

Advertising Feature

PASSPORT to DISCOVERY

The Joys of Sailing on Seabourn Cruise Line

BY BART CARD

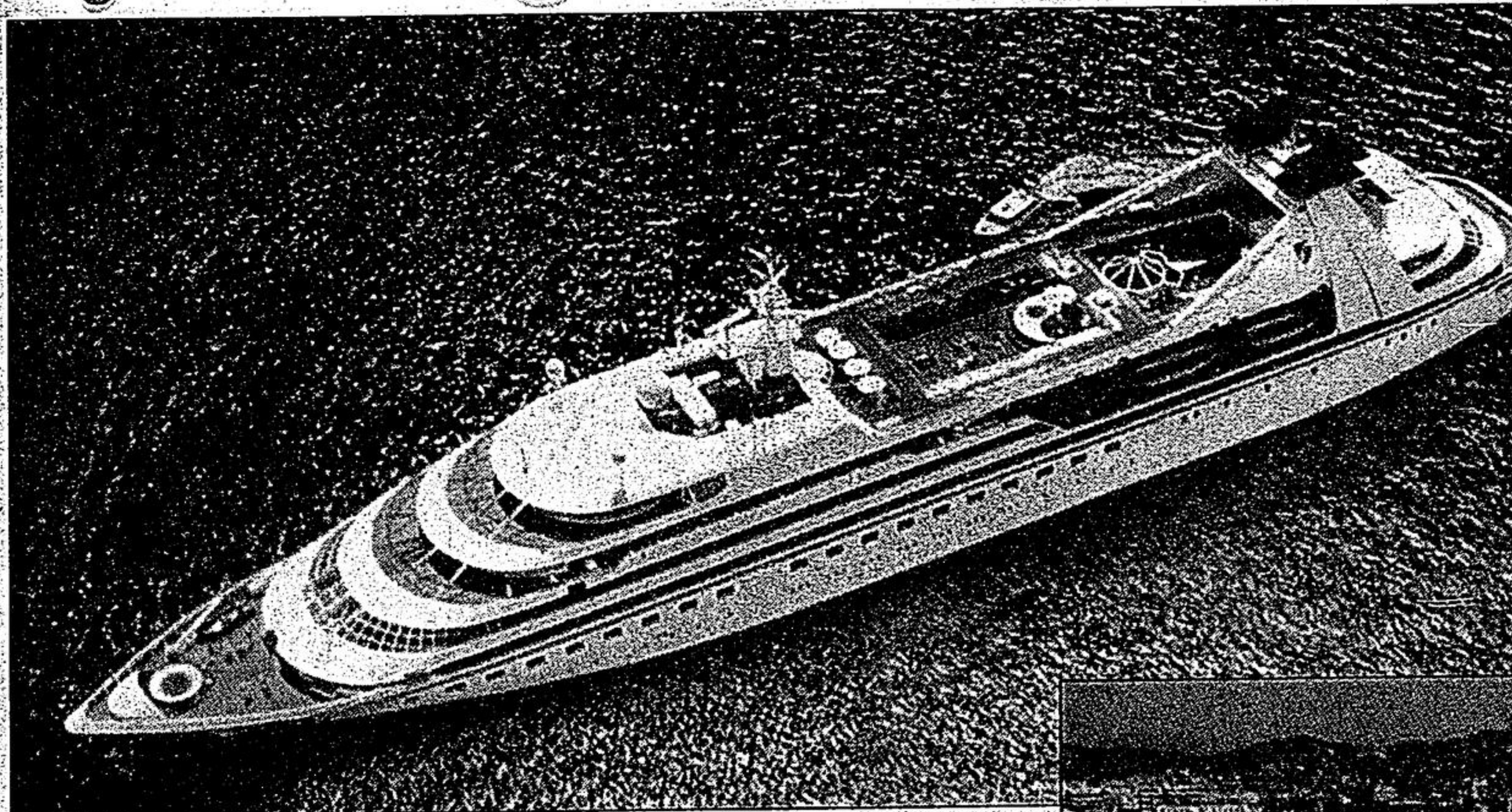
There's cruise ships, and then there's Seabourn.

In 20 years of cruising, I have criss-crossed the seas, logging more than 220,000 miles on more than 50 different cruises and they have all been enjoyable. It is truly a wonderful way to travel taking in the sights of different countries only having to unpack once, not a transportation worry on my mind. I have cruised the Caribbean, gone from New York to England, sailed the Mediterranean and toured the Alaskan waters. But I had never experienced the joy of sailing on the Seabourn Cruise Line.

