
A Voyage of Hope, Healing, and Fun

Warren Kramer

It's no surprise that National Geographic Traveler included Holistic Holiday at Sea in its 100 Best Worldwide Vacations to Enrich Your Life travel guide recently. But what is a surprise is that the annual Caribbean cruise just keeps getting better and better.

Sponsored by a Taste of Health, a non-profit educational foundation dedicated to sustainable living and holistic health, Holistic Holiday at Sea is now in its sixth year, and its roster of stellar presenters and workshop offerings continues to wow its passengers—with many becoming repeat guests.

Even in these challenging financial times, this year's cruise had almost 800 attendees, about twice the number it had on its first voyage. "With the cost of health insurance skyrocketing and in reality not being any safety net at all, people realize that going on our cruise is the most cost-effective way to maintain their health," said Sandy Pukel, co-founder of the cruise. "It's the best insurance policy you can buy because there is no better way to invest in your future than to invest in your health," Pukel said.

John Belleme, Pukel's partner in



BEACH AND SHIP - PHOTO BY MIKE BELLEME

the cruise, concurs. "Many aging baby boomers have become health savvy," he said. "They've realized that a person must be actively involved with their own health especially during these difficult times, and going on the cruise fits right in with that plan."

As a veteran attendee and guest lecturer on all six of the cruises, I agree completely with Pukel and Belleme. The Holistic Holiday at Sea cruise is a glorious seven-day respite from

the commercially driven, deadening mainstream day-to-day world. Since its inception it has continued to expand and improve, and has attracted a wider and more diverse group of people each year. On the most recent voyage, attendees came from all across the United States and from Canada, Japan, France, England, Croatia, and Australia. For seven days, we all indulged in a joyous vacation at sea that nourished our bodies, expanded our

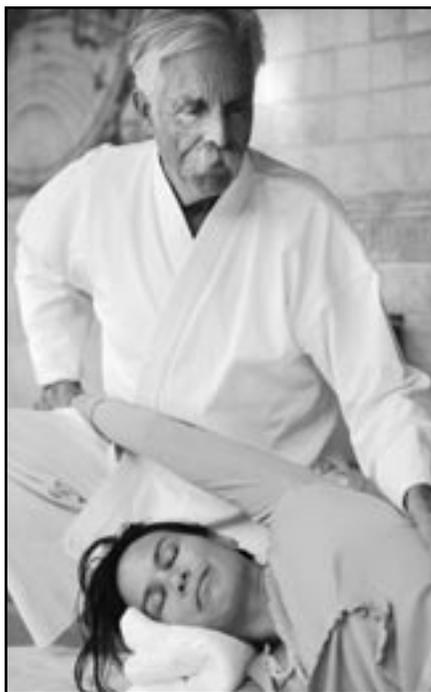
minds, nurtured our souls, and lifted our spirits. And most importantly, we all had lots of fun.

LET THE FUN BEGIN

The fun began as soon as we set sail from Fort Lauderdale on Costa Cruise's Fortuna. Setting the tone on that balmy March evening was Jessica Porter, the irreverent comedian and author of *The Hip Chic's Guide to Macrobiotics*. Her "vegetarian shtick" had everyone laughing out loud. Porter served as the master of ceremonies throughout the cruise, and proved that serious topics could be addressed without forfeiting humor.

Fun was also evident on Talent Show night when guests surprised fellow guests with their outstanding singing and dancing routines. There were plenty of conga lines each night, late night Almond Breeze milk and cookie gatherings, the requisite toga party—free sheets included—and a wild disco party where organic Frey wine flowed freely and the dancing went on till late into the night.

A dazzling hotel at sea, our state-of-the-art and environmentally friendly ship was complete with fresh and saltwater pools, saunas, gym, spa, casino, nightclubs, internet café, and all the bells and whistles expected on a luxury liner today. Even the ship's handsome Italian captain, Claudio De Frenza, was a repeat attendee—he's an avid vegetarian who has captained previous Holistic Holiday cruises and always requests to do it again. Although there were other passengers onboard the Fortuna not taking part in our holistic program, our group functioned as a cohesive unit, with our own dining room and private parties on the pool deck. Yes, occasionally some of the "other" passengers rolled their eyes when they saw some of our more free-spirited instructors glide by, but that only added to the fun. In fact some folks even crossed over to our side and signed up for individual classes.



SHIATSU - PHOTO BY MIKE BELLEME

Ports of call included Key West, Grand Cayman, Roatan, and Cozumel. Swimming with dolphins was a highlight for many, as was snorkeling in azure waters and wandering around the quaint portside towns. There was more than one onboard romance—likely helped by the organized speed-dating sessions—and all made plenty of new friends.

