



Fellows Broadsheet

The Institute of Hospitality Fellows Broadsheet is a monthly thought-leadership article written by a member of our esteemed College of Fellows. Celebrating the wealth of professionalism, knowledge and expertise within our diverse, worldwide hospitality family. The Fellows Broadsheet is published on the first Sunday of every month, exclusively for members.

Seagoing Hospitality - The Maritime Sector

Mike Deegan FIH Tech (IOSH) has been a member of the Institute of Hospitality for over 30 years during which time he has been employed both at sea and ashore in the shipping industry. He commenced his career afloat in general cargo vessels and tankers, specialising in passenger shipping as a senior officer. He has been Fleet Director, covering all aspects of ship management and which includes the hotel brief, for a large fleet of small, quality, passenger vessels for the last 10 years.

In this Fellows Broadsheet, Seagoing Hospitality – The Maritime sector of Hospitality, Mike looks at the development of maritime hospitality careers over the last 3 decades and highlights the opportunities and challenges in providing hospitality afloat.

Floating Hospitality

Ever wondered who provides the myriad of guest services and hospitality aboard those ocean liners sailing around our coasts, or in the seemingly endless TV advertisements for cruise holidays?

Well, it is people like you. Hospitality professionals passionate about providing their guests lasting memories and unobtrusive yet perfect service. But it's not just cruise ships. Anything that floats have a catering element within it. Cargo vessels, tankers, oil rigs, tugs, river cruise ships, ferries, all have to provide hospitality, to a greater, or lesser extent.

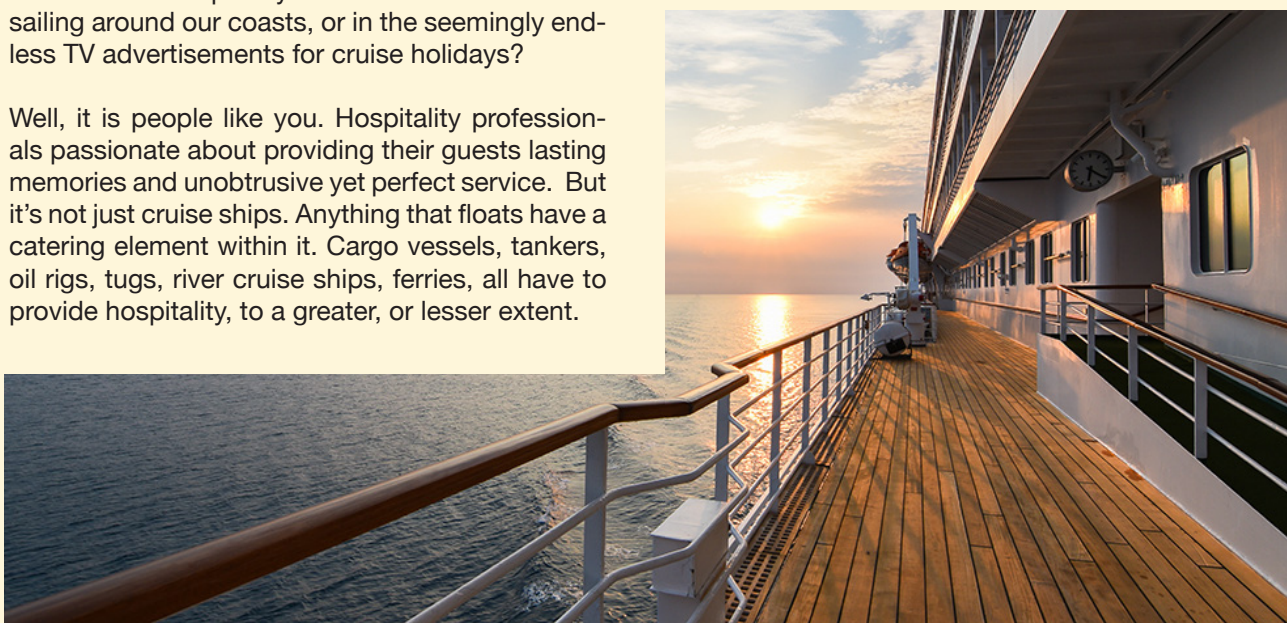
Merchant Navy

I joined the Merchant Navy almost 40 years ago, after initial training ashore, as a Purser Cadet.

Back then the training was a structured process via Assistant Purser, Purser to Senior Purser in charge of the then called, Catering Department, aboard some of the largest and more complex vessels.

As Deputy Purser (Catering), you had charge of the department in a smaller or less complex vessel. Then Senior Pursers or Chief Stewards had risen through the ranks to occupy the senior position and had generally undertaken every job on their way up to the top job.

Nowadays, whilst there is still opportunity for promotion from entry level to the most senior managers, the industry also recruits suitably qualified professionals into almost every position afloat, right up to, and including Hotel Manager, the modern-day equivalent of Senior Purser.





Superb career choice

Floating hospitality is a superb career for hospitality professionals. Responsibility comes at an early age and once away from home ports you need to rely on your own professionalism and initiative.

