

TRAVEL

BA** (L, P, G, R, TC, W, G, A)

O&E Monday, August 28, 1991



Iris Jones Travel agents meet, track industry news

The Michigan chapter of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) met recently at the Botsford Inn, Farmington. All the local travel industry professionals were there as well as industry reps from airlines, cruise lines, convention bureaus. Abraham Over of KLM's Southfield office (known to his friends as Bram) announced that KLM has applied for permission to fly from Detroit to the Netherlands, "hopefully by Jan. 1." Carolina Miranda of USAir's Southfield office had good news: you can change USAir's "non-refundable" tickets for a \$75 penalty.

That's what industry associations are for, to spread the word. Here's a word you may not have heard: if you buy a cruise at a rate designed for Florida travelers only, you may be caught in the spot check made at the gangplank and forced to pay a higher rate.

The two main agenda items sent this report about a recent trip on the Napa Valley Wine Train. Her officers are: first Vice President Gloria Schuler of Hudson's Travel Service in Saginaw; second VP Dean Markwardt, president of Suburban Travel in Rochester Hills; Secretary Joan Brooks, district manager of Carlson Travel in Farmington Hills; Secretary Dena Moonen, vice president of Royal Oak Travel.

Here are some news tidbits from local cruise reps who were part of the ASTA seminar: Lori Purcell of American-Hawaii Cruises: "Free upgrades if you book before Sept. 30. Our packages of three days at sea and four days on land are still the best way to see Hawaii. The Nov. 3 and Dec. 7 cruises commemorate the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor."

Randi S. Hoffmann of Premier Cruise Lines, which is associated with Walt Disney World (One of their three ships is the former *Love Boat*). "We've extended our special so you can get a free upgrade at Walt Disney World through Dec. 20 or a discount on a cabin."

Maureen Morrell of Norwegian Cruise Lines: "The Sunward Two has been sold. In October we launch the new Sunward, formerly the Royal Viking Sky."

Mary Bergman of Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines and Admiral Cruises: "The Monarch of the Sea, sister ship of the Sovereign of the Seas, will be launched Nov. 17. Group space is already sold out."

Judy Pettscher of Commodore and Crown Cruise Lines: "The Crown Jewel will be launched next fall. We carry 700 passengers, so you won't have to get in line at 9 p.m. for the midnight buffet." That little dig at the big ships got a cheerful laugh from the other cruise reps.

Colleen Flynn of Carnival Cruise Lines: "Carnival Airlines will resume three times a week flights to Nassau Jan. 27, 1992, offering three-, four- and seven-day packages to the Crystal Palace."

Patty Crichton of Holland American and Windstar: "We expect Alaska to be even bigger next year than this year. Detroit is the number one source of passengers for Holland America."



Riding the rails through California wine country

Charlene Baloskey of Litonia sent this report about a recent trip on the Napa Valley Wine Train.

By Charlene Baloskey
special writer

"Welcome to Napa Valley" the sign reads "our wine is bottled poetry."

We are on Highway 29, on the way to another kind of poetry, the Napa Valley Wine Train, a luxury train that offers daily dining excursions through one of the world's premier wine-growing regions.

Lunch trains operate daily, dinner trains every day except Monday, on 36-hour round trips between Napa and St. Helena, Calif. The lunch train is the most popular because it allows passengers to see the valley in daylight.

Food served aboard the Napa Valley Wine Train is prepared in the kitchen car.



The valley is particularly beautiful in the fall when grapevines are heavy with purple Cabernet or green Chardonnay grapes, and grape leaves are brilliant red and orange.

San Francisco millionaire Vincent DeDomenico, who gave America Rice-A-Roni, the San Francisco treat, bought rights to the Southern Pacific tracks in 1987 and had eight vintage railroad cars refurbished to sophisticated 1920s and '30s standards by local craftspeople and began service in September 1989.

Our Pullman car, vintage 1915, was a burgundy-and-champagne colored coach with mahogany paneling, crystal chandeliers and etched glass partitions. The train rolled slowly past wooden barns, Victorian houses and turn-of-the-century schoolhouses. Roses

bloomed beside the tracks. Grapevines trailed gracefully over low trellises.

We passed 25 of the more than 200 wineries that are the heart of Napa Valley.

The wine train is not a guided tour, so no chipper, loud-speaker voice exhorted us to look at the Noodari Winery on our left or the Christmas tree farm on our right. Nothing detracted from the feeling of serenity.

