

Sail your own Sjø

"A tribute to Scandinavia", writes the cruise line about Sjø, the new top restaurant aboard the ships Pearl Seaways and Crown Seaways that sail between Oslo and Copenhagen.

TEXT AND PHOTOS **PER A. BORGLUND**

"SJØ is operated by

Scandinavian mavens, and our gastronomic starting point is the fascination of the beautiful Scandinavian coasts, that have been the hallmark of our journey across Øresund and Kattegat for more than 150 years. Sjø reflects our passion for good food, local produce and culinary storytelling", the website says. The ferry company also writes that they have ambitions for a Michelin star!

Mat fra Norge [Food from Norway] has sailed on both ships, and eaten at the two versions of Sjø.

DFDS is one of Northern Europe's largest passenger ship companies, and the only one that sails directly from Oslo to Copenhagen. The two ships that operate the stretch can accommodate 2168 and 2044 guests, respectively. Both have several restaurants, bars and cafés on board. Every year, around 760 000 passengers travel between Oslo and Copenhagen with DFDS. The ships have daily departures from Oslo at 16:30, with arrival in Copenhagen the following morning.

The same timetables apply from Copenhagen to Oslo. dfds.no

Opening hours: Sjø has the first sitting at 17:45. **Prices:** A seven-course meal called The Journey costs 1500 Danish kroner, including wine, a glass of champagne, coffee and dessert. Four courses cost 450 Danish kroner (850 with wine), five dishes 500 (1000 with wine).



Photo: RUNE OLSEN/DFDS

THE CHEF: Christian Mortensen (left) is the chef at both Sjø restaurants, and has had Søren West on the team as a creative consultant.

TRAINING: Søren West (with hat) was sous chef at Noma in Copenhagen, and René Redzepi's right hand in building up the star restaurant. He has given the DFDS kitchen advice and guidance on such high-level food preparation.



Photo: RUNE OLSEN/DFDS

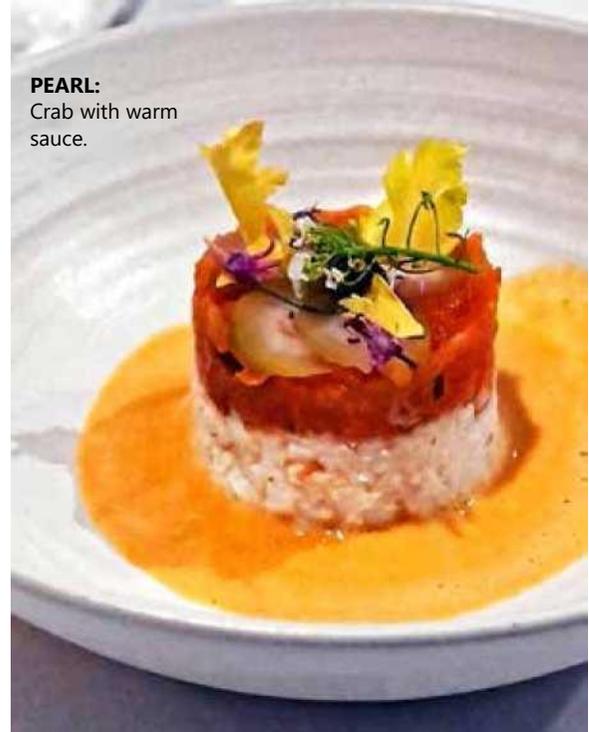
PEARL: Sjø is located out of range of possible noise.



PEARL:
Perfect crown roast of
lamb.



PEARL:
Crab with warm
sauce.



PEARL: Lovely squid.



PEARL: The marinated scallops
were a surprise.



Restaurant Sjø, Crown Seaways and Pearl Seaways.

We dined anonymously.

THE WELCOME

Crown: Flawless. We were quickly led past the queue to the neighbouring restaurant (giving us a bit of a VIP feeling), were given a nice table and offered a glass of pink champagne. We immediately each got our little warm cloth to wash our hands.

