

CRUISING.



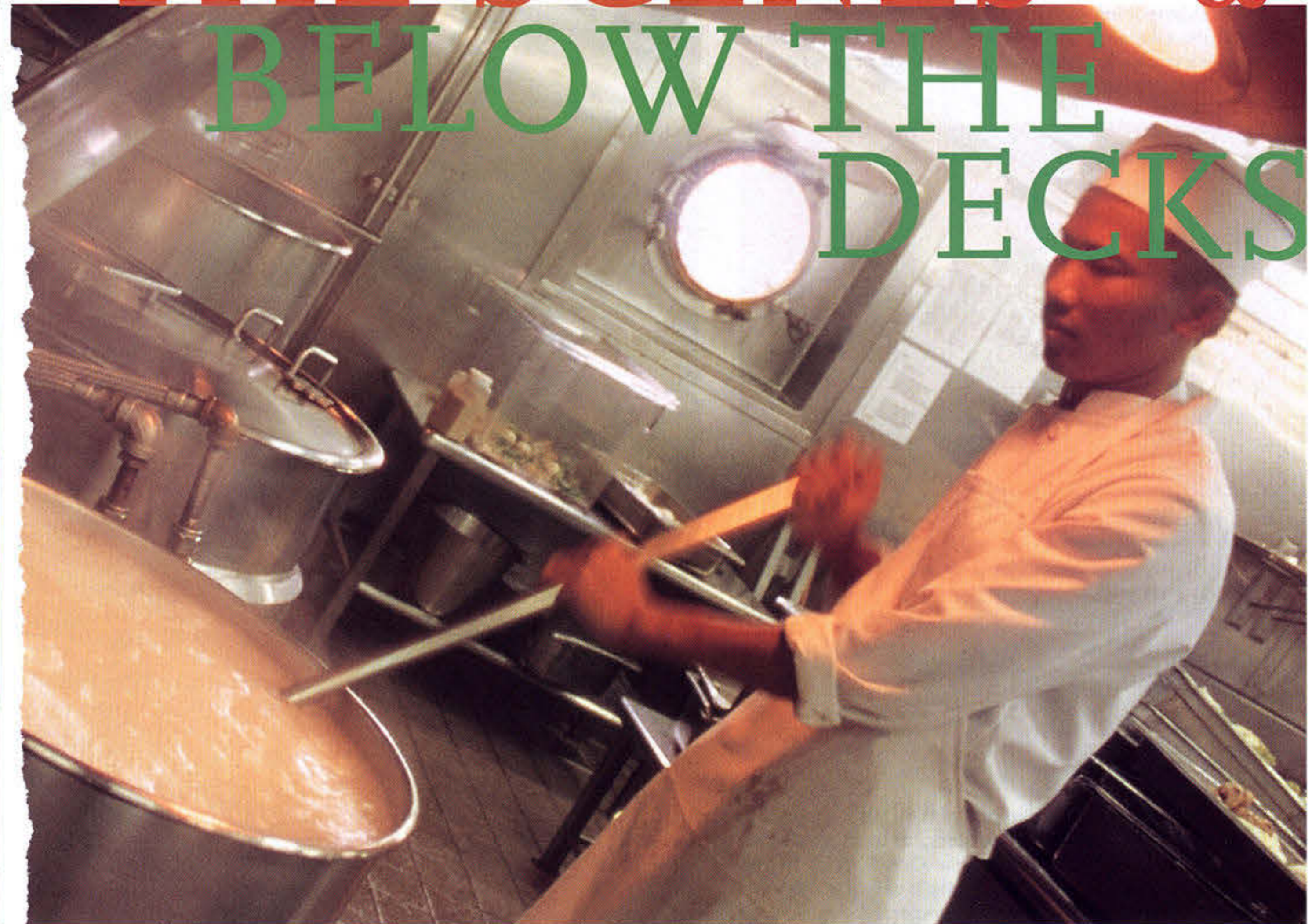
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**A**s one of tourism's booming sectors, cruising is beginning to ride the crest of its wave. In 1999 alone, a dozen new luxury-laden ships took to the high seas; that number is expected to double in the next two years.

And their promise of romance, money and travel is fueling a whole new job market. Life at sea may offer all these, but it's hard-earned booty in a world that is entirely self-governing, self-sufficient and largely without privacy—24 hours a day. Such is life below decks, where a below-the-water-line community exists that passengers rarely glimpse. Every ship has two worlds, and passengers inhabit only one.

This is an insider's look at a typical day at sea below decks.

# BEHIND THE SCENES & BELOW THE DECKS



**24 Hours** Cooking, Cleaning and Entertaining 2,000 Passengers

Text and photos by Chris McBeath



It's the deadest time of the dead of night. Even restless insomniacs have settled into a sleepy twilight zone. The ship's engines emit a low hum, and the hull creaks as it rocks.

But a ship never truly sleeps. For a handful of crew, four in the morning is the middle of the workday. On the bridge, the watch changes and a fresh-faced, tailor-trimmed officer takes the helm; deserted decks are hosed clean of briny debris; and in the kitchen, bakers pummel currant-filled dough into sweet smelling loaves—552 of them.

Moving between the decks is a new experience and a reward for two years of working "below" for a young Indonesian named Deddy, who is responsible for shampooing every square inch of the public area carpet. Like an artist, he carefully leaves his signature on his work—rows of neat little triangles carved out of the carpet's nape.

**"They come on as passengers and are off-loaded as freight," quips one food and beverage manager who estimates that the average person gains as much as 13 pounds during a weeklong cruise.**

By sunrise, the rest of the ship's army stirs. Battalions of service staff, waiters, cleaners and brass polishers stream through "Crew Only" doors to the passenger decks above. Each has a singular mission: to pamper the 1,800 paying passengers. For those who have reached the coveted ranks of cabin steward or waiter, service is a mantra that can pay high dividends: North Americans tip well, Australians are cheap and the English are restrained, rather than stingy, their tips being a genuine token of appreciation.

Life below decks is a far cry from the spit-and-polish opulence of the passenger areas. Surroundings are spartan, the noise is loud and dozens of languages reverberate off steel walls, creating an echo-

