
Why young hospitality professionals may want to sail away with a cruise line

12 SEP 2014 | Get Free Access to Breaking Hospitality News Here ([/login/create](#)) , FRITZ GUBLER
[Insights, All]

Vitor Alves is the Hotel Director on Seabourn Sojourn (<http://www.seabourn.com/luxury-cruise-vacation-onboard/Sojourn>) , which is often described as a yacht, since the six-star ship hosts only 485 guests. Seabourn Cruises are part of the Carnival family.



Vitor is originally from Portugal and received his professional training at the reputed Austrian Hotel School Klessheim in Salzburg and at Cornell in the USA. For the last 25 years he has called the Seven Seas his home away from home.

Hotel Director on luxurious cruise ship is a very enviable job. How does one get to such a position?

Generally you do not get onto a ship right at the beginning of your professional career, as most typically learn the skills and knowledge of the hospitality industry on land. I started as a chef and then completed my education at hotel schools in Portugal and Austria.

A cruise ship is a very unique hotel operation and normally, a GM of hotel wouldn't move into the same position on a ship. I started in the Provisions Department 25 years ago and went through various departments to understand the unique way they work and interlink with each other, and also to respect the contribution of each section.

25 years is a long time! It seems that you adapted well to that unique lifestyle.

Maybe it is a bit infectious; I love the fast pace of work, the young crew, the mix of nationalities and the 4 months on and 2 months off. You work in a close team - you spend all your time with your colleagues and you bond with some of them. It doesn't appeal to everyone, but I love it. It suits me well and it is indeed very rewarding.

Essentially it is a hotel at sea, but what is different from a hotel on land?

In one word - the staff. They are a close knit team, as they are together for 24 hours a day for up to 6 months, so they become a family. Most of the time, that is a big advantage compared to a hotel on land. We know their strengths, their personalities, and we use that to develop them further through regular training. We create a positive and friendly atmosphere among the crew and, in turn, that reflects on the quality of interaction with the guests.

The other huge difference is the regulatory compliances and the safety requirements we have to be trained for and must adhere to in the operation of the ship. That requires some focus from the staff, but also adds some formality and seriousness to all their performances and actions. On the last public health inspection, the Seabourn Sojourn achieved a perfect score of 100. We are very proud of that result.

However, it is the job of the Hotel Director to maintain the right balance between this very stringent regulation and the delivery of hospitality-friendly service and memorable experiences. The regulations are getting more and more complex, and keeping that balance will be a real challenge for our industry in the future.



I noticed your crew is a good representation of the United Nations. Is it a problem to have such a variety of cultures and nationalities working and living in a tight space?

Indeed we are working and living together in a limited space. That creates some advantages and sometimes poses some challenges for some individuals. Over the years, we learned that it is much better to have a good cross section of nationalities rather than hiring staff from predominantly one country. Generally staff not only leave family and friends at home, but they also leave many of their personal problems and cultural boundaries behind. Therefore, most are quite open minded and relaxed on board. The younger generation are especially very easy going. But then life is so much easier on board - no rent to pay, no public transport to catch, no cooking to be done and a doctor is located down the corridor. On most cruise ships, training is integrated into the daily job performance and therefore promotions are often more frequent than in hotels on land. The pay is good too. Staff see the world and make friends from every corner of the world.

That sounds good. Are there also good career opportunities after life at sea?

Many young professionals stay two to three years and many will use their experience on the ships as a spring board for their professional career. Many would have moved up a level or two in that time and most will get a promotion back in their home country, because not only did they get international experience, but they also have received a lot of training. Many of my colleagues who started with me as chefs and waiters are now in leading positions on ships, on land with the cruise company, or in the international hospitality industry.

After reading our interview, some of eHotelier's over 60,000 members would now be very tempted to work and see the world on a cruise ship. How can they go about finding a job on a ship?

The cruise industry is doing very well and more than 26 big ships are currently being built and launched in the next year. There are many fantastic opportunities for young professionals. I personally can recommend a stint on a cruise ship as career move, but also to give that piggy bank a good feed.

Most cruise ship companies have career sections on their website and then there are job agents in most countries hiring staff for the cruise ships. They are looking for young professionals right now! Make a start on www.carnival.com (<http://www.carnival.com/careers.aspx>) or casting@seabourn.com. (<mailto:casting@seabourn.com>)

Vitor, thank you for sharing your insights with us and for your advice to our young professional members. I also would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you and your team for the amazing job you have done. No wonder that the cruise industry is expanding at supersonic speed. I myself have become a loyal "sailor".

About the author



Fritz Gubler is the President of eHotelier. He has many years of experience across the globe in a wide range of roles in the hospitality industry. Read more about his background in the About Us (<http://ehotelier.com/about-us>) section of eHotelier.

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