

THIS PHOTO The AmaSiena.



...The new dining program ties in with expanded fitness and wellness options...



A Sea Change Dining On Board the AmaSiena *by* ELYSE GLICKMAN

While there's always a place to explore inventive and innovative food offerings at cuisine-driven hotels around the world, we're taking a detour down The Rhine River, from Amsterdam to Basel via Germany and France aboard the AmaSiena, one of the newest ships in the AmaWaterways fleet. A well conceived cruise ship is a fantastic hotel that moves from place to place and always ensures a great view.

Because some younger travellers perceive cruise experiences as the domain of retirees or families with small children, AmaWaterways co-founders Rudi Schreiner and Kristin Karst have dedicated much of the last two decades figuring out how to make cruising something other than a floating theme park. Although there's nothing wrong with the traditional cruise ship vacation, this award-winning travel industry power

couple recognizes that to keep cruising relevant for Generation X and Millennials, food and beverage programs play a critical role.

"A major change that happened (during the pandemic) with this ship and others in our European fleet was that we eliminated buffet-style service and introduced a new food program where every meal is made to every guest's needs and tastes," said Schreiner on the AmaSerena's christening day in Rüdesheim, the heart of the German Rhineland's wine country. "Fine dining is not buffet dining. It's about sitting down, experiencing excellent service and enjoying a made-to-order meal rather than waiting in line. COVID and the health concerns arising simply presented us with the perfect moment to make this change."

Karst, meanwhile, observes that foods authentic to a given destination and a farm-to-table approach are increasingly important in reinventing the cruise experience. Main dining room meals beginning with a colourful assortment of regional bites, and a cheese cart rolled out after dinner, serve as a sensory links between the kitchen and each destination. Soups, salads and main courses are crafted and seasoned according to what's available at each destination.

This is exactly what guests were greeted with when lunch was served in the AmaSiena's main dining room when it set sail in Amsterdam. The city is known for its seafood (especially pickled herring) and affinity for Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern restaurants. A selection of bar snacks such as battered shrimp, vegetables and fish spread, were followed by a Thai-inspired coconut and vegetable soup and choice of a vegetarian falafel plate or trout with seasonal zucchini and root vegetables.

As the boat headed toward Cologne on the second day, appetizers awaiting guests on every table included devilled eggs, and a small sampling of a chilled beef stew, followed by a broccoli soup and rack of lamb. Toward Heidelberg, the meal started with bratwurst, pickled vegetables and vegetable fritters. As the Alsace region of France rounded out the journey, there were plenty of soft or pungent cheeses to choose from that were very different from the gouda and edam available earlier in the week.

As elaborate gourmet meals can be overwhelming before or after a rigorous bike ride or hike, passengers can always opt for a much lighter breakfast or lunch in the lounge on the main deck. Menus have a few items also served in the main restaurant (such as the new "healthy bowl" of the day) along with yogurts, simple egg dishes, soups, sandwiches, burgers and salads. The lounge menu is also updated every day based on whatever the chefs bring in from local markets and purveyors, and there's also a full tea service offered late afternoon followed by a cocktail hour with a featured libation.

The new dining program also ties in with expanded fitness and wellness options aboard the ships and at the various ports of call, including hike and bike excursions in Cologne, Heidelberg and Strasbourg, all known for cycling paths and hiking trails that have historic and architectural highlights along the routes. With the constant goal to keep younger and more active guests moving, the kitchen needed to balance a demand for regional fare with the desire for a healthy intake.



SERVES 4

Rhineland Potato Pancakes

Reibekuchen

REIBEKUCHEN MIT APFELMUS, *potato pancakes with applesauce*, are a classic pairing in the Rhineland. The crispy fried treats, similar to Jewish latkes, are sold in street stalls, especially in Cologne, Germany.

1 **WRAP** the potatoes in a clean cloth and squeeze out the liquid.

2 **COMBINE** the potatoes with the onion, eggs, salt and pepper and mix well.

3 **PORTION** mixture with small ladle and fry in hot oil on both sides until golden-brown.

4 **SERVE** with applesauce.

Recipe courtesy of AmaWaterways.

Chef Robert Kellerhals, an alumnus of the Culinary School of Switzerland and some of Europe's top hotels, was tasked with the mission of upgrading the culinary experience — including the addition of more diverse vegan and vegetarian options — while remaining true to AmaWaterways' existing reputation for refined on-board dining. This encompasses a special meal (often staged toward the end of the cruise) curated under the direction of *Chaine de Rotisseurs*, the world's oldest international gastronomic society, founded in Paris in 1248.

