

Trim those sails at sea with a fitness cruise

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By Dorene Internicola

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Cruise liners, long considered modern-day galleons of gluttony, are also hoisting seriously sophisticated fitness and wellness centres on the high seas.

The food has not disappeared but a battery of seaworthy fitness experts are also on deck to help the health-minded cruiser resist the siren song of that endless buffet.

"Cruise lines are doing a great job of keeping up with the 21st century. You can be a fitness junkie on a cruise," said Mike Weingart of Travel Leaders in Houston, Texas. "Those who want to be fit can keep up their routine."

Or learn new ones.

Jogging tracks and state-of-the-art fitness centres are standard on most big ships, but increasingly so are wellness education classes, metabolic testing and cutting edge fitness classes, from kettlebell workouts to TRX suspension training, which borrows technology from U.S. Navy Seals.

"I had to add another TRX class at 4:30 because 4:00 was sold out," said Sarah Ward, a personal trainer aboard the 4,100-passenger Norwegian Epic.

The Epic, Norwegian Cruise Line's newest ship, boasts 20 dining options and 24/7 pizza delivery. But most popular at the wellness centre is a seminar titled "Secrets to a Flatter Stomach."

"People who are fit will find the gym," said Ward, who presides over the ship's Pulse Fitness Centre. "I like to find the others."

Princess Cruise Lines also offers more than a moveable feast on its 17-ship fleet.

"Our demographic is more the boomer generation, so obviously we understand that fitness is important to these travellers," said spokeswoman Karen Candy. "Our gyms are state of the art."

Cruisers can play Wii Fit skiing and hula hooping games, workout to exercise classes on stateroom TV, or even channel their inner Lance Armstrong in spin classes that mimic Tour de France terrains.

For those who'd rather laugh than grunt, Travel Leaders is organizing a series of Fit and Funny cruise seminars on selected Carnival Cruise Lines sailings from Galveston, Texas.

Austin Davis, a.k.a the Weight Whisperer, leads the seminars. He thinks a cruise is the perfect place to work on developing healthy habits.

"The temptations are a benefit to me," said Davis, a former comedian turned fitness expert. "No distractions. You can have anything, but you can't have everything."

Davis, a fitness consultant to hospitals at the Texas Medical Centre, advocates shorter workouts of high intensity. But the heart of his message is mindfulness.

"When you write down everything you eat, endless buffet or not, you will eat less," he said. "People tell me they want to get in shape, well round is a shape, pear is a shape."

Weingart thinks the cruise-as-floating-food-orgy concept may be waning.

"Luxury cruises are finding it's more quality than quantity. Dinner portions are, in many cases, a little smaller, and a lot of lines have done away with midnight buffets."

Candy thinks today's cruisers are more keen to tone up their sea legs.

"Go to the gym on the first day of the cruise so you can see what's offered, so you're not disappointed," she said. "Some people have actually gone on a cruise and lost weight."