in private. Thank you Sandy, John, and Jan and the entire Holistic Holiday at Sea V staff.

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*David Briscoe is cofounder of Macrobiotics America and has developed counselor training courses given over the Internet. David is the author of A Personal Peace. He is also the author of Acid-Alkaline Health Secrets, a complete course available by e-mail. See David's website at: [www.macroamerica.com](http://www.macroamerica.com) or e-mail: [info@macroamerica.com](mailto:info@macroamerica.com).*

