

**Ultimate Guide to the Main Dining Room Experience on a Cruise
with Expert Tips and Insights**



Are you setting sail soon and curious about dining in the main dining room on a cruise? Dining is one of the highlights of any cruise experience, offering a variety of culinary delights with something for every fastidious tastebud. Having been on over 40 cruises with various lines through the ages, I can share insights and tips to make your main dining room experience exceptional.

What to Expect in the Main Dining Room

1. Dining Room Inclusion

- **Included in Your Fare:** The main dining room is included in your cruise fare. It offers a sit-down dinner every evening, with breakfast and lunch available on most sea days with a first come first served basis in only 1 restaurant as most people enjoy the buffet for breakfast and lunch instead..
- **Additional Dining Options:** Casual dining options such as poolside grills, pizza, and sandwich shops are typically included. Specialty restaurants usually have an extra charge.

2. Seating Arrangements

- **Traditional vs. Flexible Seating:** You can choose between traditional fixed dining times (early or late seating) and flexible dining options.
- **Table Sharing:** You can opt to share a table with other guests or dine privately with your party. Sharing a table can be a great way to meet new people.

3. Dining Options by Cruise Line

- **Flexible Dining Names:** Different cruise lines have unique names for flexible dining—Royal Caribbean's "My Time Dining," Celebrity's "Select Dining," Princess' "Dine My Way," Holland America's "As You Wish Dining," Norwegian's "Freestyle Dining," and Carnival's "Anytime Dining."

Tips for a Great Dining Experience

1. Punctuality

- **Be On Time:** For traditional dining, arrive on time to respect the schedule and other guests. For flexible dining, timely arrival is also courteous and helps avoid waits.

2. Etiquette

- **Conversation:** Avoid controversial topics like politics or religion to ensure pleasant dining experiences for everyone at your table.

3. Service Speed

- **Requesting Quick Service:** If you have plans after dinner, inform your waiter that you need quicker service. Ordering your dessert and coffee with your main course can also save time.

4. Menu Variety

- **Changing Menus:** The menu changes nightly, offering a variety of appetizers, main courses, and desserts. Classic dishes are available every night for consistent options.

5. Multiple Orders

- **Trying Different Dishes:** Feel free to order multiple appetizers or main courses if you want to try different dishes. Sharing with tablemates is also acceptable.

6. Formal Nights

- **Special Evenings:** Formal nights feature upscale menus with dishes like lobster and prime rib. Dressing up adds to the experience, but check your cruise line's specific dress code. On MSC Cruises South Africa, special evenings are usually on cruises of 4 nights or more.

7. Dress Code

- **Appropriate Attire:** Dress codes vary but generally include casual, smart casual, and formal nights. Avoid pool wear and check specifics before packing. You could be turned away from a restaurant if you are not properly attired.

8. Wine and Drinks

- **Bringing Your Own Wine:** Most cruise lines allow one bottle of wine per person. A corkage fee applies if consumed in the dining room, but you can bring a glass without a fee. Unfinished bottles can usually be stored for future meals but please do find out from your waitron..

9. Changing Tables

- **Requesting Changes:** If you're unhappy with your table or dining companions, speak to the Maître D' to request a change for subsequent meals.

10. Politeness and Tipping

- **Respecting Staff:** Be courteous to your dining staff, use their names, and express gratitude. Additional tipping is appreciated but not mandatory.

Final Thoughts

The main dining room is a central aspect of the cruise experience, combining great food, exceptional service, and a pleasant atmosphere. By following these tips and understanding what to expect, you can ensure a delightful dining experience on your next cruise.

On MSC ships in South Africa, I usually enjoy my 5-star dining experience, then I go up to the buffet to investigate what else is being offered.