In accordance to the *Chaine*'s manifesto, the meal showcases a variety of techniques and international dishes. While things like a filet of Argentine beef or John Dory may be familiar to well travelled guests, fresh modern touches bring something new to the table. This includes everything from produce brought in from a farmer's market at that day's port of call to seasonings and sauces inspired by the home country of the cooks and chefs on a particular boat's team.»



AMAWATERWAYS

SERVES 4

Terrific Turnip Soup

IN RECENT years, root vegetables such as turnips have experienced a renaissance of sorts. This soup is one of AmaWaterways' most frequently requested recipes.

Turnips 1 1/2 lbs, peeled and sliced

Turnip Greens or Spinach thinly sliced, 1 1/2 cups, divided

Extra Virgin Olive Oil 2 Tbs, divided

Butter
1 Tbs

Onion
1 medium, sliced

Dried Rosemary
1/2 tsp

Salt 1/2 tsp plus a pinch, divided

Freshly Ground White Pepper
1/4 tsp plus a pinch, divided

Reduced Sodium Chicken Broth
4 cups

Carrot shredded, 1/4 cup

Scallion Greens
thinly sliced, 2 Tbs

White Wine Vinegar
2 tsp

1 HEAT 1 Tbs olive oil and the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until beginning to brown, about 5 minutes.

2 ADD the turnips, rosemary, 1/2 tsp salt and 1/4 tsp white pepper; stir to combine. Cover and cook, stirring once or twice, for 10 minutes.

3 ADD the broth, increase the heat to high and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer, cover and cook until the turnips are tender, 10 to 12 minutes more.

4 MEANWHILE, toss the turnip greens (or spinach) in a medium bowl with carrot, scallion greens, vinegar, the remaining olive oil and pinch of salt and pepper.

5 PURÉE the soup in the pan using an immersion blender or transfer to a regular blender and blend until smooth. (Use caution when pureeing hot liquids.) Serve each portion of soup topped with a generous 1/4 cup of the salad.

Recipe courtesy of
AmaWaterways.

«There's also a tasting meal prepared every night in the "Chef's Table" restaurant at the stern of the boat, which is outfitted with a small open concept kitchen and affords panoramic views of the castles along the Rhine. The eight-course degustation (which guests reserve ahead of time on the night of their choice, and can only do once) includes several items that are more contemporary and experimental, drawing inspiration from some of Schreiner's favourite spots in Los Angeles. Aboard the inaugural sailing of the AmaSiena, dishes such as tomato carpaccio with eggplant "caviar," beetroot-infused marinated salmon, lemongrass soup with oyster mushrooms, and prime beef with truffle jus and sweet potato are paired with regional wines.

"With a stronger emphasis on wellness from a dining and fitness standpoint, we really worked hard to find a balance between protein and vegetarian options," says Kellerhals. "Like many cruise lines, we offered vegetarian and vegan pasta dishes. However, we now recognize vegetarians, vegans and those with special diets are looking for variety. Every day, our culinary team works to develop dishes that are original, creative and beautifully plated while being inspired by the locations we are visiting."

As passengers need to fill out questionnaires to ensure a fully-customized cruise experience, dietary restrictions and requirements are part of preparation for every sailing well in advance. Even with complete details on every passenger on a given sailing in hand, Kellerhals emphasizes the importance of getting to know passengers at the start of the cruise to discuss their needs and preferences to ensure they don't miss out on what makes the AmaWaterways culinary aspect so exciting for omnivores. From there, whether the passenger is vegan, diabetic, lactose intolerant or maintains a Kosher or Halal diet, he keeps them updated daily of menu options he feels they'll enjoy.

"I am enjoying the learning process of creating plant-based dishes even omnivores will enjoy," says Kellerhals. "Like any other dish, a good vegetarian or vegan dish is all about how well the components and ingredients come together. Because we work with so many different kinds of guests with a variety of needs, developing vegetarian and vegan recipes is now a part of our everyday routine."