There is no popping down to a local supermarket when cruising in Antarctica because the stores has run out of something! Stores can take up to 3 months to plan and running out is not an option! Checking out every guest at the same time, and then checking in a full load of new guests only hours later the same day, takes a bit of getting used to, but it's incredible how quickly those things become the norm!

Overall, the sense of teamwork and camaraderie is second to none. For those for whom a life at sea is attractive, there are good career paths to senior positions and the overlay of safety and maritime training on top of professional training and knowledge makes for an interesting mix. Every crew member must undertake safety and survival training every 5 years and there are weekly fire and emergency drills to attend (no exceptions!).

Of course, this life isn't for everyone. Separation from families and loved ones is a high price to pay when pursuing a career afloat.

For those whose career is in the kitchen, called the Galley afloat, we delight in having our own language to confuse land lubbers!

Again, promotion is rapid and the opportunity for career development and creative flair are limitless. Executive Chefs and their brigades on the larger ships are preparing up to 30,000 meals a day for guests and crew, all with the "wow" factor. Plus, all Chefs afloat are expected to source local delicacies and ingredients to give guests a flavour of the places visited.

Suitably qualified individuals are always in demand in the cruise industry: positions in front of house, kitchen, stores management, housekeeping, guest relations, HR management and F&B are frequently advertised on the careers section of most cruise operators' websites. Similar seasonal vacancies are also available on river cruise ships: in Europe. The river cruise season tends to run from Easter to the end of October, with a brief resumption over Christmas and New Year.





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Apprenticeships

In the UK, the Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB), has been developing a Maritime Catering Apprenticeship which is now live and has been introduced successfully by several operators including P&O Ferries.

This is to provide training for seagoing Chefs and the training programme is overseen by the Maritime Apprenticeship Committee (MAC), along with other maritime apprenticeship programmes such as Deck Rating and Engine Room Rating.

The MAC is managed centrally by the MNTB and includes employers, training providers along with delegates from the Department for Education, Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) who oversee the safety and survival training which is necessary for all seafarers, and similar bodies.

Apprentices who complete the programme automatically become eligible to apply to MCA for their formal internationally recognised seagoing qualification: Ships Cook.

The programme itself is a Level 2 apprenticeship which generally, employers and training providers would schedule for 2 years. Academic funding to cover the tuition and college elements can be drawn down from the apprenticeship levy, if the employing company is a levy paying organisation. The employer will then pay the salary and associated start-up costs such as uniform, knives, textbooks etc.

This formal, government approved apprenticeship can be delivered to those employees that are employed in England, not necessarily working in England, via the English 'Institute for Apprenticeships'.

Other non-maritime chef apprenticeships for the UK's devolved nations are available via their apprenticeship centres. For example, Caledonian MacBrayne Ferries in Scotland use a standard Chef Apprenticeship and bolt Maritime and Safety and Survival Training onto it. I know I keep coming back to safety training, but all crew members are seafarers first and specialists second!

Plans are also in the pipeline for a Hospitality Apprenticeship.

Royal Fleet Apprenticeships

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service (RFA), which is the civilian manned fleet of Royal Naval support ships, also provide maritime apprenticeships for trainee cooks and stewards.

In common with their counterparts in the commercial Merchant Navy they undergo a 2-year training programme in their chosen specialisation, but this is overlaid with naval training appropriate for civilian crews who could be asked to serve in conflict zones.

The work undertaken by the RFA is incredibly interesting and could include supporting warships in remote corners of the globe, disaster relief, support of amphibious operations overseas and "flying the flag" in exotic parts of the world. For those who want to advance, Officer status may be available later in their career.

It is important to note that all seagoing positions require candidates to pass a Merchant Navy Medical examination at regular intervals throughout their career to ensure full fitness for service afloat. All accommodation, food, uniform and travel to and from seagoing appointments, not ferries where crew are usually required to reside in the locality of the port where their ship is based, are provided when serving afloat.

Exciting times

It could not be a more exciting time to undertake a maritime hospitality career – as I say not for everyone as there are long periods of separation from home and loved ones. But the rewards are tangible: international travel, working in some of the best-appointed hotels in the world (albeit they float!), world-class training and responsibility at an early age. Shoreside managerial positions are also available in later career (think of it as area management!) - You could be the "me" of tomorrow! I couldn't recommend it highly enough.





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About the author

Mike has spent most of his working life in the shipping industry. With 21 years at sea in the UK Merchant Navy before leaving as a senior officer. After serving on tankers, general cargo, a troop ship, cruise vessels and passenger RORO ferries, Mike started his work ashore in the late 1990s.

He was Fleet Manager with the Royal Yacht Service in Oman for 2 years before returning to the UK. Joining Hebridean Island Cruises, initially as Operations Manager, he was promoted to Operations Director and finally Managing Director, retaining the role when the company was acquired by the All Leisure group. After the group merger, Mike became Group Operations Director.

In 2012, Mike joined Noble Caledonia as Fleet Director and is responsible for all aspects of marine management within the company including technical management, environment, safety, hotel operations, crewing, deployment planning and cadet training programmes.

In addition, he undertakes risk assessments for some of the more challenging terrain in which Noble Caledonia vessels operate.

Connect with Mike on LinkedIn.



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