

## INSIDE VIEW:

# A WELL-ESTABLISHED SHIP

## A Conversation with Julian Brackenbury, Hotel Director, Celebrity Summit

By

Richard H. Wagner

**A**s the Hotel Director on the elegant Celebrity Summit, Julian Brackenbury is in charge of the services that shape the guests vacation experience including the dining and the accommodations as well as the activities and entertainment. In addition to experience with other cruise lines, Brackenbury brings to the job experience managing resorts in the Caribbean and in Africa. As such, he is well-placed to tell what Celebrity Summit is all about.

"The Summit is an elegant ship. It is a very big ship with a small ship feel. Rather than big spaces, we have lots of small pockets of activity so it feels a bit more cozy than some of the big ships. It is an easy ship to find your way around."

Summit is also an uncrowded ship. "Equivalent ships of this size on other lines would hold 3,000 guests; we never have more than 2,300 - - a lot of space."

"It is very friendly." With approximately "2,000 guests and a thousand crew, there is a good [passenger-to-crew] ratio," which translates into "great service."

"This ship does have an exceptionally exceptional crew. Most cruise ships have good crews but we really have an

exceptional crew. A ship is only as good as its crew. We look after them. We have a great captain [Captain Yannis Berdos]; the management team is good, they communicate well with each other; and the crew is one of our core focuses."

Brackenbury sees Summit, which entered service in late 2001, as being in her prime. "New ships have their problems and it takes a year or two to iron them out and then they are in their flow. This ship is not old enough yet to be a maintenance nightmare. She is in good shape."

Celebrity is a cultured and sophisticated and sophisticated cruise line, which is reflected in the activities and entertainment onboard. Recently, Celebrity re-designed its programming under the banner Celebrity Life, adding new concepts and changing how the programming is presented. "Celebrity Life is a sensory experience. It is meant to be enlightenment, enrichment and education. It is not just activities. All the events are events that you will walk away from having gained something from it. It is not like a trivia quiz or a pool game. It is something you will gain something from."

The Celebrity Life concept was first introduced when the company launched the second ship in its Solstice class, Celebrity Equinox and is now being introduced throughout the fleet. "The only limitation we have is that we do not have as many choices of venues. The Solstice class are bigger ships, so we have to be more strategic with our planning. We can offer the same events - - the core elements of Celebrity Life, we don't have any restrictions. It has been very well-received [on Summit]."

Celebrity is also known for its sophisticated dining. Although Brackenbury came to Celebrity from Norwegian Cruise Line where flexible dining was born, he recommends the traditional cruise ship dining system on Summit because of the personal service and the relationship that develops between the passengers and staff over the course of a cruise. "On the face of it, some people would say there is not as much choice [with traditional dining] and if you look specifically at times to eat, there is not as much choice. But in terms of managing your experience and delivery of your expectations, it is a lot more manageable. We can better prepare and better 'wow' people when we know they are going to be there at a given time. It is a far better experience."

"That said, we do realize there is an element of our guests that do like more flexibility and that is why we have Celebrity Select Dining, which is slowly rolling out [across the Celebrity Fleet]. On Summit, the restaurant is on two levels. One half of one deck will be turning into Celebrity Select Dining. You can dine between 6 and 9:30. You make a reservation within that window so we can prepare for you. You could just turn up but then, of course, there is a risk you won't get in. So that is coming but our core operation still will be the main and the late seating."

Because Summit is a more upscale ship, the line asks guests to maintain certain standards so that all can enjoy the experience. "We have a dress code - - basically, smart casual and above. We do try to encourage our guests to adhere to that

as much as possible. Obviously, some people's interpretation of smart casual or formal may be different than your interpretation or my interpretation, but we do have a dress code. We do advertise the dress code - - it is on the website, it is in the daily newspaper. We enforce it as much as we respectfully can."



Celebrity Cruises is owned by the same company, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd., that owns Royal Caribbean International. However, Summit is a different experience from the experience on the RCI ships. "Royal is a great product and serves its market well [but] it is a totally different product. Royal is about fun and adventure. Celebrity is about food and service. Royal is very vibrant, very lively, very family. We are very refined, very service-oriented, very calm. That is the difference."

Even so, people who begin cruising with RCI as young families will often cruise with Celebrity as they mature. "You do see over the years a progression. You see the same couple or the same family will work their way through the brand."

As a cosmopolitan cruise line, Celebrity attracts diverse nationalities. On Summit, the mix of nationalities “depends upon the itinerary most of the time. This seven-day cruise we are doing right now out of Puerto Rico is mainly U.S. guests. [When the ship was cruising in Europe] that was much more international - - a lot of

British, a lot of Canadians, Europeans - - Germans, French, Spanish. Fifty percent American and fifty percent other.”

In a “nutshell,” Summit is a “well-established ship in a well-established company with an excellent crew.”

