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# On deck with...

## Gareth Cole

Cruise Director for Cruise & Maritime -  
Marco Polo & Ocean Countess

*Marco Polo & Ocean Countess in Eidfjord*

### 1. How has your Cruise & Maritime career fared so far?

I joined Cruise and Maritime in February 2011 as Cruise Director onboard the Ocean Countess. This was my 12th ship and my seventh year at sea. After completing a very successful season on board the Ocean Countess with a great team and some great results, I recently transferred to Marco Polo for the 45-night Amazon and West Indies Cruise which has just returned to the UK. The Marco Polo will now be my home until November 2012 with some exciting itineraries to look forward to.

### 2. What qualities do you need to be a successful cruise director?

The main attributes needed by a cruise director would have to be adaptability, good management skills and an ability at times to bite your tongue! No day is ever the same on a cruise ship and the role of any crew onboard may change at any given time. Changes to weather, itineraries, scheduling and planned entertainment mean that you have to think fast to re-plan, and put together alternatives at a moment's notice. Because of this, understanding your team is very important as you need them to adapt to these changes with you.

As I have worked my way up through all of the job titles to where I am today, I am not afraid to do any task onboard which shows my team that I am one of them. This has proven to show others the route to becoming a cruise director themselves.

### 3. What is the typical day in the life of a cruise director?

The best thing about life onboard a cruise ships is that no two days are ever the same. One of the things that draws me to this line of work is the fact that you can wake up in a new country every day! I usually wake around 8.30am and it's off to the office to wade through emails. The morning is spent formulating replies and making sure all of the duties are running, ensuring guests are entertained or are off enjoying the port of call, and writing a report of the previous day so that head office has an idea of how the cruise is going on a daily basis.

After a noon announcement of navigational or port information and a rundown of key events on board, I sit and make plans for the next day's activities (which is often like piecing together a large jigsaw as every venue, taste and activity is put together to generate as much variety as physically possible), and then schedule the staff rota.

The daily programme – our ship's daily guide – needs to be checked for scheduling, before being signed off and printed. These are then delivered that night to each cabin so that the next day's schedule is known to all guests. I also like to join in with some of the activities, as it can be all too easy to become office-based. I feel that a successful cruise director finds the balance of the administration work and being seen around the ship as much as possible.

The evening comprises introducing our spectacular stage shows, maybe compeering a game show, and the night ends at midnight with a cabaret or deck party. Before going to bed, I will usually edit a game show format or create video footage for an activity, as I am constantly looking for new features to improve the cruise experience for passengers.

We are surrounded by mega-ships these days with facilities not available on the small ships. What attracts clients to these smaller ships and how do you and your team entertain them?

Our guests like the intimacy of our ships and having started work on larger ships, I can see the attraction. Particularly on shorter cruises, there is nothing worse than feeling rushed to take in all the facilities and discovering by the end of the cruise that you didn't have time to make the most of your trip. Also smaller vessels enable us to get to know all guests individually, and make our customer approach more personal, and that this helps everyone to feel at home. By the end of our cruises most staff

will know guests by name, remember them on return cruises, and this is a feeling which ensures repeat guests.

### 4. Why do you enjoy working on the smaller vessels?

In my role it is vital that I get a feel for guests' needs, tastes and how to schedule the cruise to appeal to the majority of those onboard. Certain cruises may be focused on the lecture series where as others have more of a party feel or are quiz driven. Getting the wrong balance could potentially ruin a holiday that people have looked forward to for a long time. I like all guests leaving with the feeling that they were catered for and no-one should say that they were ever bored, or there was nothing for them to do.

Smaller ships enable me to get out and meet as many guests as I can, listen to their thoughts and comments, and ultimately this enables me to not only tailor the cruise, but also improve the cruise and its facilities year round. Smaller ships can also access ports that are unreachable by the larger vessels, so not we are able to offer itineraries that many of the other ships cannot.

### 5. What is the main point of difference between the Cruise and Maritime Voyages product and some large ship operators?

We like guests to relax when they are onboard. Our main focus is generating a product and environment that encourages this, promotes our staff as being approachable, helpful and going above and beyond to maintain this atmosphere. We don't have a 'blanket' schedule that is constantly repeated, but instead offer a fresh, professional and welcoming cruise onboard two great ships with a lot of character and personality.

### 6. If you weren't at sea what would you be doing?

I have always been an entertainer and would keep entertaining through my whole life. I realised a few years ago that live variety in entertainment is dying out, and instead has been replaced by the mass-produced reality TV shows. Cruise ships are one of the few places where true variety entertainment can be found. If not on ships, I would still strive to continue development of the entertainment programme for ships, designing new features and keeping variety alive.

I plan to write a book one day of all my experiences, focusing on the hilarious anecdotes and never-ending list of surprising and hilarious things you hear passengers say or ask, which entertains us so much on board. Never does a week go by without the question "Do the crew sleep on board?", or my favourite quote "Ah, so the swimming pool is filled with sea water, well that explains the waves".

### 7. What is the most interesting cruise destinations you have visited?

This year I fell in love with some of the most fascinating ports of the Amazon. Travelling to areas untouched by mass tourism, we were treated to a glimpse of life in a truly breathtaking place, surrounded by wildlife, stunning scenery and fascinating culture. Where else can you work where you leave your house and within 10 minutes see a sloth, an alligator, a monkey and many other creatures, then a week later be swimming with stingrays and turtles?

I like ports where you can experience real local life and not areas taken over by shops and attractions. I feel very lucky in my job that I can experience so much, and share in the adventures of so many guests who journey with us to discover so much of the beauty that this planet has to offer.



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