



AP Photo/Becky Bohrer, File

This 2014, file photo, shows a cruise ship docked in Juneau, Alaska, while a paraglider soars above. Alaska expects 1.06 million cruise passengers this year, breaking its 2008 record of 1.03 million visits.

## Cruise news for 2017: Alaska boom, more in-depth experiences

By BETH J. HARPAZ  
AP Travel Editor

NEW YORK — A demand for more in-depth experiences — from learning how to scuba dive to dining in a private home in port — are shaping what's new in the cruise industry this year. Other cruise news: a boom in Alaska trips, a few precious sailings to Cuba and potentially game-changing new technology.

### HIGH SEAS, HIGH TECH

Princess Cruises will debut a coin-sized medallion in November aboard the Regal Princess that could dramatically change guest experiences. Passengers will carry or wear the medallion, which will direct them to their cabins, unlock their doors as they approach and alert crew members to their schedules and preferences, whether it's a class they've signed up for or a favorite cocktail. It will also streamline getting on and off the ship.

### ALASKA

Alaska expects 1.06 million cruise passengers this year, likely breaking its 2008 record of 1.03 million visits. The Alaska Travel Industry Association says larger ships are bringing more visitors, and destinations like Sitka, Juneau and Icy Strait Point have built out piers to accommodate bigger vessels. Smaller ships are simultaneously expanding service, specializing in more remote destinations the bigger ships can't reach.

Holland America Line marks its 70th year of exploring Alaska with the redeployment of its Oostendam ship from Europe to Alaska. Seabourn, a small-ship line, returns to Alaska in June for the first time in 15 years. Lindblad launches a new ship, National Geographic Quest, whose itineraries will include Alaska. Carnival Miracle will do a 14-day round-trip to Alaska from Long Beach, California, that will include Carnival Cruise Line's first-ever call at Icy Strait Point. Crystal Cruises, which last summer sailed the largest luxury passenger vessel ever through the Northwest Passage, offers a repeat trip from Anchorage on Aug. 15.

In 2018, Norwegian Cruise Line will launch Norwegian Bliss, a ship custom-built for Alaska trips.

### CUBA

Long-term prospects for travel from the U.S. to Cuba remain uncertain under the new presidential administration. But for now, a number of cruises are scheduled through spring. Havana is on the itinerary for sailings from Florida in April and May aboard Royal Caribbean's Empress of the Seas, and in May on Norwegian Cruise Line's Norwegian Sky. The Fathom brand continues seven-night sailings to Cuba every other week through May.

### NEW EXPERIENCES ONBOARD AND ONSHORE

Royal Caribbean is the only cruise line offering scuba-diving certification through the Professional Association of Diving Instructors. Passengers begin the course at home online, continue lessons in a ship pool and finish with four mandatory open-water dives in ports of call.

Carnival Cruise Line is offering longer sailings of nine to 15 days with options for more immersive and

adventurous experiences beyond beaches and bars. Passengers might visit a school in Mexico or get a home-cooked meal at a private house in Jamaica. "People are looking for meaningful experiences," said Carnival spokeswoman Jennifer De La Cruz.

MSC Cruises launches a wellness experience in April with personalized health assessments and fitness programs, along with a Weight Watchers cruise from Miami to the Caribbean in May.

Princess is expanding Discovery at Sea offerings for kids with new programming such as MythBusters science activities and destination-themed programs on culture and nature. Princess is also featuring a new show, "Born to Dance," produced with famed composer Stephen Schwartz, paying tribute to Broadway's greatest choreographers and dancers.

Holland America Line's new programs include cooking shows and workshops in partnership with "America's Test Kitchen," plus Rijksmuseum at Sea, with interactive displays about the famed Amsterdam museum as a tie-in to the cruise line's Dutch heritage. HAL has also just rolled out a partnership with BBC Earth, with games, activities and live concerts during screenings showing wildlife and wilderness.

Norwegian Cruise Line has opened a new private destination in southern Belize called Harvest Caye with a beach, villas for daily rental, a lagoon for canoeing and kayaking, and "Flighthouse" with a zip line, ropes course and more. The port also makes it easy for guests to explore Belize on shore excursions.

Cunard's Queen Mary 2 this year offers trans-Atlantic cruises themed on space exploration and fashion.

Disney Cruise Line will offer Marvel Day at Sea programs featuring Marvel Comics characters in activities, shows, parties and films on seven sailings on Disney Magic from New York City this fall.

### NEW SHIPS

In November, Royal Caribbean debuted the world's largest cruise ship, Harmony of the Seas, with a 5,479-passenger capacity, two 10-story enclosed dry slides and an escape game room.

