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ALASKA - A FEAST OF SALMON AND SCENERY

By [Barbara Ann Rosenberg](#)

"Would you like to go shopping with us for fresh salmon? asked a friendly female voice at the other end of the phone line. "Not in a supermarket. Not in a fish store.... at the source! In Ketchikan, Alaska. In the company (no less) of Michel Roux, owner of a Michelin three- star restaurant and Executive Chef of the Celebrity Cruise Line!"

The voice continued with even more enticements "We will be sailing," she said, "on a maiden voyage of the spanking new cruise ship Galaxy that carries almost 1900 passengers. We will board in Vancouver, British Columbia to sail through the Inside Passage en route to Alaska where we will meet Chef Roux in Juneau, capitol of the state and one of the stops on the trip."

Even better...the friendly voice went on..."The chef will plan a special dinner for us- - Salmon, of course, and Alaskan halibut -- and perhaps even some red snapper!" Then, in a day or so (my geography of Alaska and the distances between ports, was, to put it mildly, sketchy!) we would be stopping in Ketchikan to shop for the ingredients for the feast ...or, to "provision," as they put it in nautical terms!

When I recovered from my initial surprise and delight at having been invited to take part in this wonderful adventure, my head went into a "full speed ahead" fantasy. We would meet the chef, and (I imagined) in the style made famous by stellar chef Paul Bocuse when he meandered through the endless markets along the quays in Lyon, France, we would examine prod and poke the vegetables, the fruits, the fish, just as he did in search of the very best for his elegant restaurant in Collonges-au-Mont-d'Or. I fantasized that we would reproduce that scenario in Ketchikan.

I would have leaped at the chance to meet Chef Roux again even if it wasn't in Alaska (where I had yearned to go, but somehow, until now, found myself always heading in different directions.) The man was so charming, so debonaire, so mischievous - - so quintessentially French! We had met a few years before when my husband and I were traveling through Berkshire, and had stopped at his glorious small hotel/restaurant, the Waterside Inn, located at a scenic curve on the Thames, about an hour from London. However, notwithstanding the fact that Chef Roux' restaurant is in England, his food was as thoroughly French as he is

That is how, a few weeks later we found ourselves in Vancouver, ogling this beautiful new ship pulled up at the sailcloth-festooned cruise dock just a few blocks from the center of the city. And, how we were ushered aboard to our beautiful skysuite on the 12th (!) deck of the monster vessel. that was to be our home away from home for the next week.

A short while and a few toots of the horn later we were on our way to Alaska, accompanied by some of the execs of the company and about 1700 other passengers. But, where was Chef Roux? Our star player was missing!

Not to worry. As "the voice" had told me - - but, in my excitement I had

forgotten, Mr. Roux would be boarding the ship in Juneau, about halfway along the trip to get acquainted with the several eager eaters (and writers and broadcasters) who had been invited to the gala. We were already primed for our big expedition, the great fish "shop in".

In the interim, however our huge ship was moving through the calm, protected waters of the Inside Passage, gliding past a ceaselessly unfolding panorama of beauty - of incredibly dense greenery and, eventually, snowcapped mountains that loomed behind the gentle hills along our course.

And, if, for some unfathomable reason, some people wearied of watching the beauty fan out in subtle change, there was plenty of activity on board - including, of course, usual shipboard activities like gambling, shopping and reading on deck or in a beautifully stocked library, they could listen to lectures, peruse the world-class art collection on board (on every deck) exercise or be pampered in a world-class aqua spa,...and, needless to say, eat... pizza, hamburgers, snacks of all kinds and, of course, elaborate meals...served in the beautiful dining room with a choice of two seatings or for extended hours in a cafeteria kind of experience for those who wanted to see exactly what (and how much) they were getting and choose from an endless assortment of salads, soups, appetizers, meats, fish, vegetables sandwiches ...and, of course, desserts Ongoing feasts.. with ice cream sundaes as an option at every meal...or between meals. Or low-calorie choices for the strong of will! And, of course, that will-breaker, the midnight buffet, complete with mammoth ice carvings etc.

