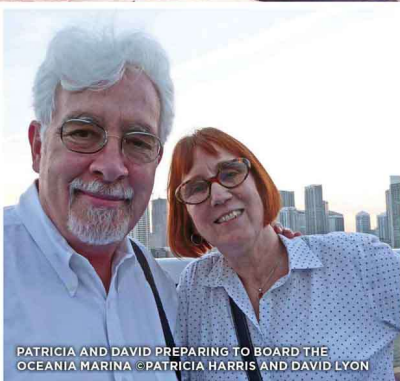


# A TASTE FOR CRUISING

By Patricia Harris and David Lyon



OCEANIA MARINA DOCKED IN KEY WEST  
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PATRICIA AND DAVID PREPARING TO BOARD THE  
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Hands-on cooking classes and shore excursions with a culinary focus make cruises on the Oceania line a lip-smacking experience.

# CRUISING

Chef Kathryn Kelly stood at the front of the classroom, brandishing a plump lemon in one hand and a gleaming chef's knife in the other.

"Acid is as important to a chef as a knife," she pronounced. "When you want to season a dish, use a lemon instead of salt."

After a day ashore on the pristine white sand beaches of Harvest Caye in Belize, we are ready to strap on our aprons in the state-of-the-art teaching kitchen on the pool deck of the *Marina*, a 1,250-passenger vessel of Oceania Cruises. Chef Kelly leads us through *Amore - Love of Lemons*, a class highlighting the versatility of the bright citrus fruit.

Trained at the Culinary Institute of America, Chef Kelly brings a pro's eye to cooking, but she also knows how to make it fun. "The risotto takes exactly 17 minutes," she said. "You can't leave the pot, so have a glass of wine nearby."

Over the next two hours, we conjure up an entire meal. We make chicken scaloppini, lemon risotto, and Chef Kelly's grandmother's favourite "soaking cake" doused with limoncello. Chef Kelly also shows us how to make salt-preserved lemons and our own lemon liqueur. We leave with printed recipes and a perfect menu for our next dinner party.

We're not frequent cruisers, but Oceania's culinary focus appealed to us for a quick winter getaway in the Caribbean. We knew we would like the *Marina* when we learned that she was literally designed around the galleys, devoting more square feet per passenger to meal preparation than any other vessel afloat (Oceania's *Riviera* is built on the same plans).

In addition to the casual Terrace Café and Waves Grill, six specialty dining rooms keep those galleys hopping. Over the course of a week, we enjoy a superb steakhouse, a Parisian bistro with a menu by Jacques Pepin, an Italian trattoria, a sultry pan-Asian restaurant, and the Continental elegance of the Grand Dining Room. But we are most intrigued by Oceania's emphasis on hands-on gastronomic experiences. As executive chef and director of culinary enrichment, Chef Kelly designs classes offered at the on-board Culinary Center, as well as the culinary shore excursions. These tours play to the strengths of the ports.

Chef Kelly explains that she thinks 'like a foodie' when she designs the excursions. Given one day in a port, she considers "where would I like to go? What would I like to do?" In the Mediterranean, the answer might be a market tour and paella lunch followed by a cooking class. In the Baltic, it might be a trip to an Estonian village for a fish cookery workshop.

On our western Caribbean itinerary, we dock at Roatan, Honduras, and pile into a small bus to head into the highlands to the Blue Harbor Tropical Arboretum. We can imagine how Spanish sailors felt when they first came ashore in 1502 and discovered pineapples, custard apples, and the weird pods growing from tree trunks: cacao! Walking the lush grounds where almost every plant is labelled, we begin to appreciate Blue Harbor's mission as an ark for Central American heritage foods. A spread of ultra-ripe watermelon, mango, papaya, pineapple, grapefruit, and carambola prove a refreshing antidote to the steamy climate along the Tropic of Cancer. Blue Harbor is also pioneering the future of local agriculture. Under gauzy shade, tens of thousands of heads of lettuce and seasoning herbs spring from hydroponic trays - one of three crops per year.

Before returning to the *Marina*, we decamp to a casual beach bar on Big French Key. Chef Samuel, a gentle giant of a man, leads us through three progressively more complex preparations of the famous local pink shrimp. We have always wondered what the big deal was about coconut shrimp - until Chef Samuel makes a batch with fresh local coconut that he shreds on a homemade grater made from a tin can punctured with a nail. Coconut in one hand, grater in the other, he displays the same two-fisted passion for cooking as Chef Kelly with her lemon and knife.

For all the great meals on board (matched with a selection of wines), the fresh scent of squeezed lemon and the salty-sweet crunch of shrimp on the beach stay with us - the best souvenirs of all.



SHRIMPS DONE THREE WAYS  
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KATHRYN KELLY'S COOKING CLASS ONBOARD THE OCEANIA MARINA  
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