

## A Tall Ship Experience by Tamati Munroe

Kia Ora, I am a cadet onboard the STS Spirit of New Zealand. Here is my short but special story about the fun time I had sailing in The Tall Ships Race.

One average morning I was presented with an opportunity of a lifetime, a chance to go sailing in Europe! I had never been. Not only to go sailing, but to take part in the prestigious annual Tall Ships Race. We've read books, seen images and heard stories about Tall Ships around the world. Nothing could prepare me for this eye opening experience. I got all my stuff organised and before I knew it I was on a plane to London via Hong Kong.

I spent a few days with family and friends making my way north to Hull (where the ship awaited me) from London. I enjoyed the historical spoils of Thames side London, the Pork Pies of Melton Mowbray and eventually the sight of the Humber Bridge in Hull. When I arrived in Hull I found the ship, I was going to call home for the race. Tall ship 'Maybe', a gaff rigged Ketch painted light yellow with original wooden decking. This ship was built more than 80 years ago and has a bit of soul.

The accompanying crew joined the next day for the delivery voyage of the ship to the first port, Antwerp Belgium. I was assigned a bunk in the front of the ship. 18 people the ship can accommodate. Many people from the UK were on board. There was great banter and good accent practice for me. We finally got sailing out of the Humber. We were using the Mizzen, Main, Main gaff topsail, Forestay and Jib sails to do approximately 7.5 knots.

There were epic sights of vast wind farms working hard and giant ships on the North Sea. We had 2 and 3 hour watches. We just wasted time by learning how to tie knots and learning random facts. The sea was mental. Restricted visibility and intense rain made it hard to see and steer the ship. A tack line snapped and it seemed as all hell broke loose with the Jib sail flogging in the wind.

The weather cleared up nicely and the North Sea got the better of me. My face got sunburnt one day and my lips were dry because I under estimated the conditions of this environment. An image is now always in my head of the many ships all anchored and lined up one behind another outside the ports. We entered the river entrance and made our way up to Antwerp to join the festivities.

We arrived in Antwerp on a hot summer's day with crowds filling the town and the tall ships alike. I will never forget seeing the masts of the ships towering above buildings. The sight of these huge ships just succeeded any books, stories and pictures. I was humbled by the amount of tall ships afloat in front of my eyes.

A few days of partying and festivities in the town made the North Sea crossing worthwhile. I made good friends from the delivery voyage and said hooray as they left, so to meet another group for the first leg of the race. This crew full of Europeans (Dutch, Belgian, Finnish, and German to name a few.) We had to sail 300 nautical miles just to get to the race start but it wasn't all smooth sailing. My brand new ship mates suffered sea sickness. The English Channel was unforgiving and did not give up. We had engine failure and lines snapped in the next few days. A bit of hope is lost but we would give this a good go.

With the perfect underdog start, we were in it. I was now a part of the 2016 Tall Ships Race. We saw many Dolphin and Whale pods along the way. During my watches, the sun would rise at 4am and set again at 9pm with beautiful purple and orange skies. The cook's food was very nice throughout the voyage. I pulled my Ukulele out and we sang. I taught my watch mates a Maori song from New Zealand. Morale was awesome on deck as we began to catch up on other ships in the race. In the mean time we were all learning each other's first language and stories.

We were hearing that other boats had pulled out of the race due to rough conditions earlier in the week. As we saw we were catching up on the rest of the fleet, the wind gods were blessing us. We could actually have a chance here. I enjoyed using the sextant with the Skipper and crew and setting full sail in the sunshine. We could listen to music and dance on watch and had many different songs playing on a loud speaker.

The ship was becalmed in the Bay of Biscay off the coast of France. This did not last the whole crossing because we got hit by 45 knots of wind half way across. The weather returned to being lovely but there was just no wind at all. A few water fights ensued and we had a chance to give the ship a clean and tidy up.

We all decided to dress up one day in our festival outfits on a hot day. I was dressed up as a fox and my friend Buz, a chicken. The whole team dressed up and took photos and took pleasure in each other's company. We wet the deck twice daily with a salt water hose because the deck is original and dries out and splits unless watered.

We were getting near and saw sharks swimming by and little crabs floating on the sea surface. There was a good vibe on deck as we could all see the Portuguese coastline. Everyone came up onto deck to eat cheese and crackers and drink squash and listen to music on a special evening.

I had travelled half way around the world on 2 planes, sailed across the changing North Sea, punched through waves and dodged large ships in the English channel, broken the engine and the Mizzen and Jib sails, seen both ways of the Bay of Biscay and started at the back of the pack for the race. After all of that, we won the award for 2<sup>nd</sup> place and had an absolute blast doing so. My time spent onboard was filled with exhilarating fun and overwhelming moments.

I have personally benefitted from the time I was able to spend with the people I met and the ship I sailed on. The race was a very special way of challenging myself while working with different groups with the ocean as a platform. I would like to return to the race sometime again in the future. I have made friendships and beautiful memories that will not be forgotten.

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