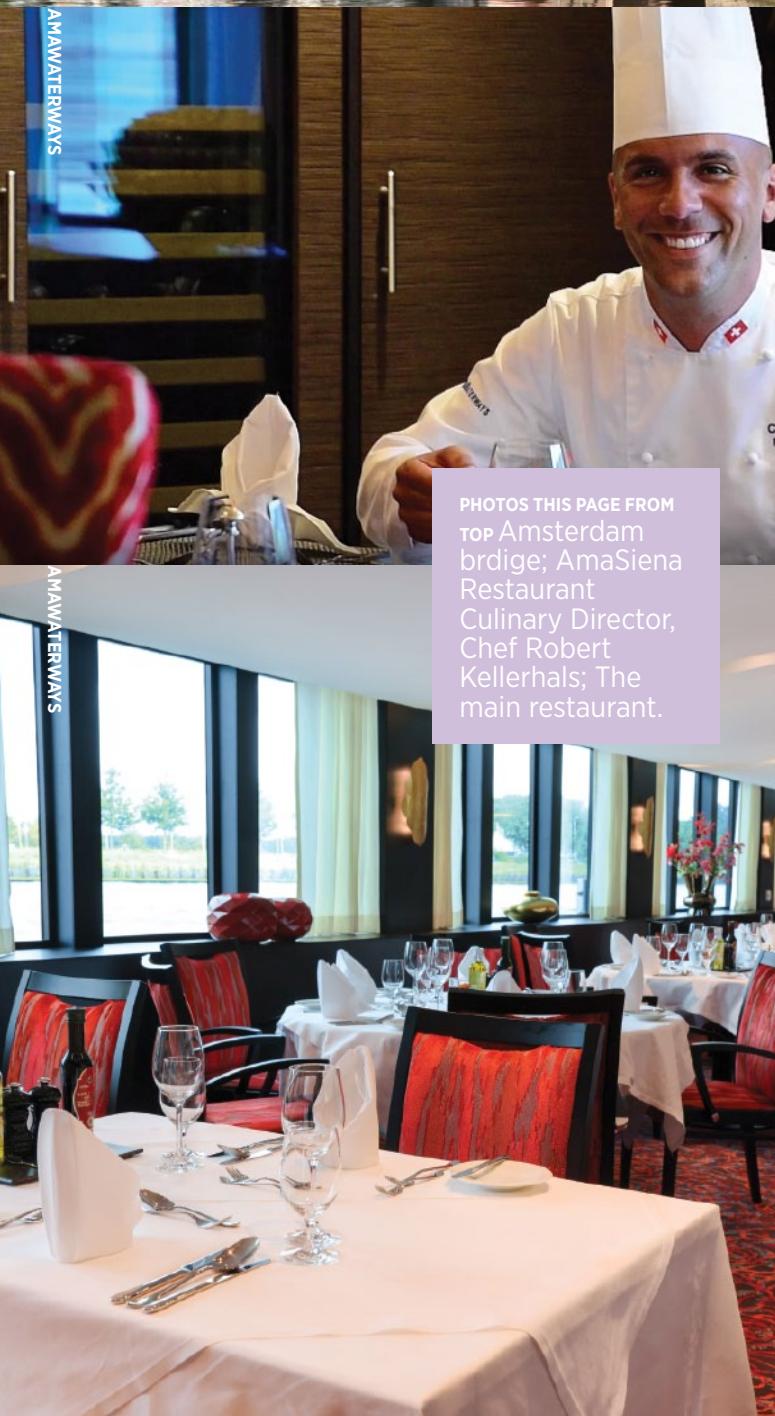
With pride, Karst mentions that AmaWaterways was the first river cruise line to be inducted into the prestigious *Tables et Auberges de France*, which, like *Chaine de Rotisseurs*, recognizes exceptional regional gastronomy.

As the culinary team of the AmaSiena is made up of people from around the globe, their ability to bring a global outlook and a farm-to-table mindset aboard a floating hotel is no small feat, and tailoring it to passengers from Europe, North America and Asia traveling on the same journey makes it all the more impressive... truly a moving feast. 



www.amawaterways.com

ELYSE GLICKMAN is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.



PHOTOS THIS PAGE FROM
TOP Amsterdam bridge; AmaSiena
Restaurant Culinary Director,
Chef Robert Kellerhals; The
main restaurant.



SERVES 1

Rüdesheimer Coffee

RÜDESHEIM, ONE of the featured stops along AMAWaterways' Captivating Rhine route and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is beloved for its historic buildings, terraced vineyards, and nuanced wines. This heart-warming winter cocktail, which captures the town in gastronomic form, may feel old world. However, it was invented by German television personality Hans Karl Adam in 1957 and has since become a year-round favourite.

Asbach Uralt¹ 1 1/3 oz

Sugar Cubes 3

Brewed Coffee
6-8 oz

**Whipped Heavy
Cream** to taste

**Grated Dark
Chocolate**
to taste

¹ A dry, aged brandy such as Cognac, Armagnac, Brandy de Jerez, or any other quality German or California grape brandy will do.

1 **HEAT** the brandy in a microwave-safe container for 1 minute at 600 watts or over hot water.

2 **PUT** three sugar cubes in a coffee cup.

3 **ADD** the hot liquor and light with a long match.

4 **STIR** with a long-stemmed spoon so that the sugar dissolves well and allow the flame to burn for about one minute.

5 **TOP** off to just about an inch below the edge of the cup with hot coffee.

6 **PUT** a dollop of whipped cream, sweetened with vanilla sugar, on top and add dark chocolate sprinkles.

Recipe courtesy of AmaWaterways.