Pearl: Same warm welcome, you feel very welcome indeed. Also offered champagne here, from an opened bottle that turned out to be very "dead." New, fresh bubbles in the glass in seconds! Here, too, one offers a hand rinse before the meal.

THE MENU

Crown: You can pick and choose from a menu of 12 dishes. We had five courses each and were pleasantly satiated. Most people will manage one or two courses more. On our trips, these dishes were on offer: Octopus, common crab, lemon sole, raddicchio, artichoke, cauliflower, crown roast of lamb, venison, teal duck, selection of Scandinavian cheeses, apple and hazelnuts.

Pearl: The menus are identical.

THE FOOD

Crown: First of all, we were served an appetizer of veal sweetbread and the whitefish roe, equally delicious and tickling to the taste buds.

We started our own choices with (Norwegian) crab and squid, where the many-tendrilled sea creature was described as "lovely, with an acidic taste of grapefruit". The crab cake (with pickled tomato and unripe peaches) was also nice, but we were startled when the sauce, which was completely poured at the table, was cold. Shouldn't it be hot to contrast the refrigerator-cold shellfish? The flounder, a lemon sole, was served with a Jerusalem artichoke and a vanilla-flavoured sauce. This sauce was also completely cold, the delicious fish fillet could also have benefited from some heat.

A small lamb chop served with smoked yoghurt, a candied piece of lamb's neck and a dipping sauce were perfect, as was a pink fillet of venison served with several types of mushrooms.

A small dish of artichoke had an excessive acidity to the taste (from oranges), but on the other hand, generous amounts of black truffle were used in the garnish. In any case, the highlight was a breast of the little Eurasian teal duck, with which we also got the microscopic thigh as a crazy bonus. The duck was served with celery and honey, in a sauce that with all its condensed, salty depth tasted absolutely amazing!

Selected Scandinavian cheeses were presented on a separate trolley, which made the cheese look a bit sparse due to its size. The man with the trolley apologised that they only had one Norwegian cheese (a red washed-rind cheese from Eiker Gårdssystem), but there were none other of the country's big-name cheeses on offer. The cheeses we tasted were good enough, but we were surprised that the Swedish version of spruce stump was served cold. Our own from Gangstad will, by the book, be heated according to all the rules of the art. We got to choose generous amounts of cheese to go along with two types of bread from Sjø's own bakery, with good butter.

Pearl: Here, the kitchen also offered a little bit of veal sweetbread, but also delicious raw marinated scallops with roe on top.

We just had to test the crab here, too, and indeed: here the sauce was served warm. The crab dish itself was not as delicately arranged as on Crown, but the portion was almost twice as large. BUT: Here we found three quite large hits of the crab shell in the mixture, which is no fun when they crunch in your teeth. The octopus also had quite a different arrangement on the plate, but tasted as lovely as on the sister ship. The crown roast of lamb was still a sure winner, and when it came to the teal duck, this ship took the cake: The dish was equally delicious and as good as we found it on the first night, but here the portion was twice as large: two breasts and two thighs! One can only be grateful.

The venison was about the same on both ships, but this evening there were only a very few funnel chanterelles on the plate, not the many large pieces of different mushrooms we had been looking forward to. And the cook had been rather generous with the flake salt in the dish. The meat hardly needed that much crunchy salt on the surface.

My partner chose the hazelnut with caramel sauce dessert this evening, and concluded that the purée was sweet and good, but somewhat excessive.

The portion also stood out as very large in relation to what we were otherwise served. The leftovers of this dish were the only ones left on the plate during the two evenings at the table.

SERVICE

Crown: We were brilliantly treated and it is exotic having a sommelier with a maritime uniform, with stripes and everything. The waiters are never far away, the service goes smoothly. We got straightforward advice on wine choices. The napkin is discreetly replaced with a new one if it gets a stain. Each dish is thoroughly explained when served.

Pearl: The same here, great service. We noticed two differences: Pearl's sommelier thought it was a good idea to choose the same red wine for lamb, deer and duck. The colleague on the Crown put his foot down and gave us two types of wine. The waiters on the Pearl were not as conscientious in asking whether we were happy with the food after each serving.