This year Viking Cruises adds two more ocean-going ships, Viking Sky and Viking Sun, with the Sun embarking on Viking's first-ever world cruise, 141 days long, in December. Viking is also adding two new river ships, Viking Herja and Viking Hild.

Crystal Cruises not only launches two new river ships this summer, Crystal Bach and Crystal Mahler, but the cruise line is debuting AirCruises on a private Boeing jet that will take guests around the world, starting with a 27-day, \$159,000 trip. "The world is getting wealthier and the wealthy want to travel," said Crystal CEO Edie Rodriguez.

Silversea Cruises launches Silver Muse in April with eight dining venues including a jazz club and Hot Rocks, where guests can cook their own meat, fish and vegetables tableside. Silversea's refurbishment of Silver Cloud as an ice-class expedition ship will be done in November, in time for 11 Antarctic and eight Arctic trips in 2018.

# Amped-up beef stroganoff is ideal dish for Valentine's Day

By SARA MOULTON  
Associated Press

Primed to romance your certain someone on Valentine's Day? Nothing says "I love you" more persuasively than a home-cooked meal. This one-pot noodle dish, a variation on Beef Stroganoff, is the ideal messenger.

Although the roots of the classic recipe are certifiably aristocratic — a French chef working for Count Pavel Stroganoff, a Russian, created it in the early 1800s — Beef Stroganoff was being treated pretty roughly in America by the 1960s. At that time, when "convenience" trumped every other value, home cooks loved being able to whip up a fancy main course using canned gravy, canned mushrooms, canned minced onions and canned roast beef.

We're gonna treat it with a little more respect in this recipe for Amped-Up Beef Stroganoff. To start, the basics remain unchanged — thin slices of beef fillet topped with a sauce of fresh mushrooms and sour cream, all of it ladled over noodles. But I've beefed up the umami — and intensified the taste — with dried mushrooms, tomato paste and Dijon mustard. Also, we cook the noodles in the sauce, which makes them that much more delicious.

Ideally, your steak of choice will be beef fillet — it is Valentine's Day, after all — but if you don't want to splurge, you can swap in less expensive cuts. And if you can't find dried porcini, you'll be fine with dried shiitakes or a mix of dried mushrooms. In truth, any dried mushroom packs a one-two punch, contributing not only itself, but also the savory liquid generated when it's rehydrated. That mushroom liqueur makes a lip-smacking base for any sauce.

What to serve alongside this love offering? A nice refreshing salad involving citrus will provide the perfect contrast. And don't forget the stagecraft! Set a proper table with cloth napkins and mats, a candle or two, and a bottle of robust red wine.

*Sara Moulton is host of public television's "Sara's Weeknight Meals." She was executive chef at Gourmet magazine for nearly 25 years and spent a decade hosting several Food Network shows.*



Sara Moulton via AP

This amped-up beef stroganoff is a 1-pot noodle dish made with filet mignon, dried mushrooms, tomato paste and Dijon mustard.

### BEEF STROGANOFF

**Start to finish:** 1 hour  
**Servings:** 2

- 1 ½ ounces dried porcini, rinsed
- 1 ½ cups low-sodium beef or chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 8 ounces filet mignon cut into 1-inch cubes
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- ¼ cup finely chopped shallot or onion
- 4 ounces sliced fresh mushrooms (white, cremini, exotic or a mix)
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 2 teaspoons fresh thyme
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon flour
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 4 ounces egg noodles
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- Chopped parsley for garnish

In a small saucepan combine the porcini mushrooms and the beef broth and bring the mixture just to a boil. Remove the pan from the heat and let the mushrooms steep for 15 minutes. Strain the liquid through a fine strainer, reserving it, and chop the mushrooms.

In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Season the meat with salt and pepper and add it to the pan. Sear the meat quickly on all sides and transfer it to a plate.

Reduce the heat to medium, add the shallot to the skillet and cook stirring until softened; add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally until the mushrooms are lightly browned. Add the garlic, thyme, tomato paste and flour and cook, stirring, 1 minute.

Add the red wine, reserved broth, 1 ½ cups water, the chopped porcini and the noodles to the skillet. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook, covered, stirring occasionally, until the noodles are just al dente, about 10 minutes, adding additional water if necessary to keep the noodles partly submerged. Stir in the sour cream, Dijon and lemon juice; adjust the seasoning if necessary. Add the beef and beef juices and simmer just until the meat is heated, about 1 minute. Serve right away, sprinkled with the parsley.