So Much to Do, So Little Time

The only dilemma that I, and many people onboard had, was choosing which classes to attend—there was just so much to do and so little time. A few savvy couples solved this problem by splitting up to attend different seminars, with each taking notes and then sharing afterwards.

Over 100 classes taught by three dozen instructors were on the menu, and they included yoga, Pilates, Zen meditation, integrative relaxation, mind-body medicine, shiatsu, nutrition, hypnosis, the healing powers of music and art, and macrobiotic cooking classes that ranged from begin-

ner's to advanced.

Although all of the wide-ranging presenters shined brightly, there were a few superstars in the line-up that drew record crowds. Participants especially enjoyed the provocative presentations made by Dr. T. Colin Campbell who explained why scientific and medical evidence that favors plant-based diets has been denied to the public, Dr. Neal Barnard who explained why Uncle Sam wants you sick and fat, and Dr. Sherry Rogers who asked: Is your cardiologist killing you? Veteran macrobiotic counselors such as Susan and Denny Waxman, Jane and Lino Stanchich, and Bob Carr offered plenty of food for thought. And the vivacious television chef Christina Pirello was a big hit with her natural foods cooking classes, as were Isa Chandra Moskowitz and Jessica Porter.

Food, Glorious Food!

Front and center throughout the cruise was food—gloriously healthful, sinfully delicious, and generously abundant food. Prepared in a separate galley under the strict supervision of internationally acclaimed chef Mark Hanna, meals ran the gamut from the strictly macrobiotic healing diet to the more casual vegan/natural menu. Mornings began with luscious spreads of buckwheat pancakes for breakfast along with the more traditional miso soup and whole grain cereal offerings. And the meals just got better as the day went on. From flavor-filled appetizers like grilled tempeh-orange kebabs, tofu-aramé quiche, and fresh spring rolls; to creamy vegetable soups and colorful salads; followed by a broad array of satisfying entrees—penne pasta with pesto, black soybean and rice croquettes, seitan stroganoff, and shiitake mushroom risotto.

Desserts were to die for—apple crisps, blueberry-peach crumble, strawberry shortcake, raspberry apricot kanten, and even chocolate cake. Many of the recipes came from Greens and Grains on the Deep Blue



LUNCH BUFFET - PHOTO BY MIKE BELLEME

Sea, a cookbook published last year by Sandy Pukel and Mark Hanna that was a direct result of so many passengers asking for recipes. After the nightly dinners, there were evening socials that included even more delicious food; one night there was a vegan pizza party with Rustic Crust and Galaxy vegan cheese, and on another night there was a vegan ice cream party where we all made our own sundaes with Luna and Larry's Coconut Bliss, fresh berries, and yummy macrobiotic chocolate syrup.

STORIES OF HOPE AND HEALING

As can be expected, the Recovery Panel brought tears of joy and hope to many. Cancer survivors told miraculous stories of how they healed them-

selves through a natural diet and alternative treatments. Some were unlikely candidates for taking the holistic approach such as Bob Mikell, a New Jersey highway patrol officer who told of beating his cancer through macrobiotics. Another inspirational participant was Betty Hoehn, a woman who was diagnosed with low-grade lymphoma and had a huge tumor growing beside one of her kidneys. Hoehn told us how she cured her illness through a strict macrobiotic diet and in doing so totally shocked her mainstream doctors. An added bonus for Hoehn was that her husband, who had been suffering from diabetes and high blood pressure, also adopted the macrobiotic lifestyle and no longer needs to take handfuls of medication each day. And then there was Janet Vitt Sommer, a nurse diagnosed with cancer who was

told she had only three months to live. With the help of friends who cooked macrobiotic meals for her, Sommer told us she is now cancer free. She got married to the man of her dreams on the first Holistic Holiday at Sea cruise, and now comes every year to share her story of hope and healing.

Stories like these, along with the overall atmosphere of positive energy that permeated every nook and cranny of the ship, created a sense of camaraderie that was infectious. "When on the ship, we all feel as if we're elevated 100 feet in the air, functioning in our very own world," said Sandy Pukel. "Participants feel totally free and safe enough to let their souls go out and share their very personal stories. Nobody judges anyone else," he said.

It is often said that people who

eat alike, think alike, and that's part of what created the incredible synergy among the hundreds of people on the cruise. People from all walks of life and different ethnic backgrounds came together, mingled as one, and forged friendships that will last a lifetime. I often felt as if I was part of one big, happy, floating macrobiotic family, and understand why the cruise is described as a voyage to well being.

Holistic Holiday at Sea VII is scheduled to sail from March 21-28, 2010. For more information, contact: www.atasteofhealth.org or call 828-749-9537.

