



## **Cruise Lines Embrace Cultural Immersion by Bringing the Destination on Board**

By Erica Silverstein

The [2026 Virtuoso Luxe Report](#) ranked “cultural immersion” as the #4 trend in travel and cruise lines are ready for it. Cruise lines have found creative—and delicious—ways to bring regional culture to their guests.

From cuisine tied to the day’s port of call to local experts and performers holding court in ship theaters, cruise lines more than ever are tying on-ship activities to the destinations they sail.

### **Cruise lines embrace regional cuisine**

Trying new foods, especially regional specialties, has always been important to most travelers. A new trend is cited in [American Express Travel’s 2026 Global Travel Trends Report](#) – 89% of Millennials and Gen Z surveyed say they want to enjoy local snacks.

Cruisers can enjoy some culinary risk-taking and immersion on board, not just during time ashore.

Silversea Cruises has embraced this trend, introducing the S.A.L.T. (Sea And Land Taste) program in 2021 on its Silver Moon, and expanding the program to other ships in the fleet, including the newest ships Silver Ray and Silver Nova. Guests can learn about regional cuisine through expert-led lectures, cooking demos, and hands-on cooking classes. S.A.L.T. Kitchen and S.A.L.T. Bar change their food and drink menus throughout the cruise to highlight ingredients and recipes from the current port of call.

Alaska specialists Holland America Line and Princess Cruises are committed to serving locally sourced, sustainable seafood on their Alaska sailings. Holland America specifically highlights an array of Alaskan ingredients at themed brunches and dinners and offers a special menu of Alaska-inspired cocktails, cooled by glacial ice.

On select Arctic cruises, in Greenland and the Northwest Passage, Quark Expeditions’ Tundra to Table dinner introduces guests to Inuit and Nunavut dishes, starring ingredients like musk ox and ptarmigan, prepared by visiting Inuit chefs. HX Expeditions features a Greenlandic culinary program, bringing aboard a rotating roster of local chefs, partnering with QAJAC Brewery to offer Greenlandic craft beer on its ships, and pledging to procure 30% of food products from regional purveyors.

### **Local crew and guest performers bring their culture on board**

The cruise industry has long known the power of personal interactions between guests and crew of diverse nationalities and continues to prioritize bringing locals on board to educate, entertain and interact with passengers.

On AmaWaterways’ two new ships on Colombia’s Magdalena River, every crew member is Colombian – even the captains. Polynesia-immersive Paul Gauguin has always sailed with Tahitian hosts, Les

Gaugins and Les Gauguines, who share their culture through song, dance, and crafts. The Paul Gauguin also brings performers from the islands on board for culturally relevant evening entertainment.

Iditarod winners, mountain climbers, and Alaskan authors share their journeys and Alaskan heritage with Princess Cruises guests through the line's North to Alaska program. However, its most popular cultural program might be the sled dog puppies it brings into its Piazzas for guests to adore.

Azamara introduced Stories Under the Stars, a program that invites destination experts on board to share folklore and local mythology with guests while they enjoy campfire-style desserts and drinks on the pool deck. The line also offers a Destination Showcase event, pairing a regionally inspired meal with a performance from local entertainers.

### **Cultural programming infuses onboard activities with local flair**

Cruise lines are enhancing their daily activity schedules with programming related to the ship's destination. On the new Celebrity Xcel, Celebrity Cruises has dedicated an entire section of the ship to cultural immersion. The Bazaar will feature a market selling the wares of Caribbean and Mexican artisans, restaurants and cooking classes themed to regional flavors and dishes, and onboard "festivals," celebrating with music, dance, and costumes—inspired by the Bahamas, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and the Cayman Islands.

Princess Cruises offers a mix of cultural enrichment programs on its Japan cruises. The captain will kick off the cruise by breaking open a cask of sake as part of a Japanese welcome ceremony. Guests can make paper flowers and try other local crafts, enjoy *rakugo* (traditional comic) storytelling and learn from regional expert lecturers. Plus, the Diamond Princess has a Japanese-style bathing spa, with indoor and outdoor pools, for cruisers to experience relaxing *onsen*.

Onboard cultural immersion through dining, programming, and entertainment is only the starting point. Travelers also have the opportunity to embrace local experiences through the lines' extensive shore excursion programs and via their own independent shoreside activities.

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