

Crystal River Cruises.

Fine cuisine from the
ship's galley.



New standards in river cruise hospitality.



The shipping company Crystal Cruises launched Crystal River Cruises in 2016, applying its successful ocean-cruise concept to the river segment. Now customers can float down European waterways in style as well, visiting cities such as Vienna, Budapest or Amsterdam. The company gets especially high marks for the incomparable comfort it offers: With its 1:1.6 staff-to-guest ratios, Crystal River Cruises is setting new standards of quality and service within the industry. Besides enjoying butler service in their luxury suites, passengers can also choose from several onboard gourmet restaurants. Between them, the five river cruise ships serve around 2,500 meals per day.

Scoring bonus points with the guests.

The five-star-plus cruise line is all about attentive customer service, and passengers notice the difference from the moment they embark. Small wonder that Crystal Cruises has already been recognized with countless honors, such as Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards for Best Cruise Line and Virtuoso Cruise Line of the Year. But the company isn't about to just rest on its laurels – they regularly request feedback from customers on every aspect of their service, even introducing the QAP (question answered by passenger) as a key performance indicator for guest satisfaction. Most of the time, customers only give feedback if they are extremely satisfied or extremely dissatisfied. According to Crystal River Cruises' own information, they receive an above-average amount of feedback by industry standards. Guests find their F&B selection particularly praiseworthy. We asked Thorsten Sengutta, Corporate Chef, why that is.



The company

Crystal Cruises was founded in 1988 in Brentwood, Los Angeles, and has spent the past 20-plus years making a name for itself in the luxury cruise industry. The company now has three cruise ships running on open seas and five traveling the Rhein, Main, and Danube Rivers.



Mr. Sengutta, how do you do it?



Thorsten Sengutta, Corporate Chef, has been in charge of kitchen operations and processes at Crystal River Cruises since July of 2016. He started in their ocean liner division, but his new position allows him to maintain a better work-life balance. Although his primary focus is on developing recipes and creating a recipe database, he pays the Crystal River Cruise galleys regular visits as well.

At Crystal River Cruises, you get an above-average amount of feedback from your customers. Can you tell us about your results as far as F&B goes?

The feedback we've gotten has been extraordinarily positive. If we do get the occasional negative rating, it drives us to get even better at what we do. For example, if someone has a special request or a certain food allergy, we don't just give them some lower-quality alternative – they get the same dish, just prepared a little differently.

Are your customers' expectations and standards rising?

Nowadays, it's practically standard practice to serve multiple variants of each dish. Gluten-free, lactose-free, vegan, regional, sugar-free. Our kitchen crew doesn't think of it as a challenge, we think of it as motivation to serve our guests exactly the food that they want to eat.

So you place a lot of importance on your guests' well-being?

Absolutely. The personal relationship between chef and guest plays a big role to us. Each evening, the chefs go out into the dining area and talk to the diners. To be honest, our chefs really enjoy it, because who doesn't like hearing a compliment or two? But we take criticism very seriously as well, because then we can respond to it immediately, without having to wait for the feedback form.





Each plate is garnished according to specified standards, with great attention to detail.

Who would you say deserves the guests' praise the most?

Our kitchen crew, for sure. We have a very stable international team, and they all enjoy being on board. They know they're in good hands here, and that they'll learn a lot they can use later on in their career. Next year, 95% of this year's kitchen team will join us on board again – just like previous years.

How does your crew meet your customers' high expectations?

Our guests expect top-quality food. We create the right environment to help us perform at world-class levels. One aspect of that is making sure our chefs have the best technology at their disposal. The galley on the Crystal Ravel, for example, has 5 RATIONAL SelfCookingCenter® and one VarioCookingCenter® – intelligent, multi-purpose pieces of equipment that take a lot of work off our hands and continually deliver great results. That way, our chefs can focus on making sure that each individual plate is exceptional by the time it goes across the pass.

“We offer our chefs the right environment to help them perform at world-class levels. That's why our ships are equipped with state-of-the-art kitchen technology.”

Thorsten Sengutta, Corporate Chef.



Challenges to expect in a galley kitchen.



Top
Adjustable door lock to secure the cooking chamber door.

Bottom
Gentle cooking using the sous-vide function.

