

Q&A

DEE LAVIGNE, DEELIGHTFUL ROUX
SCHOOL OF COOKING, NEW ORLEANS

INTERVIEW BY Clare Vooght

Q. How did you become a chef?

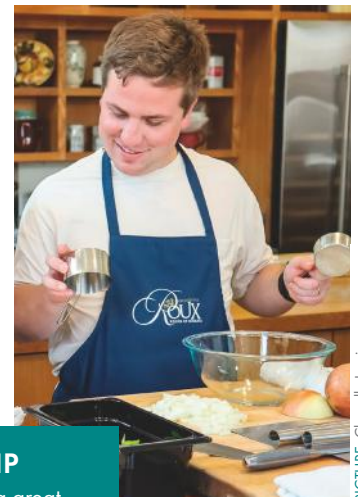
A. I started cooking at the age of seven, baking cakes and making breakfast. I would challenge myself to make my father's fried eggs over medium without breaking the yolks. After attending a culinary arts class, I decided to go to culinary school. I went to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. It's a classical French culinary school but I had the chance to learn how to cook cuisines from all over the world.

Q. How did you get into Creole and Cajun food?

A. As a native of New Orleans, Creole and Cajun cuisine has been a part of my life since birth, it's in my blood. New Orleans food speaks to my soul with its incredible spices, plus the mix of so many cultural influences. Louisiana's cuisine has a complexity of flavour found nowhere else in the world and that's why I love it.

Q. Tell us a little about the ethos of your culinary school Deelightful Roux.

A. It's New Orleans' only black-owned cooking school. Each class is around two and a half hours and students work their way through creating an appetizer, an entrée and a dessert. Students do everything from peeling shrimp, chopping, seasoning and making a roux, to flambéing bananas for Bananas Foster. Of course, the best part is at the end when we all get to experience the tasty dishes that have been lovingly created around the table with new friends.



PICTURE: Chanelle Lewis

Q. You're going to be teaching culinary sessions on Luxury Gold's Southern Grace tour. What can guests visiting Deelightful Roux on that tour expect from a class?

A. All of the above – and we'll be creating some of New Orleans' most famous dishes like jambalaya, gumbo and New Orleans-style Bananas Foster. I'm really looking forward to meeting guests from all over the world who are keen to learn more about Louisiana's cuisine.

Q. How important is food when it comes to learning about other cultures?

A. Food is a vital part of getting an inside view of cultures from across the globe. You not only get to see how cultures are influenced by traditions, geography, climate and economy, you also get to taste it. In turn, this allows the food to feed your soul as well as your belly.

Q. Which dishes tell the best stories about New Orleans?

A. That's a hard question because New Orleans is a melting pot of so many cultures, which all bring their different food influences. But if I have to pick one it's gumbo, a crazy-delicious savoury stew made with a variety of meats or shellfish combined with the trinity (onions, celery and green bell pepper). It is a mix of African, Native American and European flavours. The West African influence of okra, filé (the Native American ingredient made from the sassafras tree) and the French dish bouillabaisse all contribute to what Louisiana gumbo is today.

BOOK IT: Guests can experience a cookery class with the Deelightful Roux School of Cooking at the Southern Food and Beverage

DEE'S TOP TIP

New Orleans is a great place to find fantastic food in every price range. Tell clients not to be afraid to go off the beaten path of Bourbon Street to see what the city is really made of.

Museum on Luxury Gold's nine-day Southern Grace tour of Nashville, Memphis, Natchez and New Orleans.

Prices for a September 8 departure start at £4,862. luxurygold.com 

WIN A FAM TRIP

TTC is running a competition for agents to win a place on its TTC Tour Brands' Agent Fam Trip on May 8-15. Agents will visit US southern states and sample tour brands Trafalgar, Costsaver, Contiki, Insight Vacations and Luxury Gold, plus VIP experiences and a cooking session with Dee. Visit: agents.ttc.com/login