

Charlotte Bainbridge International Exchange UK to New Zealand 2016

My international exchange with Spirit of New Zealand

On the 2nd May 2016 I flew to the other side of the world to meet a beautiful 40m barquentine, 10 inspiring crew members and 40 awesome teenagers. What a stunning ship she is! The black hull and the wooden masts really make you feel like you're stepping aboard a pirate ship. I saw some of the trainees nervously step aboard with their big heavy bags, and as they looked up at the spiders web of rigging above I thought yes, this is going to be great. Once again I feel exactly the same way you do and I can't wait.



The first day was a day of safety briefings and getting to know each other which is pretty normal, and then we set off for Man 'o' War Bay. The scenery was just breathtaking. I have never seen so much green before! Bright green hills and blue water and the weather was really calm too. This meant we could get stuck in getting to know the boat really well and learning how to use the sails. I loved it when they got out some chalk and just started drawing diagrams on the deck! Such an easy way of keeping the theory side of sailing out doors and in the fresh air as it should be!

I can't believe how many new things I tried/ saw/ did! From eating a Fejoa to seeing little blue penguins and 'tramping' to natural hot springs in the bush! Oh and there were the fan tail birds, rafting through caves and early morning swims.



The trainees loved the climbing, every one of them made it right up to the royal, and I got to sit there on the yard greeting each one of them and taking a photo as they reached the top. There's nothing I love more than sharing that feeling of being on top of the world and I got 40 of the biggest smiles I have ever seen.



Every night we would sit in groups and have a debrief on the day's events and share a few stories. It was so clear that everybody was enjoying themselves and learning new things about themselves.

Every night there was singing or laughing or playing games. Emma the 3rd mate had some really good games up her sleeve, Singstar and Spirit Olympics were some of my favourites and Simon led some really fun team games on the beach. I wish we had beaches like that at home! On one evening we had a BBQ at mansion house bay which was really gorgeous, we sang songs and ate marshmallows together.

To scrub the decks, they spread sand on the decks, then play music and scrub the sand into the decks with their bare feet. They call it the deck dance! This was such a fun new way of doing something pretty mundane, but my poor soft Pommy feet were a little bit sore after!



The great thing about Spirit being so big is that she carries 2 aluminium luggers which can carry 10 trainees each. They are so fun, they are just like little go-kart versions of Spirit! This means they can get a really close up sailing experience whilst having a little adventure on their own.



Towards the end of the trip the trainees wrote letters to themselves, as a reminder about the things they have most enjoyed and the lessons they have learned. The Trust send the letters to the trainees addresses about 6 weeks after the trip which must be really cool, I really liked this idea.

On the last day we handed the ship over to the trainees. They nominated their own Captain, Mates, Engineers, Cooks and Watch Leaders and put everything they had learned into practice. They were so excited to do this and really made the most of the opportunity; they put up every single sail on board, made some fantastic food and we got back to Auckland safe and sound thanks to them.

I can't express how much I enjoyed my trip. I already love sailing - I've had the best time sailing T.S Royalist for 2 years, but to take this to the other side of the world and share this with Spirit of New Zealand was really fun and really interesting. I've been inspired by the energy and passion of the crew on board and come away with some fresh ideas and new skills. I can't believe I can say I've sailed a tall ship in New Zealand! I'm really proud of how far I've come as a young adult in sail training, and I'm just so thankful for everybody who has helped me along the way; to the crew on Royalist who took me on, to the crew and trainees on Spirit of New Zealand who helped me create some unforgettable memories and of course to the James Myatt Trust who have funded me to have this opportunity of a lifetime. My mission is to pass this kindness on and try to make a positive difference to other people like me.