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Superficially, most cruise ships and superyachts seem like distant cousins (although some of today's gigayachts are a little harder to distinguish). But in reality the operational aspects of the two may be more similar than you think. Bridges or engine rooms are often scale versions of one another, give or take a smarter pilot chair or set of generators. And although once considered the host to marauding hoards, service on cruise ships such as the *Oasis of the Seas* is reaching unprecedented heights for the industry. So, how different are we in the superyacht industry from cruise ships? In this first of a two-part series, *TCR* looks at the similarities and differences when it comes to attitude to work, levels of service and workloads.

ATTITUDE TO WORK

The attitude towards work differs significantly from the crew in yachting to the crew in the cruise ship industry. Cruise ships are run like well-oiled machines with very strict departmentalisation and a strong sense of organisation. This means that the crew are far more specialised compared to those onboard smaller superyachts, who are used to multitasking.

But how would this stand up to a busy yacht charter? Kim Russell, a chief stewardess who has worked alongside ex-cruise ship crew, feels that they found the charter schedule "very challenging and were not to be relied upon for support". She notes that they lacked the "we're all in it together" attitude prevalent on yachts. Additionally, although she finds they were extremely well trained in their specialist area from the cruise ship, they did not demonstrate versatility in their roles and were less willing to carry out jobs outside of their job description. Onboard cruise ships there is a strict hierarchy throughout each department, with more defined boundaries than on

superyachts. Peter Vogel, who spent many years working on cruise ships before moving over to yachting, notes: "Onboard cruise liners the rules and guidelines for crew are clearly set out and adhered to. Onboard yachts I feel that there is a completely different culture and more often than not, the rules are not clearly explained nor followed up. I therefore feel that there is less respect for the management onboard yachts than there is in the cruise world."

Mike Hitch, an ex-cruise ship officer turned superyacht fleet captain, observes that onboard cruise ships there is a "very high level of discipline, necessary to keep the ship functioning properly". Perhaps it is this discipline and level of hierarchy and order that keeps cruise ship crew motivated and working to a high standard. In contrast to Russell's experience, Hitch describes the relentlessness cruise ship work: "As you will spend many months onboard without a break there is a necessity to have a strong work ethic otherwise you will probably find your contract cut short. Of course there are always weak links in the system but these get weeded out very quickly."

Both Vogel and Hitch agree that work ethic cannot be generalised between cruise ship and yacht crews but that it is much more down to the individual. "Work ethic is something that you have regardless of where you work," argues Hitch. "I have sailed with both good and bad on both yachts and cruise ships. On cruise ships, the crew work long hours for several months on end. Therefore, it is necessary to have a strong work ethic to survive." Vogel notes that levels of passion for the work are equal in both industries. He does, however, observe that in yachting "you either run into a greatly motivated and passionate crew or have to deal with a burned out bunch where the passion has disappeared".

But the sheer size of a cruise ship means that procedures and planning are imperative to keep things functioning

onboard, like running a town compared to a hotel on a superyacht. Lisa Grobler, an ex-cruise ship spa worker, says: "Cruise ships are about slick operation and perfect timing. Everyone works to a system in coordination, there is no room for error. The main restaurant onboard *Britannia*, for the third class, seats 1,400 guests and serves two sittings for each meal; you have two hours to serve three courses and turn the place around for the next group of 1,200 to 1,400."

In addition to superior organisation, the attitude towards safety onboard cruise ships is meticulous. Grobler describes the safety training she received: "[There was] fire training every couple of months and when you join a new contract [there are] boat drills every week (sometimes twice in a cruise), plus a safety demonstration to guests on embarkation day. [There are] drills with US coast guards and MCA every couple of months. It is often a pleasant surprise to find you are in a lifeboat getting lowered to sea. [There was also] crowd management training. The crew need to be prepared as a disaster at sea would be very damaging to the cruise ship industry, especially if the crew didn't handle it correctly." Perhaps there is a lot that we as an industry can learn from this ingrained safety culture.

WORKING HOURS

The working hours onboard a cruise ship can seem relentless. Crew normally sign a contract that can last for between three and 10 months. Once the contract has been completed crew go home and rest for a couple of months before undertaking another contract. Generally this time off is unpaid; however, some cruise lines pay an annual salary including leave time.

Schedules and quality of life onboard differ for the deck and engineering crew. "Engineers work eight hours in 24; they do four-hour shifts, so if you work 12pm to 4pm you would then work again from 12am to 4am," explains Grobler. "They can also order any guest food whenever they want and they get free drinks and huge cabins with portholes. They have the good life when off duty [but] it balances out that they are in the engine rooms on deck C, three levels below sea in the heat."

For other departments, 12- to 16-hour days are commonplace, as well as seven-day weeks. The crew will get a couple of hours off when they are in port if they are lucky but in general it is many months of hard work before they can take a couple of months leave to recharge their batteries. Sometimes crew are expected to complete four or five transatlantic crossings (or "trannies") in a row with barely more than a few hours' turnaround. The housekeeping staff would have to clean around 12 rooms in two to three hours.

However, cruise ships are generally audited and inspected much more than yachts. Therefore conformity

to working hours directives is far stricter than in yachting, where the hours are more erratic. Onboard a yacht you can spend several weeks, possibly months, working flat out day and night; conversely you could find yourself with a great deal of free time when the guests and owners are not onboard. The work on a cruise ships is totally consistent, with a reliable and continuous guest turnover.

SERVICE LEVELS

Service levels differ greatly between cruise ships and yachts. You could compare it to the difference between the service from a five-star hotel compared to the personalised service from staff at a private residence. Peter Vogel describes how crew on superyachts must be a "match" for their employer whereas onboard a cruise ship crew must provide a service to numerous guests. He is of the opinion that cruise ship crew have a great deal more hospitality experience than their yachting counterparts and this is a matter of necessity: "You will not land a job with any cruise line without hospitality education ... while in yachting you just need that killer smile".

Despite this standard of hospitality training in cruise ships, Vogel admits that crew are limited in their service approach: "It is glamorous and nice for the guests but you are restricted by the amount of crew you have onboard and by the budgets that stop you from providing the ultimate service level. In yachting you are able to go that extra mile, [with] the freedom to please your owners and their guests with everything that you can envision."

Hitch concurs that there is a lack of yachting hospitality training: "There is less time for training and because of the smaller numbers of crew you are expected to be proficient at your job when you join." Describing himself as someone with very high standards, Hitch recently took a cruise and "was pleasantly surprised that all my expectations were exceeded ... the service was excellent, the food was outstanding." He also believes that the only difference between yachts and cruise ships is the level of personal service. Russell emphasised the high standards of service but lack of crossover skills in cruise ships crew.

Although individuals approach work differently and generalising can lead to stereotyping, a comparison of the two biggest marine hospitality industries is certainly interesting – and there are more similarities than you would initially assume. In the next issue of *TCR* we will consider the mix of people onboard, who the work suits, occupational stability and long-term careers on cruise ships compared with superyachts. ■

Have you worked with ex-cruise ship crew or worked on a cruise ship? Do you think that the demands and operations are worlds apart or more similar than most would expect? Let us know at TheCrewReport.com/Feature