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East Meets West on Victoria Cruises' Menus

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Chinese cuisine and Western entrees are both served to guests on Yangtze River cruises

By: [Marilyn Green](#)

River Cruise



Caption: Victoria Cruises chef

How do you strike a balance between the desire for exotic exploration and the need for the familiar on a river cruise itinerary, especially where dining is concerned? Victoria Cruises does it by giving guests culinary choices.

“The Yangtze is usually at the end of a Chinese tour, and Westerners are often longing for familiar food,” said Walter Staib, a chef who has garnered four Emmy Awards for his PBS show “A Taste of History.” “We give them the option of both kinds — both extremely well done.”

Walter Staib gathers fresh ingredients from local farmers and markets along the Yangtze River. // © 2014 Victoria Cruises

Feature image (above): Staib has helped design an onboard menu that offers both Western dishes and authentic Chinese cuisine. // © 2014 Victoria Cruises

The Details

Victoria Cruises
www.victoriacruises.com

Victoria Cruises and the Yangtze River. Staib works closely with Victoria's executive chef Jack Shapansky, whose history includes high-level chef positions at properties such as Orlando Omni Resort.

"On tours, the guests are able to see and smell different foods along the way, and they are able to sample some of them on the ships," Shapansky said. "When the westerners taste the food, they ask if it is tempered for the Western palate. I tell them that it is toned down a little bit as far as the heat, but the flavors are authentic."

Under Staib and Shapansky's guidance, the sophisticated Western menu on Victoria's cruises includes entrees such as steak Diane, breast of chicken Kiev and smoked duck. Guests can mix cuisines at will as they are simultaneously presented. For example, breast of chicken with wild mushrooms shares a menu with Chongqing-style chicken.

"Training with Walter Staib has been an inspirational experience," said Chen Gang, an executive chef onboard Victoria Anna. "He showed us how to approach cooking from a completely different perspective — more like an art form than an exercise in food preparation."

Staib asserted that the strictest standards of cleanliness are upheld on the ships.

"It takes commitment from the top down, and that is not lip service with this company," he said.

Victoria has an organized a system with local farmers along the Yangtze River, so the cruise line receives the freshest ingredients delivered directly to the ship. At the same time, there is very little staff turnover, which ensures a high and consistent level of service.

"Once you train Chinese staff, it will be maintained to the letter," Staib said.

Staib was recently in China to oversee the implementation of new menu items and conduct training exercises. He also filmed footage for an upcoming episode of "A Taste of Honey" that will feature

