

ELBA

A Day in the life of...

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MY ALARM GOES OFF...

Because working on a ship is very much like shift-work, the time you start work can vary. I usually start work at 4am, so my alarm will go off at around 3.30 and after a shower, I will put on my uniform. On some ships, you are not required to wear uniform, so normal clothes like jeans and a t-shirt are fine.

Most people on the ship work 4 hours on and 8 hours off, with some "overtime" in between. You typically work between 8 and 10 hours a day but as the work is usually enjoyable, time passes very quickly. Other shifts start at 8 and 12. Because you live on board the ship whilst working, the commute is easy and you can be 'at work' in just a few minutes.

I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR...

I am in charge of the safe navigation of the ship for two 4-hour shifts (called watches) each day. I work on the bridge (where the ship is controlled) from 4 to 8 every morning and again from 4 to 8 every evening. While on watch, I keep a lookout for other ships and make sure the ship is

safe. Most ships are controlled by an 'autopilot' and I monitor this to make sure the ship sails safely.

When the ship is in port, I am responsible for the safe loading and unloading of cargo and /or passengers.

I GOT MY JOB...

Many British shipping companies take on trainees (called cadets). I wrote to some shipping companies and applied to join their training programs. After an interview, I was offered a place with one company and started college a few months later. The training involves a mix of time at college and on board a ship. You typically spend 4-6 months at college learning the basics about ships and life on board and then spend time at sea before returning to college. You must spend a total of 12 months training on a ship to qualify as a navigation officer.

Shipping companies pay a lot of the costs of training, including college fees. They also pay a small living allowance while you

are training. The course I studied was Nautical Science. I studied in Ireland, but there are many colleges in the UK that offer the same course.

AT SCHOOL I STUDIED...

You need a science subject and to pass GCSE maths in order to qualify for the college course, with, some companies requiring candidates to have A-Levels before moving into work. The college course contains some maths and physics, as well as the core subjects of navigation and ship safety. The college work is challenging, but with hard work, isn't difficult to pass.



Shipping



Merchant Seaman



MY TYPICAL DAY...

The morning watch is usually quiet, as most people are in bed. If the ship is in the middle of the ocean and there are no other ships in the area, I can do some other work while the autopilot takes care of the navigation. I also have an 'assistant' on the bridge, usually a trainee or a sailor, so they will keep the look-out while I do other work.

After breakfast, I will do some work on deck. This can be anything from inspecting and maintaining safety equipment to checking cargo or inspecting tanks and spaces on board that most people would normally never see. I also have a lot of paperwork to do, planning work and maintaining records of inspections. This can be quite boring, but I spread it out and mix it with the interesting work.

I have lunch around 12pm and then have some time off until my afternoon watch at 4pm. Because I only ever get around 6 hours' sleep at night, I usually have a little nap in the afternoon, to make sure I am properly rested. I spend another 4 hours on the bridge between 4 and 8.

THE KEY SKILLS I USE IN MY JOB...

Working at sea requires a number of skills, which I learned during training. In addition to learning how to safely navigate and 'drive' the ship, you learn about steel maintenance and cargo handling. Safety is very important on ships and attention to safety in all work is very important. You also train as a fireman and a medic, so that you can deal with emergencies at sea.

It's also very important to have good interpersonal skills so that you can live and work in close proximity with others. If you are shy or don't mix well - the sea will change this! I have sailed with many young people who joined a ship for the first time, shy and with little self-confidence. They usually finish their training as different people - bursting with confidence.

THE BEST PART OF MY JOB IS...

The best part of my job is definitely the travel; seeing new places and meeting new people. I have been very lucky in my career. I have been around the world three times, crossed all the oceans and visited over 100 different countries. All while being paid!

THE WORST PART OF MY JOB IS...

Spending long periods of time away from my family and friends is always difficult, but you make good friends on board and they often become your family. Although many people working at sea spend up to 4 months away at a time, you can work on ferries and other ships that require you to stay on board for just a week or a month.

MY ROLE MODEL GROWING UP WAS...

I was lucky to have a lot of good role models in school. I also played a number of sports and found role models in many of my coaches. My parents both worked very hard and have inspired me to do the same.

AFTER WORK...

When the afternoon watch finishes at 8pm, I am free for the rest of the evening. Like all meals, my dinner is prepared on board by the cook. People eat together and I have my breakfast and lunch with others but because I don't finish work until 8, I often eat my dinner alone. After dinner, I usually read or watch a movie before going to bed. There is usually a good social life on board, despite there being fewer than 20 people on the ship. People organise karaoke, bingo and quizzes, which are always good fun.

MY PLAN B...

I was very lucky because I knew from an early age what I wanted to do and even luckier that I was able to do it. Being at sea is not for everyone and many people chose to leave and do something different. Luckily, many of the skills and qualifications you learn at sea can lead to good, "normal" jobs ashore. Some of my friends who trained at sea now work ashore in ship management and operations departments of shipping companies, as pilots (who guide ships in and out of port), surveyors and even lawyers. There are plenty of opportunities available for anyone who decides to move ashore and training at sea gives people a great platform to move on to a new career.