Shortly after boarding, I moved from the lounge car to the dining car for the first lunch seating. The wine train has two meal seatings on each trip, you can eat on the way to St. Helena or on the return trip.

The dining car was a scene from a romantic old movie. Lunch was served at linen-covered tables set with bone china, sterling silver and



The Napa Valley Wine Train rolls through the heart of California's wine region. Guests dine in an atmosphere of relaxed elegance.

crystal stemware. The lunch train price of \$55 includes salad, dessert and a choice of entrees: broiled salmon in wine sauce, filet mignon in Cabernet and Roquefort sauce, grilled chicken in Chardonnay and tarragon sauce.

Napa Valley wines star in all the dishes as well as on the considerable wine list. Near the end of lunch, executive cook Ken Schloss invited us to visit the onboard kitchen where he and a crew of six prepare meals. Creating culinary magic in a rolling kitchen requires some ingenuity, but Schloss has come up with workable solutions like using ordinary squeeze bottles to apply those extraordinary wine sauces.

After the main course, the friendly waitstaff moved us efficiently back to the lounge car for dessert and coffee (the Chocolate

Decadence was sensational). The five-course candlelight dinner, which costs \$65, is even more elaborate than lunch. Dinner service includes hors d'oeuvres, a sorbet course, and an even wider choice of entrees. The dress on the dinner train is semi-formal and the setting romantic as twilight settles over the Napa Valley.

On Saturdays and Sundays, the wine train also operates a champagne brunch train (\$55) and a family car with special rates for children and an optional à la carte continental breakfast. Prices include the train, meal, taxes and service charges but not wine.

The train leaves Napa, about an hour's drive from San Francisco. A shuttle service also runs to Napa from San Francisco area hotels.

For more information call, toll-free (800) 522-4142.

Wine country perfect for picnics

By Charlene Baloskey
special writer

"When I heard you were from Michigan, I had to come over and introduce myself. I lived in Redford and West Bloomfield and attended the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit," Mary Danieluk said.

Mary is the wine buyer for the Oakville Grocery, a fine gourmet shop on Highway 29 in the Napa Valley of California. I met her while I was browsing the walnut-pistachio baklava and looking for a good place to have a picnic. The perfect picnic requires a great location and great food. The California wine country provides both.

More than 60 Napa Valley wineries have picnic sites, each with its own personality. I knew about the wooded grandeur of

Rutherford Hills, the flowery hilltop elegance of Vichon and the one-stop convenience of V. Sattul with its on-site delicatessen. Was there another great winery picnic site nearby?

Mary Danieluk and her husband, Douglas, know a lot about wineries. They lived in the burgundy area of France for three years while Douglas studied winemaking, and they have been using their skills here in the Napa Valley. People stop to buy lunch ingredients at the Oakville Grocery, or order lunch boxes 24 hours in advance for about \$12.

Mary sent me to a charming, secluded picnic site at Villa Mount Eden, a small, but prestigious winery off the beaten path (from Highway 29 drive east on Oakville Crossroad). Villa Mount Eden's narrow dirt driveway winds through fields of

grapes, passes a farmhouse and a white clapboard winery, and ends in front of a small courtyard with trellised rose bushes, ivy-covered doorways and three picnic benches. The winery dogs, Daisy and Sheba, who had been sleeping in the sun, strolled over to greet us.

The beauty of this winery is its serenity. In an area dominated by large wineries and crowded parking lots, Villa Mount Eden stands out as a peaceful, friendly oasis — and as a perfect picnic site. "People like this place because there's no traffic," said Barbara Harriman, assistant hospitality manager.

Barbara said the picnic benches are available to customers who buy a bottle of wine.

For information on picnic sites, check area tour maps, or contact the Napa Valley Chamber of Commerce (707) 226-7455.

European air fares cut

It's getting to be a game, isn't it? Every year we hold our breath in anticipation, knowing that the airlines will offer dramatically low fares to Europe during the fall season. This year, with sales off because of the Persian Gulf War and the recession, it was inevitable.

There are only minor differences between British Airways, Northwest Airlines and Delta Airlines: buy your ticket before Sept. 18, fly after Oct. 8, don't expect a refund. The fare to such cities as London and Frankfurt

is \$446 round trip from Detroit. It goes down to \$386 if you fly Dec. 25 through March 15, minor variations in between. Stay six days to six months.

British Airways also has a special fare if you buy by Sept. 11, fly from Oct. 16 through Dec. 1 and return by Jan. 4: \$518 round trip.

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