Warren Kramer is an internationally recognized macrobiotics counselor, lecturer, and cooking teacher. He is on the faculties of the Kushi Institute and the Strengthening Health Institute. Kramer runs the Macrobiotic Center of New England, and lives in Brighton, MA, with his wife Fatim and their newborn son, Adam.

CRUISE RECIPES

The following recipes come from *Greens and Grains on the Deep Blue Sea*, and are just two of the many delicious dishes served on the Holistic Holiday at Sea cruise.

SEITAN PAELLA

In this version of the traditional Spanish dish, medium-grain rice is made rich with flavorful stock and creamy with frequent stirring.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings.

- 10 cups water**
- 6-inch piece kombu**
- 4-8 cups clean vegetable trimmings**
- 3 Tbsp olive oil**
- 2 cups medium-diced onion**
- 2 cups medium-grain brown rice, rinsed and drained**
- 1 cup medium-diced carrots**

1 cup quartered green beans
1 cup chopped leeks
2 cups ¼ inch seitan cubes
1 tsp sea salt, or to taste
freshly ground black pepper to taste

Bring the water, kombu, and vegetable trimmings to boil in a large pot. Reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer uncovered for 20 to 30 minutes. Strain and discard the trimmings from the stock. Keep the stock hot.

Heat the oil in a large cast-iron skillet or risotto pan. Add the onions and rice, and sauté, stirring constantly for 5 minutes.

While continuing to stir, slowly add a ladle of the stock. As the rice absorbs the stock, slowly add another ladle. Continue adding stock while stirring for 45 minutes.

Add the carrots, green beans, leeks, seitan, and more stock (if needed) to the rice. Cook, while stirring, for another 10 minutes. If the vegetables are not tender, remove the skillet from the heat, cover, and let steam for 5 minutes.

Season with salt and pepper before serving.

BLUEBERRY-PEACH CRUMBLE

Tangy blueberries and juicy peaches are lightly sweetened with rice syrup in this luscious treat.

Yield: 6 to 8 servings.

⅓ peach juice
1 Tbsp arrowroot powder
4 cups peeled, thinly sliced peaches
2 cups blueberries
freshly grated nutmeg to taste

Crumble

1 cup whole rolled oats
1 cup unbleached white flour
¼ tsp cinnamon
½ tsp sea salt
¼ cup corn oil
¼ cup rice syrup

The Gorgeously Green Diet

by Sophie Uliano

Various books come through the office and here is a new one that is worth taking a look at. *The Gorgeously Green Diet, How to Live Lean and Green* is a book that is outside of the usual macrobiotic range. However, there are many similarities. The book emphasizes using organic natural foods and teaches how to live responsibly or as the author says, “Lean and Green.” And, for someone who is not ready for a strict macrobiotic approach to diet and lifestyle, this advice could be just what is needed.

Sophie Uliano, is a “green guru,” appearing on Oprah and other shows, to promote a “green” lifestyle, that is, a lifestyle that is healthy for your body, healthy for your budget, and healthy for the environment. Her first book, *Gorgeously Green*, is a New York Times bestseller, and this book is a follow-up by providing more details on how what you do and what you eat really does make a difference.

The book covers all the relevant topics such as cooking from scratch, composting, exercising, and even a chapter on skin food. The heart of the book, though, lies in the three customized plans to implement these ideas: Light Green, Bright Green, and Deep Green. Each 14-day plan details a transition into becoming more “green” and offers tips, advice, and recipes along the way. What really impressed me though was the pledge Sophie asks people to commit. Here is the pledge:

1. I commit to cutting my beef and chicken consumption down by 25-50 percent. I will prepare at least three meat-free meals a week. Meat production has a very heavy eco-impact.
2. I commit to buying organic, seasonal, and locally produced food whenever possible. I vote with my dollars and want to support sustainable producers.
3. I commit to cooking at least three meals a week at home so that I can save money, my health, and the planet.
4. I commit to reducing my food waste by 50 percent by sticking to my eating plan and my shopping list and by using my leftovers.
5. I commit to growing something edible (even an herb will do!).
6. I commit to recycling my paper, plastic, glass, and cans, and to buying recycled paper products (paper towels, napkins, and toilet paper) to preserve more trees.

For more information, see www.gorgeouslygreen.com.

— Book Review by Julia Ferré

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Oil and flour an 8-inch-square baking pan and set aside.

Place the peach juice in a mixing bowl, add the arrowroot, and stir to dissolve. Add the peaches and blueberries, and toss gently. Transfer to the prepared pan, sprinkle with nutmeg, and set aside.

To make the crumble, combine

the oats, flour, cinnamon, and salt in a mixing bowl. Rub the oil into the mixture with your fingers, then drizzle in the rice syrup while mixing with a fork. Distribute evenly over the fruit mixture.

Bake for 20 to 30 minutes, or until the topping is golden and the fruit is bubbling. Serve warm.