*Nutritional information per serving: 871 calories; 338 calories from fat; 38 g fat (14 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 203 mg cholesterol; 419 mg sodium; 65 g carbohydrate; 7 g fiber; 9 g sugar; 53 g protein.*

## Say I love you with Valentine's Day cupcakes

By ELIZABETH KARMELE  
Associated Press

This old-fashioned cherry cupcake is just the thing for Valentine's Day. I've updated a cake that my mother used to make for my sisters and me when we were children with all the flavors of a bourbon Old-Fashioned. The rosy pink color of the cake immediately brings to mind the Feast of Saint Valentine.

When I drink Old-Fashioneds, I seldom add cherries, but the cherries are essential to this cake. The cake is colored a beautiful rosy pink by the addition of maraschino cherry juice and a generous amount of chopped cherries that add texture, and moisture to the light white cake. The cake itself tastes like the best vanilla cake you have ever ate with a soft nod to the maraschino cherries. A fragrant orange-bourbon buttercream tops the cupcakes and completes the adult "Old-Fashioned" flavor.

I had remembered this cake fondly but sometimes the memory is better than the actual thing. Not so in the case of this cake. In fact, I made it twice recently while my mother and I visited my sister and her family. We couldn't get enough of the cake and it is now my current favorite. After all, everything that is new was once old and vice versa. When making this cake for a mixed age crowd, you can make two versions of the boozy icing and eliminate the bourbon for the under 21 crowd. The orange buttercream brings a bright taste of sunshine to what can sometimes be dreary days in February, with or without the bourbon.

I never thought that this simple recipe would remind me of an important lesson. The day that I was baking the cupcakes for the photo, I ran into a legendary pastry chef. When I told him what I was making, he said "You cooks (as opposed to pastry chefs) have all the fun. Can you imagine what 'they' would say if I made a cake with maraschino cherries?" Because I love to make my food delicious and sometimes playful, it had never occurred to me that there might be ingredient boundaries for some cooks. I think that this is a good lesson for our holiday devoted to love: If you love it, and it makes you happy, don't worry what other people think. These Old-Fashioned cupcakes make me very happy — and I think that they'll do the same for you.

*Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pit master at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and the author of three books.*



AP Photo/Richard Drew

### Valentine's Day cupcakes

#### CHERRY CUPCAKE WITH ORANGE-BOURBON FROSTING

**Servings:** 20  
**Start to finish:** 40 minutes

- 1 stick unsalted butter, softened
- 1 ½ cups granulated white sugar
- 2 ¼ cups cake flour or 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon fine sea salt
- ¼ cup maraschino cherry juice
- ½ cup whole milk
- ½ generous cup chopped maraschino cherries (about 1 cup of un-chopped cherries)
- 4 egg whites, stiffly beaten

Preheat oven to 350 F. Using an electric mixer, cream together butter and sugar until fluffy, about 3-5 minutes.

In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder and salt. Stir in alternatively with the cherry juice and the milk. Remove from electric mixer and stir the chopped cherries into the cake batter. Fold in the stiffly beaten egg whites.

Prepare a regular cupcake pan by placing liners in each mold. Fill each cupcake ¾ of the way full. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.

Let cool on a rack and make the frosting.

#### Bourbon Old-Fashioned Frosting:

- 1 pound powdered sugar
- Pinch of fine-grain sea salt
- 1 stick unsalted butter, softened
- ½ generous teaspoon pure

- vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon orange extract
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- 1-2 tablespoons bourbon
- Zest of one large navel orange

Sift box of powdered sugar and salt or whisk well to remove any lumps. Set aside.

Cream butter until fluffy using a stand mixer or a hand mixer set on medium speed.

Slowly add the sugar. When the sugar is incorporated in the butter, add vanilla extract, cream and bourbon one tablespoon at a time until your desired consistency is reached.

Stir in orange zest at the end. Taste and add more bourbon only if you want it to taste a little boozier.

If it is too stiff, add a little more cream. If it is too loose, add a little more sugar.

Taste for balance and add a touch more salt and vanilla if needed. Spread on top of cupcakes or place in a pastry bag fitted with a large star tip and decorate in a swirl pattern. Top with a pink conversation heart or stemmed cherry, if desired.

*Cupcake Nutrition information per serving: 151 calories; 44 calories from fat; 5 g fat (3 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 13 mg cholesterol; 218 mg sodium; 25 g carbohydrate; 1 g fiber; 15 g sugar; 2 g protein.*

*Bourbon Old-Fashioned Frosting Nutrition information per serving: 200 calories; 65 calories from fat; 7 g fat (5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 20 mg cholesterol; 23 mg sodium; 33 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 31 g sugar; 0 g protein.*