

Maritime Hotel Academy to aid Island Cruises launch with the appointment of a fast-rising American chef as food designer and culinary trainer



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Maritime Hotel Academy to aid Island Cruises launch with the appointment of a fast-rising American chef as food designer and culinary trainer

Austria's Maritime Hotel Academy has won an exclusive consultancy contract to provide product design, recruitment and training services for Island Cruises, the new joint venture between UK tour operator First Choice and Royal Caribbean International which launches a Mediterranean cruise programme in March.

The 40,132 gt Island Escape - formerly Royal Caribbean's Viking Serenade - will operate two seven-night itineraries from Palma, Mallorca, with 1,680 passengers and 500 crew.

Under product design, the Academy is developing combined entertainment and food & beverage concepts featuring casual, non-traditional dining. Input on entertainment will also include devising production shows based on latest best-sellers such as Moulin Rouge and Harry Potter.

A consolidated training plan for all ship's officers and crew - including those outside the hotel and entertainment departments - has been drawn up by the Academy's service trainers, management trainers and health & hygiene specialists. Training of senior managers has already begun.

Academy consultants are also assisting in hotel and entertainment staff selection following recruitment advertising and audition notices which attracted hundreds of replies. *"We are looking for candidates with that extra something in view of our innovative product proposals,"* said a company spokesman.

FOOD DESIGN ROLE FOR US CHEF ON MARITIME'S ISLAND PROJECT

The Maritime Hotel Academy's consultancy work for newcomer Island Cruises has been boosted by the appointment of a fast-rising American chef as food designer and culinary trainer. Phillip Craig Thomason, 31, has joined the Academy



project team in Salzburg, Austria, to spearhead menu development under a product design, recruitment and training contract with Island, the joint venture between UK tour operator First Choice and Royal Caribbean International.

Thomason, an award-winning graduate of the Cordon Bleu School in Paris, has worked for US celebrity chefs George Mahaffey of the Little Nell Hotel in Aspen, Stars restaurants founder Jeremiah Tower and most recently Wolfgang Puck, whose restaurant and hospitality business includes catering for prestige events such as the Academy Awards and the Superbowl.

Thomason's knowledge of volume, quality catering complements the "Ad Lib" dining concept, with no set times or tables, devised for the 40,132 gt Island Escape, formerly Royal Caribbean's Viking Serenade.

The three onboard restaurants include the a la carte Oasis, the 24-hour Beachcomber and the 600-seat Island offering a hot and cold buffet selection or full waiter service. With a brief ranging from light bites to haute cuisine, Thomason's menus will reflect worldwide influences as well as traditional favourites.

"I am trying to create three unique experiences taking into account some very exotic ports of call and using fresh local produce as much as possible," he observes. His restaurant dishes include starters such as lemongrass and ginger prawns; main courses like mandarin duck with wild rice pancakes, herb-crusted pork with pumpkin butter and swordfish with mango salsa; and desserts including bittersweet chocolate and Earl Grey tea parfait or summer berry tart with lemon curd and lavender shortbread.

"Producing inviting food on a large scale poses special challenges at sea in terms of storage space and particularly staffing. We'll have far fewer kitchen staff compared with a shoreside operation of similar size and quality - around 50 people producing up to 6,000 meals a day," says Thomason.

In the weeks before Island Escape enters service, he is overseeing chef training during the ship's transAtlantic positioning voyage and during refit in Portugal, followed by supervisory visits to ensure smooth implementation.



"I will be working with the executive chef to finalise menu development and kitchen organisation - everything from shift rotas to ingredient lists," says the Seattle-based specialist.

"We will be perfecting the balance between creating food which is easy and cost effective to produce yet faithful to the idea. As TV chefs have proved, food has become a very popular art form which underlines the Academy's belief that cruise dining should be just as entertaining as the shows."

Recognised as the leading faculty of its kind, the Salzburg based Maritime Hotel Academy has provided consultancy and training services for more than 25 cruise lines since being formed in 1989.

(Source: [Maritime Leisure Group](#))



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