Seabourn's fleet includes all-suite sister ships Seabourn Pride, Spirit and Legend, and I was ready to embark on a wonderful journey as I prepared to board the Seabourn Legend. Accustomed to more than 1,200 passengers on previous junkets, the Seabourn only caters to 208 visitors per cruise. As I passed my luggage to a Porter, I walked on the gangway and straight onto the Legend to be greeted by the Steward. With a sterling silver tray in hand, he offered a flute of champagne, orange juice or water, and on this occasion, with a ship of this magnitude, I accepted the champagne to quench my thirst. This was certainly a better experience than the trying headaches of attempting to board an airplane out of South Africa following days on safari.

In the span of eight days, with Captain Karlo Buer commanding, we traveled from Barcelona down the French Riviera, to the French ports of Vendres, Cassis, Le Lavandou, Porquerolles, Cannes, St. Tropez and finally Nice. There is nothing roomier than the body of the ocean. Nothing more patient. It smiles with waves and sends them crashing over a ship's deck. The sea is company, and no one helps bridges that relationship between you and the water than Seabourn.

Seabourn Cruise Line is regarded as the world's most celebrated cruise line, consistently receiving top awards, ratings and honours. Voyages range from four days to 43, venturing to some of the most celebrated ports. Founded in 1987, the Seabourn philosophy was to create nothing less than a totally new concept of cruising - with absolute dedication to the highest level of personal service, combined with entertainment where preferences are noted and spontaneity is indulged. I was breathless at the first sight of my suite, pure luxury measuring 277 square feet with balconies open to fresh ocean breezes, sleek interiors and an elegant, large walk-in closet. I was taken aback when a server asked my preference from a selection of a half-dozen soaps from around the world. If it were wine or cigars, there would have been no hesitation. I guess I couldn't go wrong, but still, I



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asked my young friend for her opinion and gladly accepted her offering.

During my cruise, I spent memorable time with Tony Egger, the Corporate Executive Chef for Seabourn, and Trevor Coutts, Legends' Chef de Cuisine. What a treat it was to share stories with Tony and congratulate him on his efforts with Seabourn. It was five-star dining every night but I must admit, I enjoyed an old-fashioned barbecue on my first night back in Holland Landing following such lavish outings. I will never forget joining Trevor on a visit to a French market to purchase fresh asparagus and artichokes featured at dinner that evening and the bottomless bowl of berries at breakfast the next morning.

But my adventure didn't begin on the Seabourn, where some well-to-do passengers will often spend a month on board. It began with an Air Canada flight from Toronto to London, followed by a flight to Spain arranged through EasyJet.com. As I was sitting on the flight to Barcelona, I chuckled to myself at the no-frills approach to EasyJet.com, knowing in another few hours I would be checking into the Hotel Ritz, Le Meridien, a five-star establishment rated number one in beautiful Barcelona.

Historic Barcelona is acclaimed worldwide for its art and culture, with its charming Mediterranean air and its warm, friendly people providing the setting for the elegant, luxury of the Hotel Ritz. In itself, it is symbolic of the beautiful city's history. During the past 80 years, the criteria of luxury hospitality, excellent cuisine and personalized attention,

which Cesar Ritz established as the philosophy of the hotel at the beginning of the century has continued.

The Ritz is located in the very heart of the city - situated on a pleasant, tree-lined boulevard that marks the elegant, traditional building that opened in 1919. Completely renovated in 2000, it is close to the popular Ramblas, near the historic Gothic Quarter, and convenient to the port and other points of interest. The hotel has spacious, comfortable rooms and deluxe rooms with Roman baths. This is truly a special hotel with old-world charm, courteous staff and a reputation for excellent cuisine and service.

I only had time to relish one night at Hotel Ritz, but I managed to spend time with their extraordinary chef, Romain Fornell, who was decorated with his first Michelin Star in 2001. Graduating in 1994 in the prestigious Ecole Hoteliere de Toulouse, he's made several stops along the way before finding a home at the Restaurant Diana at Hotel Ritz.

Before boarding the Seabourn, I had time to explore the splendid markets of Barcelona following an amazing evening with old family friends. Barcelona features some of the best open-air markets in the Mediterranean. You can spend hours mingling with the locals, searching out fresh fruits, vegetables, poultry and meats. It took a while, but I located some saffron to bring home to Canada. It's an extremely expensive spice, which I must have when I prepare the Spanish dish of Paella, a family favorite.

