

CRUISING

The New Prime

Cruise lines showcase artisanal butchery and culinary lineage at sea. BY CASANDRA KARPIAK



High Seas Steakhouse:
MSC Seascapes's
Butcher's Cut
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My 11-year-old son stared silently at his plate of Wagyu beef. He studied the marbling of his premium cut, still shocked I said “Yes” when he asked if he could order it. He cut into it carefully, then took his first bite. He looked up almost immediately, eyes wide, as if he had discovered something he did not expect to find at sea.

For decades the cruise ship steakhouse followed a predictable formula of white tablecloths, shrimp cocktail and a dependable filet mignon. That era is evolving as cruise lines export specific culinary philosophies to the middle of the ocean by shining a light on the butcher's provenance and the menu's geographic soul without abandoning the classics.

When I sailed with my husband and two sons on *MSC Seascapes*, the steakhouse — traditionally a quiet, adult-dominated enclave — became our favorite social hour. At Butcher's Cut the atmosphere

felt simultaneously like a high-end Manhattan grill and a welcoming family kitchen. For a 13-year-old, the spectacle of a massive tomahawk steak being presented proves just as engaging as any onboard entertainment.

As the waiter carved the showpiece bone-in ribeye tableside, the conversation moved from the day's excursions to the craft of the perfect char. For once, my teenagers cared more about the Maillard reaction than their TikTok feeds.

The concept leans on an American steakhouse identity, sourcing premium cuts from Meat by Linz to maintain a link to the Midwest even in the heart of the Mediterranean. An MSC spokesperson noted this balance is intentional: “We focus heavily on the quality and selection of the meat but also on how it's prepared and presented. The service and atmosphere play a big role. Guests are not just coming for a meal but for a full dining experience.”



On Princess Cruises, the steakhouse draws on an eight-generation lineage dating back to the 1700s in Panzano in Chianti, Tuscany. By partnering with Dario Cecchini, the “World’s Most Famous Butcher,” Princess imports a specific Tuscan soul to the high seas.

“Dario Cecchini was a natural partner for Princess. His philosophy around food goes far beyond cooking — it’s about respect, tradition and bringing people together,” said Sami Kohen, vice president, Food & Beverage, Princess Cruises. The Butcher’s Block by Dario focuses on traceability and “responsible carnivorous,” using the whole animal to create a communal, hands-on affair.

As a parent, I find myself drawn to a model replicating the warmth of a shared Italian table. Executing that level of craft on board presents challenges most land-based kitchens never face. Kohen acknowledged it’s a logistical challenge to ensure the intramuscular fat of a premium cut remains perfectly preserved until it hits the high-heat broiler.

“Delivering an authentic, butchery-driven experience at sea requires weighing tradition with the realities of shipboard operations,” said Kohen. “This style of dining relies heavily on technique, timing and well-trained culinary teams who understand not only the craft of butchery but also the philosophy and storytelling behind it.”

While Princess leans into heritage, Holland America Line has mastered the art of the adaptive standard. The cruise line’s steakhouse is a chameleon, shifting its flavor profile to match the horizon. This philosophy turns the dining room into a map of the ship’s journey, changing as the coordinates do.

“We like to let our itineraries influence the menu,” said Marisa Christenson, associate vice president, Food & Beverage Operations, Holland America Line. “That might mean Alaska crab and corn chowder when we’re sailing Alaska or Norwegian-style cured salmon gravlax in Northern Europe.”

For my family, this geographic intelligence is what makes a meal memorable; it tethers the dining occasion to the world outside the window. Christensen noted while the classics — like the jumbo lump



crab cakes and tableside Caesar — remain staples, the true essence of Pinnacle Grill lies in the service. “They remember preferences, they anticipate what guests might want next,” she explained. “The service is confident and attentive. Nothing feels rushed, and nothing slips through the cracks.”

Holland America’s commitment to the steakhouse sensibility successfully exported this DNA to the shore. The Canyon Ridge Grill at Denali Lodge serves guest favorites like David Burke’s clothesline candied bacon with flavors rooted in the Alaskan wilderness. Even at the base of a mountain, the goal remains the same: A familiar, high-stakes excellence that feels distinctly local. “It’s familiar in the best way but still unmistakably Alaskan,” shared Christensen.

The era of the one-size-fits-all cruise buffet is receding into the wake. In its place lies a new maritime standard as carefully curated as the itinerary itself. By bridging the gap between Midwest ranching, Tuscan tradition and modern logistics, cruise lines prove the middle of the ocean doesn’t have to result in a culinary compromise.

Princess Premium Fare:
Princess Cruises’ The Butcher’s Block by Dario (top left), Holland America’s Pinnacle Grill candied bacon (top right), and Pinnacle Grill ribeye steak (bottom)

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