ATMOSPHERE

Crown: Sjø here is only separated from the surroundings (the neighbouring restaurant) by a partition, so that you get the ambiance and voices (and children's screams) from the outside. According to the staff, the ship will be remodelled to rectify this. Otherwise it is a nice room.

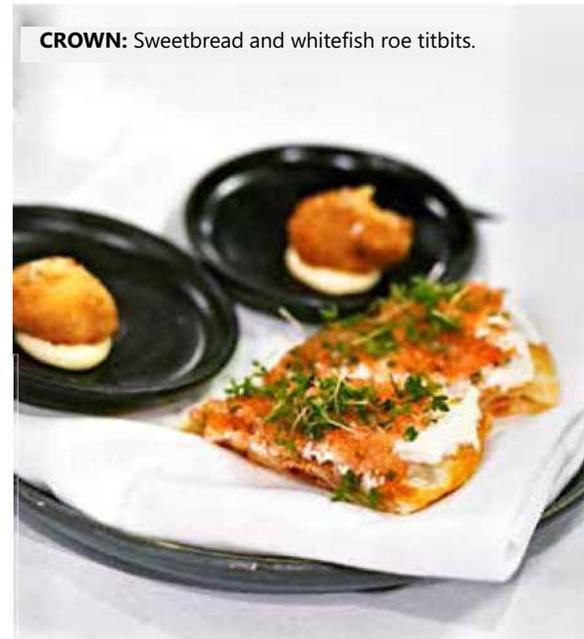
Pearl: Sjø here is placed together with the banquet hall, which was empty on the night we dined. There is also better noise insulation from the surroundings, so you get the impression of sitting inside a defined restaurant venue.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Crown and Pearl: The answer is yes. A little nitpicking notwithstanding, we found that we had two brilliant meals, with great food, excellent service and pleasant choices of drinks. And especially: 500 (Danish) kroner for five dishes is a bargain, you get much more for your money than if you choose the ships' steakhouse, where a tenderloin costs 360 kroner, for example. Both evenings we were regaled generously with champagne (with refills for the seafood dishes) and a choice of red wine that matched the rest of the menu. The price tag for the beverages came to about 700 kroner for both. So, about 1200 kroner per head for a great mealtime experience with drinks.



CROWN: The restaurant is close to the rest of the ship's activity.



CROWN: Sweetbread and whitefish roe titbits.



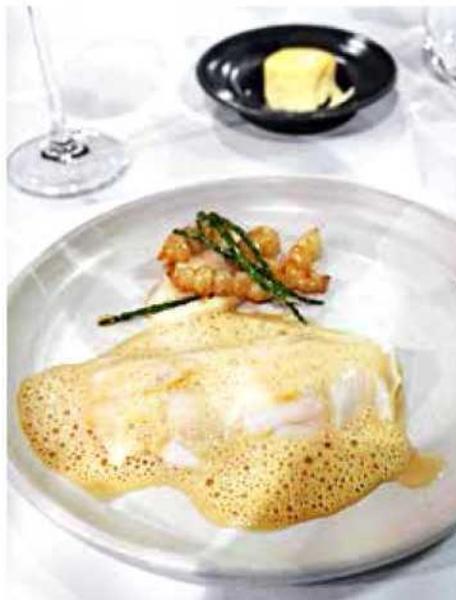
CROWN: Crab with cold sauce.



CROWN: Fantastic teal duck.

CONCLUSION

Crown and Pearl: If you want to sail to or from Copenhagen, there is no reason to have dinner anywhere else on board than at Sjø. We don't know whether the two restaurants will ever get a Michelin star, but the level of what is served makes the meal alone worth the voyage between Oslo and Copenhagen. So far we have to say that the ferry company's stated ambition of having a star has meant that people are constantly talking about the combination Sjø and Michelin with the greatest confidence. That in itself is a brilliant PR move!



CROWN: Flounder with Jerusalem artichoke.



CROWN: Delicious fillet of venison.