

Crewse

It isn't always
smooth sailing.

By Haidee E. Allerton

True Tales From the Workplace

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to work on a cruise ship? Me, too.

The closest I've come—so far—is recently being a passenger on a cruise to the Caribbean (Don't cry for me, dear readers!)

Anyway, there are some interesting jobs aboard a cruise ship: ice sculptor; social director, of course; steward; navigation officer; Bingo number caller; and the always mysterious title of "purser." A ship is like a small city: The crew population holds manicurists and masseuses,

chefs, piano players, personal trainers, waitpersons, golf pros (chipping lessons into the deck pool only), blackjack dealers, and so on. In fact, typically there are 200 to 1000 different types of jobs available on a cruise ship, with an average starting pay of US\$2000 a month. On my ship, there were 1200 passengers and 600 crew—one crew person for every two passengers.

The kitchen staff served 6000 meals a day. The Bingo Guy called the numbers every afternoon (dressing alternately as a scuba diver, bunny rabbit,

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and various other disguises), entertained in the after-dinner shows, and also served as the DJ till the wee hours in the disco—*whew!*

The typical contract is five to eight months. That means a crew member is away from home and at sea (except for the port destinations, which the crew has little time to explore) for the whole time. Then they take six weeks off before embarking on the next six months or so. Some of the Indonesian dining room staff were aboard for a year, many leaving behind families.

The crew is provided with uniforms but must supply their own dress-up clothes for formal nights on the ship. Their airfare to and from home to their assigned ship is gratis. Most share a small cabin on the lower decks, with no portholes and a room with a toilet and shower overhead.

That means the whole room gets wet when you take a shower. You may have experienced this arrangement in some European hotels, even fine ones.

Their meals are included and they get to eat the same fare as the passengers do. However, one crew member did confide that one thing he misses about being on land is being able to eat whatever he wants when he wants. “For instance,” he said plaintively, “sometimes I feel liking having spaghetti but it’s not on the ship menu.”

If a crewperson has done several sailings, he or she starts to recognize the frequent cruisers from other trips. And though dalliances between crew and

passengers are (officially) forbidden, romance does happen between crew members. The captain of my ship met his wife when she was a passenger on one of his voyages some years ago.

According to mycruiseshipjob.com, anybody who has worked on a cruise ship will tell you it’s the “best job in the world.” Every day, you meet new people and make new friends. Every night, there are parties and employee get-togethers. You meet people from nearly every country, so you grow and become more worldly, well rounded, and diverse. You can stay in contact

on email. If you decide to visit that country one day, you already have a friend there.

You also save most of your pay because you have almost no expenses.

I couldn’t imagine another week of Bingo, team trivia, overflowing buff-

fets, overeating pas-

sengers, Vegas-type entertainment, Blackjack tournaments, shuffleboard, quoits, sloshing drinks...and I only participated in (not ran) some of those activities, and only when I wanted to. Not to mention that I was thankful to escape the Norwalk virus. What are the crew’s odds of catching it over six months?

And to think that when I disembarked—rested, relaxed, but ready to get off the ship—the crew remained aboard to sail on and on and on. But you know what? They looked like they were having fun.

Bon voyage!