You might think one kitchen's the same as another, but if you look more closely, you'll realize that ship's galleys are unusual in several ways – and the ones on the Crystal River Cruises fleet are no exception. Galley kitchens tend to have too little space rather than too much. That's another reason Thorsten Sengutta swears by RATIONAL units: they're the heart and soul of the kitchen, because they're multifunctional enough that they can replace a lot of other equipment, which saves a great deal of space. On board, they bake, grill, and braise in the SelfCookingCenter®, while they use the VarioCookingCenter® to prepare pasta, thicken sauces, and do sous-vide cooking. They've found that one particularly clever way of saving space is to install a Combi-Duo – two SelfCookingCenter® units stacked on top of one another, within a space of just 1m² – for double the capacity and double the flexibility. RATIONAL also offers special Marine models designed for on-board use, which makes them especially safe to operate even on high seas. The units are securely anchored to the kitchen walls and floor, and they feature a locking mechanism to hold the open door in place, along with rack rail locks to keep containers from sliding out.

Tricks for keeping your cool during dinner service.

Who wouldn't want a few extra hands in the kitchen during the dinner rush? But rather than squeezing more chefs into the galley, Crystal River Cruises relies on intelligent kitchen help in the form of modern technology. "Generally, we use the slowdown between meal times to prepare, portion, and cool our food using the Cook & Chill method. Sometimes things get hectic in the evenings anyway, though. When they do, the VarioCookingCenter® handles routine tasks for us while the chef is busy doing something else," Sengutta says. "For example, it takes pasta out of the water when it's done just right, or holds a sauce at temperature so that it won't burn. You can really count on it."

Crystal River Cruises

(total)
30 × SelfCookingCenter®
5 × VarioCookingCenter®
ConnectedCooking



From idea to galley: developing recipes for cruise ship fare.



Easy operation thanks to the MyDisplay function.

While the cruise ships are being renovated during the winter break, Thorsten Sengutta works on the menus. He spends the entire year collecting ideas to use in menu planning, and also draws inspiration from the local markets and restaurants in the ships' ports of call. "There's a trend toward fresh and regional dishes. Diners want their meals to reflect the atmospheres of the European cities they're visiting. In Vienna, for example, we serve schnitzel and apple strudel," Sengutta explains. Preparation methods require as much planning as the menu itself: "It may work on a small scale, but the important thing is that it will work in large-scale galley operations as well."

Standardization plays a big part in Sengutta's work, which is why he's building a database of recipes with ingredients and cooking processes.

To make sure that all of the ships maintain the same high standard of quality, he uses ConnectedCooking, RATIONAL's networking solution. Once a recipe has been tested and approved, it's saved to ConnectedCooking along with a picture, and then transmitted in one click to all of the connected RATIONAL units on the ships. This ensures the kitchen teams across the fleet have the right cooking processes saved, so they just have to press the button for the meal they want to prepare. The MyDisplay function shows each dish along with a picture, which makes it easier for the international, multilingual team to operate the unit.

“To me, RATIONAL stands for quality, which is why all of our ships are equipped with their appliances.”

Thorsten Sengutta, Corporate Chef.





There's no Plan B on board.

“It may not be a problem today, but it could end up being a big problem while we're out on the water. That's why our annual maintenance routine is so essential.”

Thorsten Sengutta, Corporate Chef.

Crystal River Cruises offer breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as 24-hour room service. In other words, their kitchen appliances are up and running 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. “Equipment failure is something we can't afford,” Sengutta explains. “Variations in water pressure and hardness mean that our appliances are subjected to extreme conditions.”

Each year, during their winter break, Crystal River Cruises has a RATIONAL Service Partner do upkeep and maintenance on its appliances – checking seals and replacing worn parts, for example. That way, they can be sure that their kitchen units are ship-shape and well-equipped to handle another season of extremely heavy usage.

If anything does happen during a trip, Sengutta knows he can count on RATIONAL's worldwide service network: “Generally speaking, we don't have any problems with the RATIONAL units. They're robust, very impressive quality. We've only ever had one break down. All we had to do was make a phone call, and we had a RATIONAL Service Partner waiting at the next harbor to help us solve the problem. We depend on that kind of quick assistance, because we don't have a Plan B on board,” Sengutta adds. “Our equipment simply has to work.”



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