



## Dinner party for 8? Here's advice from experts who host dinner for thousands

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MIAMI, June 20, 2016 /PRNewswire/ -- When you prepare for your next dinner party, consider what it must be like to entertain a ship full of guests every night, seven days a week. On your cruise vacation you can pick up valuable tips for your own home entertaining, from experts who host dinner for thousands.

In fact, hotel directors, chefs and maître d's say they frequently receive requests for take-home entertainment advice, whether about napkin folding, specific recipes that guests want to try or ideas on what drinks to serve.

For those longing to learn, cruise lines including Princess Cruises have cooking lessons and lectures, and Holland America Line has an entire Culinary Arts Center. Both provide plenty of ideas to use back home.

"You learn tricks of the trade, such as substituting white bread crumbs with panko crumbs, which will assist in providing that extra crisp and crunch to your baked and fried dishes," said Gerald Mosslinger, vice president of food & beverage for Holland America Line.

Food-focused shore excursions in places such as the Caribbean and Mexico can add ideas, and recipes, to your repertoire.

Several cruise brands including Holland America Line, P&O Cruises Australia and Germany's AIDA Cruises also have cookbooks available in gift shops onboard that feature cruise line-specific recipes and entertaining tips.

"They are quite popular because people can literally take the recipes home," said Mosslinger of the four books written by Holland America Line's consulting Master Chef and Culinary Council Chairman Rudi Sodamin.

Just like their guests, the crew tends to bring experiences at sea into home entertaining.

For instance, Irishman Ken Byrne, known as Carnival Cruise Line's singing maître d', said that just like in the dining rooms he oversees, he always presents his dinner guests at home with a menu.

"Six, eight or 10 people, I will always have a menu on the table for them," Byrne said. "I prepare an appetizer, either soup or salad and a choice of two main courses, whether it's meat and fish or meat and chicken, and dessert." One of his favorite desserts to prepare is the line's popular Warm Melting Chocolate Cake (see recipe below), available nightly in the main dining rooms.

Don Habets, the hotel director on Holland America Line's just-debuted 2,650-passenger Koningsdam, similarly channels the cruise ship experience when he has friends over at his home in the Netherlands. Variety, he said, is key.

"If I do a barbeque it's usually six to eight people but I buy stuff for 20," he said. "I get portobello mushrooms for the vegetarians. I know one of my friends likes mozzarella, so I get that. Another friend likes honey mustard dressing. So all these things stick in my mind to try to assure everybody gets what they want."

When adapting experiences you've had at sea into your home entertaining, it's important to keep in mind basic rules.

Chef Uwe Stiefel, corporate executive chef for P&O Cruises Australia, said it's great to try new recipes, but it's never a good idea to experiment on your friends. Test out new dishes before the night of your dinner party, he recommended.

It's also important to plan your menu carefully. "Avoid cooking too many heavy dishes and think about how each course will go together," Stiefel said. "Also, always ask guests if they have dietary requirements prior to the party."

Pay attention to the seasonal calendar when buying fruit and vegetables, advised Guenther Kroack, corporate executive chef for AIDA Cruises. "And never put tomatoes in the fridge because they will lose their flavor."

It's also important to take into account when and where you tasted new flavors so you can bring that experience into your home.

Dominican chef Emil Vega, whose recipes are featured in the Ocean Grill on social impact brand Fathom's 704-passenger Adonia (sailing every other week from Miami to Cuba and Miami to the Dominican Republic) noted Caribbean cuisine derives from a rich culture that goes beyond simple recipes. Sharing ambience is also important.

"Dominicans and Cubans alike start preparing dishes early in the day to season the new day with happiness," Vega said. "There's a reason music such as the merengue, *bachata* and rumba harmonize perfectly with the marvelous smells that emanate from the kitchens."

There are also other ways to make your guests feel at home.

Holland America Line's Mosslinger said he tends to go the whole nine yards with folded napkins, napkin rings, fancy glassware and even chargers (large decorative plates).

"When I entertain I want to make the event special just like on a ship," he said. "You do it because it looks good, you want people to feel good, you want them to feel welcome."

Carnival Cruise Line's Byrne, currently on the line's newest and largest ship, the 3,954-passenger Carnival Vista, said it also doesn't hurt to break into song.

"I always have fun whether it be a game, a song or a dance," Byrne said. "It's great to include fun in everything you do, at work and at home."

### **Recipe for Warm Melting Chocolate Cake**

*This easy recipe has been the most popular dessert on Carnival Cruise Line ships for more than 20 years.*

- 6 oz. Dark chocolate
- 6 oz. Butter (1 ½ sticks)
- 4 eggs
- 6 oz. Sugar (¾ cup)
- 2 oz. Flour (7 tbsp. plus ¾ tsp.)
- Vanilla ice cream (optional)

Preheat oven to 400°

Melt the chocolate and butter over low heat.

Mix together the eggs and sugar and whisk for a few minutes, then add the flour.

Remove the chocolate from the stove, pour in the egg batter and stir until smooth.

Pour the batter into a greased ramekin. Bake about 14 minutes. Serve warm with or without vanilla ice cream on top.

#### **Entertainment tips from cruise experts**

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- Decorate your table with fresh flowers and other seasonal products (leaves, pumpkins).
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- Add to the ambience with carefully selected background music.
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- Consider serving dishes that can be prepared in advance, so that you can spend less time in the kitchen and more time with your guests.
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- Impress your friends with a printed menu and accompanying wine selections.
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- Relax. You're supposed to have fun at your party too.
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