

Below I have written a small diary of my experiences on board the STS Lord Nelson which saw me take part in a 10 day voyage around the coast of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in Canada as part of a Rendezvous Tall Ships regatta. This was a brilliant experience and I feel that it has helped me develop as a person by exposing me to situations and experiences that allowed me to challenge myself in ways that are not usually possible.

I arrived at the ship in Lunenburg on the first day at about noon and started to get settled in, the first few hours involved a lot of admin such as the issuing of wet weather gear and the harnesses that are used when climbing the mast. After this we had a lecture on the safety on board and did a mock emergency alarm test, during this I was part of an evacuation team that is responsible for helping wheelchair users up and onto the main deck from the lower mess which included a team on a pulley system and a stabiliser in front to pull the user up the stairs. During the evening, the locals held a party for the crew which was a brilliant opportunity to get to know the people that you would be working with.

On the second morning, we opened the ship up to the public so that they could look around and get an idea of what the JST does and how they operate, most people found this quite interesting and some were quite confused by some of the adaptations such as the raised strip down the middle of all the deck so that visually impaired people can more easily move about the ship. After a quick lunch, we had the opportunity to go up the mast an activity that initially daunted me especially going out over the water on the yard arm having to stand on just a rope hanging below the yard. After this we left Lunenburg and motored around the coast until we dropped anchor for the night which allowed me the chance of my first watch at anchor which meant that my watch were responsible for making sure that the ship was not drifting.

The third day saw our first bit of sailing however before we could do this some of us had to go up the mast and unfurl the sails, an opportunity that I almost did not take up due to my experience the day before however I made myself go up again and this proved to be a very good decision as I began to become comfortable whilst doing a job and was quite comfortable to unfurl the sails with both hands meaning that I wasn't actually holding onto anything and was simply standing on the swaying rope. Once we were under way we had a peaceful day sailing around Nova Scotia with multiple opportunities at sail handling. The afternoon saw my first sailing watch which saw me being a lookout as well as piloting the ship which as I found out is easier than most ships its size due to it having power steering, allowing all abilities to steer. As well as this I filled out the ships log which is a series of meteorological observations as the Lord Nelson acts as a mobile reporting station for the national met.

Day 4 saw me woken up at midnight to do my first night watch, this gave some spectacular views of the night sky including seeing Venus rise at 3am, as well as the unique experience of sailing at night. During the day we got into the routine of being at sea with the opportunity to do lots of sail handling, but also to get some rest in the afternoon known as quiet time which I used to catch up on some sleep due to being up the night before on night watch. We also did happy hour on this day which is where everybody on board helps to clean the ship which can be anything from scrubbing the decks to scrubbing the toilets the latter of which was the task that was given to me. In the evening, we went to anchor again due to the fact that the following morning we were due into Digby a small fishing town on the other side of Nova Scotia.

On day 5 we went in through a headland entrance into an area called The Gut and motored through to Digby, due to the large tide of about 8 metres we had to cockbill the yards so that they were at an angle, this way when we went down the side of the quayside with the tide the yards would not hit.

We had another afternoon of open ship which saw more strange questions including a woman who thought we were from South Africa. In the afternoon, I had the opportunity to go ashore and discover the small town of Digby which included discounted ice cream for all crew members and free sea food. The evening was an opportunity for our watch to be able to go out for dinner where we had yet more seafood as it is very big in Nova Scotia and appropriate as Digby runs off of fishing. This was my first experience of eating lobster which turned out to be a very messy experience.

The next morning, we had the chance to go on a walking tour with a local tour guide, I was particularly interested at how such a small town has so much history as far back as the US war of Independence when it was founded by refugees still loyal to the crown. After a quick lunch we were back out at sea again and we sailed down the coast back the way we came as it was the way that the wind was going and we wanted to get as much sailing done as possible, however I was not very involved with this as this was my day to be on mess duty. This included setting up and clearing the tables that both the permanent crew and voyage crew used as well as helping the chef prepare food such as peeling potatoes and then cutting them to the right sizes. Although hard work, I enjoyed this experience as it gave an insight into the workings of the whole of the ship as well as it giving me a full night's sleep. In the evening we took part in a sail past where we went up The Gut to a place called Innapolis Royal and back out through the headlands. I was also able to go up the mast when we were leaving the gut which gave a brilliant sunset as we went out of the headlands with the sun just above some of the ships ahead of us.

Day 7 saw me woken up earlier than the rest of the crew so that I could complete my mess duty by preparing the breakfast tables and later preparing lunch. However I managed to get a small break from this as I participated in a knot tying lesson and even managed to find 5 minutes where I had phone signal to phone home and find out my A level results. That night saw us go into anchor again in an area outside of the city of Saint John in New Brunswick the other side of the bay of Fundy, this proved to be a brilliant anchorage and gave a spectacular view as several other tall ships that we had been meeting up with in our ports were sharing the same anchorage.

The next morning gave one of the most spectacular sunrises that I have ever seen coming up over one of the other tall ships however this moment of serenity didn't last long as I was tasked to help bring up the anchor, this saw me hosing down the anchor chain as it was raised as it was covered in mud from being in the water all of the night, luckily I managed to get most of it off before it went below decks to the people that were making sure that it was laid out in lines so that it would not tangle. Later in the afternoon we sailed into Saint John which although at first was very industrial and dirty however when we got through to the cruise ship berths where we were moored proved to be an interesting red brick town. Once more we were given a chance to go out in the evening which made a welcome change to the cramped conditions in the mess.

The penultimate day saw us do an open ship again in the morning which was our busiest yet and saw hundreds of people come onboard and explore the ship however we had to stop this after lunch as the gangway was removed due to the tide going down. The afternoon gave an opportunity to go ashore which allowed me to explore the city and visit the local museum which gave an in-depth view of the history of the region. In the afternoon when everyone was back we did the assisted climbs where our two voyage crew who were incapable of doing so on their own, were able to go up the mast with the permanent crews assistance and instead of the usual clip system they had a rope on their harness which was being controlled by us on deck.

The last day saw many of the voyage crew leave to go home however a few of them were left on board for the voyage back to the UK in a few days' time with a new crew. As I was not due to travel

home until a few days later, I managed to stay on board for an extra 3 days and helped with maintenance before they went back, this was particularly insightful as you are allowed to go to places that are usually out of bounds to crew and allowed me to learn a lot about the ship and how it is operated, this was made all the better by the fact that they supplied a free drink in the bar after a hard day's work.

Whilst on board my motivation and can do attitude was noticed by the permanent crew on board which led to me being offered several extra opportunities, such as ferrying the Captain onto one of the other tall ships for a meeting, I grabbed hold of these opportunities and through them I was offered a position as a Bosun's Mate on board which means that I can apply to go back on board as a crew member with the expenses paid for, allowing me to get even more experiences through the trust.

Through participating in this voyage I have learnt a lot, I have learnt that age is just a number and a disability can only hold you back when you let it, I made some very good friends with those on board most of which crossing large age gaps, it gave me the opportunity to learn a lot from different people with vastly different experiences and make some very good friends. As well as this I learnt through my experiences with the mast and going aloft that perseverance is essential and that only through facing your fears will you overcome them and grow as a person. I am eternally grateful for your kind donation without which this opportunity would not have been possible.