I had a full afternoon, protected under the hot Mediterranean sun thanks to my Tilley

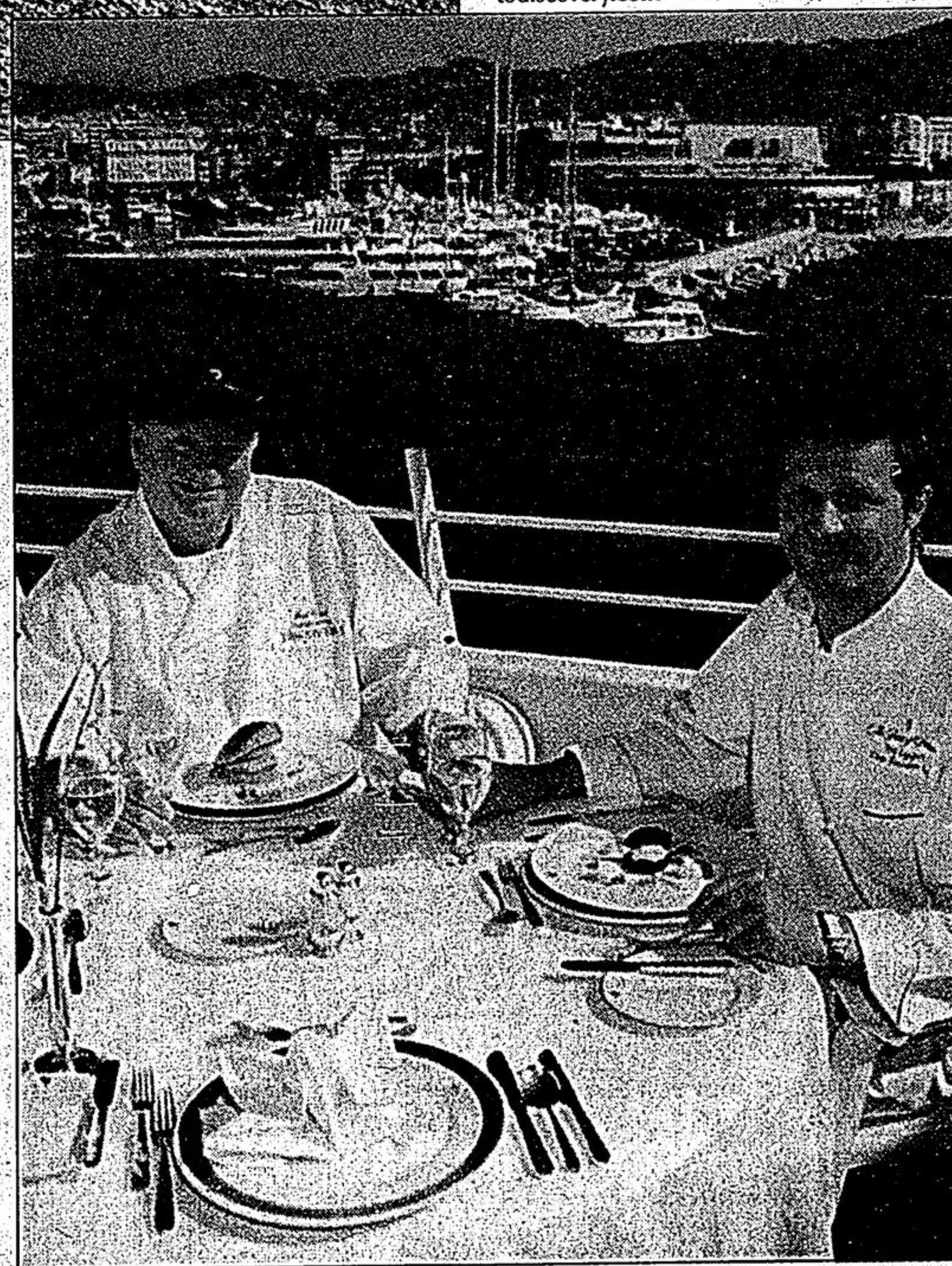
hat. I ended my market visit with an espresso or two as I chatted with some English-speaking locals.

Back at the Hotel Ritz to pick up my luggage, I tipped the Porter and began to make my way to the Seabourn. There were a few more tips to be doled out, surprisingly, it often seems to cost more to check out than check in. I laughed out loud when I realized the Seabourn practices a no-tipping policy at all times.

For more information on the Seabourn Cruise Line, visit their Web site at www.seabourn.com. You can also book through Tourcan Vacations, Tel: (416) 391-0334 or www.tourcanvacations.com

For more information on Hotel Ritz, Le Meridien, visit their Web site at www.lhw.com/ritzbarcel

To contact Bart Card mailto: bcard@passport-todiscovery.com



Bart dining on the waters

Photo Mick Meegan

Pity the Pickpockets!

"You might be interested in an experience I had recently. During a festival in Valencia, I was targeted by pickpockets while in a very dense crowd. I had on my Tilleys with all valuables in the front pockets and while fighting through

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Dr. Jeff Scott - Gormley, Ontario

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