

BAHAMAS: The Love Boat's New Chocolate Voyage

By Vicki Arkoff

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All aboard for the sweet life with Princess Cruises' new cocoa temptations.



Regal Princess

Hurricane season aside, the balmy Caribbean is always enticing, especially during the throes of a chilly USA winter. But [Princess Cruises](#) really knocked my thermal socks off when I boarded their newest ship, the huge 3,600-passenger Regal Princess, to embark on the maiden voyage of the dramatically expanded “Chocolate Journeys” program. Yep, it’s all about chocolate, 24/7, and it’s the most expansive gourmet desserts program on the ocean. Impressively, the endeavor is spearheaded by one of the world’s top master chocolatiers, Norman Love, the former Godiva specialty chocolatier whose [Norman Love Confections](#) team now produces 55,000 hand-painted, gourmet chocolate candies on a daily basis. (Love on the Love Boat. It’s a match made in sweet heaven.)

To celebrate Princess Cruise’s 50th anniversary, Norman Love worked with the cruise line to create a new onboard experience that includes premium chocolate offerings for desserts, cocktails, candy-making demos, chocolate/wine tastings, turn-down service pillow treats, and even spa treatments at the ship’s Lotus Spa. By the end of 2016, it’ll be available throughout the 18-ship fleet.



Master Chocolatier Norman Love. Photos by Vicki Arkoff.

Once I was on board, it didn't take long for the chocolate celebration to start. As the Regal Princess embarked from Ft. Lauderdale's Port Everglades, the ship's horns blasted the Love Boat Theme, and the bubbly corks popped while Love's new "Chocolate Love Pop" truffles-on-a-stick were served on the Lido pool deck. At dinner in the main Symphony dining room we were served the first of 15 new chocolate desserts that will be rotated nightly in all shipboard restaurants. Chocolate Tiramisu with Mascarpone Cream and Espresso Gelato? Yes, please.



Chocolate Tiramisu

A Private Bahamas Resort Fit for Royalty: Princess Cays

The onboard food was almost enough to make me forget our sailing destinations: we were on a two island sampler tour of the eastern Caribbean Sea. This was clear when I awoke and stepped outside onto my stateroom veranda: a picture-perfect rainbow, warm sunshine, and a white sand beach greeted me. We had quietly anchored off the southern shore of the Eleuthera Island in the Bahamas.

“The name of the sea itself comes from the Carib people, the last group to rule the area before the arrival of the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, Danish and British,” the ship’s charming British captain, John Foster, told me that morning. “This particular cruise features Princess Cays and Grand Turk, both of which offer the perfect blend of history, relaxation, and adventure.”



Princess Cays Resort

Tenders took us from the ship to Princess Cays, the cruise line's private 40-acre beach resort with everything needed for a giant beach party: music, four beach bars, two BBQ lunch spots, a variety of coves for swimming and watersports, and reefs for snorkeling. Everywhere you looked were rows of complimentary beach lounges for perfecting your beach bum skills, and for a few extra clams you could rent shaded clamshells, or even private bungalows for some peace and quiet. For adventure there were lots of rental sailboards, paddle boards, banana boat rides, and fishing gear (in case you're tempted to the make like Ernest Hemmingway who was repeatedly drawn to Bahamas).

Eleuthera's 19th Century Charm & 21st Century Ease

Regal Princess passengers had total run of the place so it felt like a private island, but it was actually the southern-most stretch of land attached to the thin, 100-mile-tall island of Eleuthera, known as the "birthplace of the Bahamas." To get a taste of the island's local culture and British heritage, I hopped a bus for a southern island tour of brightly-painted villages and picturesque churches dating back to the 1800s. We peered into Rock Sound, an ocean hole with a seemingly endless bottom and visited a local grade school where the school children were happy to have foreign guests — mainly because it meant singing and snacks instead of "maths."



Junkanoo celebration. Photo by Vicki Arkoff

We had delicious jerk chicken and conch fritters for lunch, watched a conch salad-making demonstration, and were treated to a joyful, colorful, and out-of-season Junkanoo celebration of drumming and dancing. The celebrity homes of Mariah Carey and Lenny Kravitz were too far north to see, but in the sleepy, 19th century town of Tarpum Bay we spied two fishermen with a small catch to sell, and few inebriated men seeking shade under hand-made signs exclaiming “No Swearing.” “I know I told you that Tarpum Bay is a fishing village,” our lively local tour guide Terika confessed, “but the truth is that it’s a drinking village with a fishing problem.”

Between stops and Barritt’s ginger beers, we learned about local bush medicine remedies and picked up some slang. “Potcakes” are the benign stray mutts that wander the islands. “Sky juice” is the potent fermented coconut drink that the locals make. “Zipzip” is gossip and “Tingum” is the person you’re secretly gossiping about when they’re nearby. “Everyone knows everyone else here and we are glad to share what we know,” Terika grinned.