



Fresh From the Source: Local Suppliers Feed Cruisers

By Zachary Laks

Before dawn breaks over Kodiak, Alaska, the rush of the morning has already begun as crews unload the morning's catch: wild salmon, halibut, and Pacific cod still slick with icy seawater. Within hours, the day's bounty will be cleaned, packed, and transported onto the plates of cruise ship guests.

In Alaska, Seattle, and beyond, local sourcing connects communities directly to the food served on visiting cruise ships. Collaborations with Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) member cruise lines ensure that local businesses benefit directly from cruise tourism – while guests reap the benefit of enjoying food that reflects the places they visit.

For small-scale local suppliers such as fisheries, fruit and vegetable farms, pasta makers, and cheesemakers, partnering with cruise lines can sustain an entire season's livelihood.

A foodie renaissance at sea

Cruise ship guests are increasingly interested in how onboard dining reflects the regions they visit. In response, cruise lines are expanding relationships with suppliers in the ports they visit to bring local flavors on board.

In Puerto Rico, producers such as family owned Martex Farms provide cruise ships with fresh high-quality produce such as bananas and mangos.

In Seattle, cruise lines work with local purveyors such as Sterino Farms in Puyallup, Wash., a provider of produce that allows chefs on Holland America Line ships to showcase the best local products. Cruise guests reap the benefits of fresh flavors. Charlie's Produce is another leading supplier of fresh fruits and vegetables to cruise ships bound for Alaska, a trusted Pacific Northwest supplier with long-standing relationships with local farms for fresh produce.

Across Europe, small farms, cheesemakers, pasta makers, and fishmongers likewise work with CLIA members, providing seasonal products for cruise guests to enjoy. Conor SRL, based in Bologna, Italy connects farmers and cruise ships, distributing high-quality fruit and vegetables to ports across the Mediterranean and Northern Europe.

In northern Germany, AIDA Cruises treats guests to strawberries from Karls Farm in Rövershagen throughout the summer. The initiative reflects the line's commitment to using locally grown products – in this case fresh strawberries – supporting the regional economy and offering passengers a taste of Germany.

For local farms, aligning harvests with the cruise season allows growers to plan production around guaranteed demand, and to keep their businesses going beyond peak tourism season.

Direct from the source

For sailings in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, small-scale fisheries work with cruise lines to seamlessly source local catches for daily menus.

In Alaska and elsewhere, CLIA member lines such as Royal Caribbean, Norwegian Cruise Line, and Holland America Line are increasingly partnering with seafood organizations to adhere to the highest sustainability standards in sourcing products. These include the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), a nonprofit that supports sustainable fishing practices globally. As part of their commitment to sustainable sourcing, Holland America Line is also partnering with the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI).

Royal Caribbean's sustainable efforts in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska include partnerships with local suppliers such as the Seafood Producers Cooperative and Alaska Specialty Seafood, to source fresh seafood and other regional products.

Beyond Alaska, Holland America Line, as an example, works with European companies such as Schmidt Zeevis in Rotterdam and Bjerrfisk in Frederikshavn, Netherlands, to supply fish caught each morning, ensuring guests on European cruises fresh tastes of the sea.

MSC Cruises and Explora Journeys source most of their food locally in Europe and beyond, such as chocolate and gelato from Venchi, based in Italy's Piedmont region

Guests on Norwegian Cruise Line ships in Texas and Louisiana get a taste of local dairy thanks to the line's collaboration with supplier Café Azul to procure award-winning milk from Volleman's Family Farm, a fourth-generation, family operated farm in Gustine, Texas.

From shore to ship

Sourcing locally isn't just a smart choice; it's how CLIA members enhance the onboard experience. Whether that's a server who can offer the precise origin of the day's catch or opportunity to indulge in a decadent cheese handmade just miles from the day's port, these local infusions deliver both quality and sense of place.

Through smart sourcing cruise lines link to coastal communities, helping local food producers thrive.

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