Then there was swimming! Yes, swimming in heated pools (indoors and out)...or gambling in hot tubs! And, yes, there were people doing both - even if the weather at the outside facilities was brisk - and whether or not the sun was out and shining to provide auxiliary warmth in the somewhat chilly northern climate where we were! Not freezing, mind you...just chilly!

Chilly, enough to keep the glaciers in Glacier Bay from melting to any dangerous extent, but warm enough to see the little pieces of floating glacier (called "calves") passing along in the water. And, on occasion to be treated to glimpses of wildlife such as sea mammals (including whales in season)

Then it was on to our first port of Skagway...a fitting first shore excursion with much of the lore of the hopeful goldminers who had flocked there en route to the Klondikegold fields in search of their fortunes. It was there we took part in a most exciting, unique experience: a helicopter flight to the top of a glacier. Outfitted in "clompy" boots and vests, people looked rather like space beings as they embarked and landed on the flat top of a huge, bumpy hunk of ice - a glacier that gave us as close to the feeling of landing on the moon as most of us are ever likely to experience!

The next day we arrived in Juneau where, we set off by "bush plane" for a feast of west coast salmon, barbecued over an open fire at a wilderness lodge (where we were warned against feeding the bears! Fat chance!

Later in the day, after we had a chance to explore the usual souvenir shops that sold all manner of "Smokey the Bear" and hard-cooked canned and cryovac-wrapped smoked salmon (not at all like Nova) and (for some unknown reason) shops selling Colombian emeralds, we managed to sample a "halibutburger" and a beer at the Red dog Saloon(a former miners' hangout"),

And a chance to meet Chef Roux, who had, in the intervening years since we had met him, lost none of the irrepressible charm that endeared him to us when we met him in England.

After a (relatively) early evening of Russian caviar, vodka and champagne, we prepared for the early morning marketing trip that had been planned with Chef Roux. Well...not too early, as it turned out, except for "slugabeds" who consider 10:00 a.m. "early"!

In the style befitting a three star chef with an international reputation, Mr. Roux appeared in garb more suitable for an intimate studio photo session than a slough through a messy fish market...with the joke (on me) conclusion that the market we encountered was brought to us pristinely



displayed on a refrigerated truck, rather than in drippy, chopped ice 9th street Italian Market style

There were huge halibut - about 50 pounds each, larger than any I'd ever seen! Huge salmon, too! Gleaming, fresh - - just out of the sea with clear eyes and bright gills...all of which Chef Roux examined intensely before he gave his final nod of approval and muttered "Oui - -la!" (Yes...that one) for the selected specimen to come to the kitchen of the Galaxy.

And, what a photo shoot it was! Chef Roux selecting fish...smiling at the camera, poised, assured, and, of course, charming the photographers (like my husband) and the writers (like me), all of us salivating in anticipation of what was to come, later in the day after Chef Roux and his battery of helpers had a chance to work their magic on the raw ingredients he had honored with his choice..

Hours later, all that gorgeous fish was metamorphosed into a feast fit for, yes, kings and queens, which is what we felt like as we ingested those astonishing specimens...first the halibut and then the salmon, each prepared by Chef Roux, to utter perfection, sauced, garnished and presented with all the glory befitting a display of crown jewels!

And, speaking of crown jewels, Ketchikan has a handsome, sophisticated jewelry store, located on a side street of "downtown". Joseph Machini is a particularly striking shop because (in Ketchikan, best recognized as the locus of a huge salmon industry) its major focus is on the stunning work of an Israeli artist, Frank Meisler, whose intricate sculptured designs in bronze, pewter, silver and gold are displayed throughout the store - - and in the window, where, in spite of the fact that my eyes were nearly dulled by the wares of the usual souvenir shops, I reacted with pleasure. at finding something so unique! Of course I bought a small piece of Meisler's work, a beautifully crafted little hand, a treasure of inspiration that never fails to elicit admiration whenever I wear it..

Could there be more? Or had we reached Nirvana - - at least the Nirvana where fish was king?

Well, if we had not...we still had a few days of our return passage aboard Galaxy. Plenty of time to enjoy the shows, the music and the dancing.

An ordinary cruise? Hardly...and we still had time to muse about Nirvana at sea.

