

SHIPSHAPE: Cunard was first, but other cruise lines are muscling in on consumer interest in sea-going spas, gymnastics and on-deck exercise Programs. Passenger list gets fit not fat

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"DECK potatoes, stretch those thighs," a tawny aerobics trainer commands on the Sovereign of the Seas. Behind her a deck full of would-be jocks get their hearts pumping to Madonna's insistent lyrics. When they finish their morning workout, these cruise passengers will claim "dollars" which they can redeem for yellow t-shirts and visors.

Passengers used to win points by scoring the last chocolate eclair at the Midnight Buffet; today they win points by attending aerobics classes and jogging around the Promenade Deck. On Princess ships guests who register for Cruisercise collect coins; on Holland America ships their Passport to Fitness is stamped every time they walk a mile or choose a low-calorie meal. The emphasis on "getting physical" does more than offset unwanted pounds; it motivates passenger to adopt healthy habits while they're on vacation.

"All our programs respond to passengers' desire to be active," says Royal Caribbean's Rich Steck. "We even have people who'll bring their bikes so that they can take off when the ship's in port."

With younger passengers cruising every year, the trend toward fitness is clear, and cruise lines are gearing up to meet that challenge.

"Our new Fantasy has the largest health-and-fitness centre afloat," says Carnival Cruise Line's Jennifer De La Cruz. "We wouldn't commit this much space to exercising unless our passengers wanted it." The Fantasy's 3,658-square-metre Nautica Spa includes a glass-enclosed gym with ocean views, an exercise room for aerobics and dance classes, six massage rooms for aroma therapy and loofah treatments, co-ed whirlpools under skylights, and a jogging track.

"We're seeing a trend toward more health-conscious habits," says De La Cruz, "and we're revising our diet and fitness options accordingly."

"Going to sea, like going to Heaven, gives everyone a fresh start," wrote humorist Richard Gordon. In fact, many passengers are taking advantage of the relaxed atmosphere, enthusiastic staff, and free, state-of-the-art equipment to start working out for the first time in their lives. They ease in gradually with morning calisthenics and a 1,500-metre

walk around the deck, then they might join a dance class or spend a half-hour on the treadmill to work up a sweat. Certified counselors can explain and demonstrate the weight training machines that flex specific areas of the body.

G Pelliteri fitness director for Royal Cruise Line, works with elderly passengers many of whom have arthritis, heart ailments, or are recovering from surgery. For them Pelliteri uses Therabands, wide elastic that helps strengthen shoulders, neck, and arms. "Sit and Be Fit" classes teach exercises that can be performed in a chair, and water workouts are ideal for relaxing and toning muscles.

Royal Cruises' program has scored a hit with seniors who want to make constructive changes in their lifestyles. A positive mental attitude is often the key.

"I have files of letters from passengers grateful to be shown that exercising is fun," says Pelliteri. One of her converts, a college football referee, started his first exercise routine on board the Crown Odyssey.

To complement workouts, Royal, like many cruise lines, invites health professionals to talk on stress reduction, nutrition, developing self-esteem, and preventing heart disease.

"I start every cruise with a slide show that shows passengers they don't have a gain weight if they eat sensibly and exercise daily," says Pelliteri.

The first health spa at sea was developed by Cunard Line and the Golden Door in 1983, and it's still one of Cunard's strongest selling points. Passenger can log as many as 20 daily classes at no extra charge; ashore, California's Golden Door Spa costs \$4,165 (Canadian) a week and has a long waiting list.

"Only our most knowledgeable and experienced fitness staff are invited to join the Spa-at-Sea program," say director Teri Suhre. "This ensures that cruise guests receive the same high level of instruction and supervision as our guests on land." Fitness achievers are honored with "Losing While Cruising" and "Aerobic Animal" awards at a non-alcoholic cocktail party.

"Our passengers are increasingly health-conscious," says Olaus Strand, Cunard's assistant vice-president of passenger services.

"We stock bran products, non-alcoholic beer and wine, and low-calorie

menu items. If guests let us know in advance they want a certain diet food or drink, we'll go buy it for them."

Most cruise lines prepare menu entrees approved by the American Heart Association for reduced fat, calories, and salt. These heart-healthy dishes include chicken breast with pineapple (588 calories), salmon and steamed vegetables (379 calories), and spinach fettucine (522 calories). For breakfast, choose an egg-substitute omelet, non-fat milk pancakes, and fresh fruit and you won't feel like a cholesterol casualty. For lunch, try the salad bar.

Regent Sun's Club Physique offers the most personalized weight loss program afloat. Its Futurex 5000 Body and Fitness Computer measures what percentage of a person's body weight is water, fat, and lean pounds. Based on the results, counsellors can design a customized diet and exercise regimen.

Sports enthusiasts needn't save their strength for shore excursions; they can practice their golf drive, play volleyball, paddle tennis, basketball, and even learn scuba diving and snorkeling at sea. Billing itself the "Athlete's Fleet," Norwegian Cruise Line's Supersport cruises team guest pros with passengers for workshops and personal instruction. When was the last time you went one-on-one with the NBA's Moses Malone or Byron Scott?

"The watchword for cruises in the '90s will be active, not passive, fun," predicts Royal Caribbean's Rich Steck. So when you hear rock music shaking the walls at 7 a.m. it's not the last of the disco crowd; it's the early-morning workout crowd in their Reeboks and sweats.