

GO TO SEA

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(This is an inspirational first person account from a veteran, giving proper perspectives about life at sea to youngsters who are aspiring for seafaring career - Chief Editor)

When I decided to make a career at sea, it was purely for the opportunity to travel to distant places and see around the World, and possibly have romantic encounters!

That was way back in 1964! I joined the Directorate of Marine Engineering & Training at Kolkatta in the Marine Engineering training program, then considered the best in the country and passed out with a certificate (no degree those days) that fetched me instant employment at a princely salary of Rs. 450, considered very lucrative as a starting remuneration. With excitement, I joined the company and set sail for the USSR & the Black Sea, looking forward to thrilling times.

Within a few days of being on board, I realized it was no easy matter sailing in the environment of the engine room; always down next to a steaming boiler, in temperatures around 45 degrees centigrade! Not to forget the bad seas and heavy swells causing rolling & pitching and resulting in sea sickness for most of the newcomers. Luckily, I was spared its worst effects.

It was a memorable voyage, as it was also my first experience of collision with another ship in the treacherous Bosphorus Sea, which resulted in its stern being cut out by the fore part of our ship, causing it to literally get stuck to our fore peak tank and believe it or not, we sailed back to India with the ugly appendage stuck on us! Fortunately for us, there was no casualty.

The next 6 years were spent sailing 9 months in a year on high seas, alternating between

examinations, certifications and related matters for career advancement.

It was a happy time for me all through my career acquiring rich experience on various kinds of ships viz, cargo ships, bulk carriers, oil tankers etc.

I recommend the career for all young aspirants who have a spirit of adventure and the will to develop self-confidence and make true men of themselves.

Don't go only to earn the money. Today, you can earn equally well in many other professions. You will, if you are moderately smart, earn more in your working life ashore. A good technical degree with an added MBA will even start you off at par with a senior government officer's salary with attractive perks.

Go to sea instead, for it will push you to your physical and mental limits. Get dirt under your fingernails, sweat on your brow, aches in the muscles, and the sea breeze on your face - that will teach you many things, but mainly what is real and what is unreal. In the university of hard knocks, the soul is tempered by practical problem solving skills, application of the mind and concern for others. And lo !! what emerges will be a well-rounded, mature individual with great inner strengths, someone who will be an asset to the society and to one's own self and family.

The motive of seeking travel to far off places is no longer a great incentive to join sea, since one can make all the travel through package tours

and affordable too! Instead, go to sea to sight the schools of dolphins leaping out in unison, so synchronized in their movements in and out of the serene seas , as they travel along with the ship! You may even see whales on your port bow.

Witness the setting sun over the idyllic expanse of the endless horizon, to see the velvet black canopy of the night sky embroidered with a myriad glittering stars, to fill your lungs with fresh ozone filled air and taste the tang of the salty spray churned up by the ship ,....to be one with nature like you have never been before....one cannot understand all these except through personal experience. When you are alone on the bridge at night, you realize that you are the only human being on earth in the center of a vast space so unalloyed and peaceful that you begin to understand why so many of the world's thinkers and writers have been sailors of one sort or another.

Go to sea to get away from the conditioning by civilization. Go, because this takes you back to basics, you and your shipmates facing the elements. No clutter. No emergency services either; no doctors or fire-fighters or policemen. Just you and your training. A good stress, as you will find out, because there is no syndrome of continuously running to stay where you are - that many a job ashore entails. There is no scope for senseless work at sea either; the effort-without-accomplishment feeling that is so commonplace on land. What a sailor does usually shows results, good or bad. Go to sea, then, to escape becoming a rat in rat race. Go to sea to escape the life of routine desperation that Thoreau (the famous American Poet, Author & Naturalist) saw most men leading.

Don't go to sea if you have no other options; there can be nothing worse than being stuck on a ship for months, working day and night and feeling trapped in the job. Instead, choose the sea. Choose it with the complete realization that

you are committing yourself to a lifestyle that you have examined and preferred. Go to sea because it is something you want & desire and not because it is the easy way out. Because it will not be; the sea is a mistress that is many things, but it is never an easy one- and that is one damned good reason to choose it.

Go to sea for the power it throws up ... the power of elements over you.

Go to sea for the power it gives you over yourself, too; there is nothing more intoxicating than working under severe pressure- to physical and mental exhaustion and finding reserves within yourself that you never knew existed.

Anyway, go to sea because you will be what you want to be; nobody will be able to take that away from you .

Go to sea, young man, because the experience is unmatched. Go, because although many things will happen to you out there, only one thing is guaranteed, and that is this- every lad that goes to sea will return a man.

So go- and go with pride, because you are one of the chosen few.

About the Author

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