

Monaco is home to some of the most luxurious superyachts in the world.

## Working on SUPERYACHTS

An insider's look at what it takes  
to work on the big boats  
BY MARIANNE SCOTT

**FORT** Lauderdale. Miami. Antibes. Antigua. These are some of the vast yacht havens where eager people—mostly young—go to find employment on a megayacht or superyacht. The jobs can be aboard yachts skippered for or by owners, or yachts offering luxurious charters. A few commercial boats—like recreational diving charters in exotic places—also employ crew.

**JOB REQUIREMENTS** Most job seekers believe that working on large yachts—and there are more than 5,000 cruising the oceans—will offer them money, travel, adventure and escape. They arrive in hordes, a gleam in their eye and the hope that they can share the luxurious, glitzy lifestyle of the ultra rich—the .001 of the one percent—if only a little. And, undeniably, these jobs aboard floating palaces may give them a taste of that life. But only if they work hard. Extremely hard. ▶

Indeed, rarely does one get employed on one of these vessels without training, experience, references—and often, connections. In addition, owners and charter companies may demand drug testing for all staff. For the more advanced positions, extensive education and certifications by *internationally recognized* organizations and transport agencies, a history of successful yacht management, hands-on job experience and time-at-sea are required.

Insurance companies covering these yachts worth tens to hundreds of millions demand crew be certified or they won't insure. And the investments are huge. A rule of thumb is that a yacht's initial cost runs about US\$1 million per metre (more for the top-end vessels). Thus a 150-metre yacht costs at least \$150 million to construct, and 10 percent, or \$15 million per year to operate, which includes crew pay, insurance, maintenance and repairs, fuel, food, moorage and upgrades.

There are many jobs aboard big yachts and each one requires different skill sets. The specific requirements for each position

will vary from yacht to yacht, depending on size, whether the owner is aboard or if the yacht is being chartered, and the country of registry. The most common positions are captain, first/chief officer, mate/bosun, deckhand, chief engineer/second engineer, chief steward or stewardess/purser, junior steward or stewardess, chef, sous-chef, crew cook and cook-stew. These jobs can last a day, a week, a season, be full-time/permanent, part-time or rotational. Some yachts offer jobs to couples, like captain/housekeeper, or second officer/chef.

That said, some yachts—especially charter yachts—request their crew offer talents in addition to their yacht management skills—especially on the smaller yachts. Their job listings will recruit stewards/stewardesses/deckhands/chefs, and so on, who are also massage therapists, hairdressers, beauticians, yoga instructors, specialists in water toys like kite boards and jet skis, divers, tender operators, spear fishers, fishing coaches, security specialists and personal trainers.

The absolute minimum certificate, compulsory for even the least skilled jobs

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

**Megayacht**  
80 to 150 ft.

Crew:  
3 to 8



**Superyacht**  
150 to 300 ft.

Crew:  
8 to 15



**Gigayacht**  
300 ft. and up

Crew:  
15 plus



What's the difference between mega- and superyachts? I asked renowned Victoria-based naval architect Greg Marshall, who designs superyachts. "The terms are likely linked to an owner's ego," he chuckled. "But we've seen the size benchmark move up. Today, to be considered 'super,' overall length begins at 45 metres (150 feet). Megayachts usually start at 24 metres (80 feet)," says Marshall. However, there is no industry standard.

I had the opportunity to speak with captains, stewardesses, chefs, a deckhand, engineer and other people knowledgeable about superyacht employment. In addition, crew employment websites provide a trove of information. Perusing job descriptions offers intelligence on what yacht owners and charterers are looking for. They also reveal just how many jobs can be found aboard large yachts and the kind of training and experience most captains and insurers demand.

aboard, is the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, known universally as the STCW. These are standards agreed to under the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea. The STCW's goals are to ensure seafarers globally achieve the same competencies, work to the same standards, know the hazards of working on a vessel and are able to respond properly in an emergency. It also sets out the principles for the treatment of mariners. Today, 158 countries/parties have signed onto the convention.

Courses are offered in Canada, the U.S.,

U.K. and many other countries. Regionally, you can sign up with Western Maritime Institute Canada in Ladysmith and BCIT in Vancouver. Both conform to Transport Canada regulations. Fremont Maritime and Compass Courses, both in Seattle, also offer the STCW. The topics the STCW covers are: First aid and CPR, personal survival techniques, personal safety and social responsibility, fire prevention and fire fighting and security training.

**DYLAN STEPHANIAN, 27**, took a gap year during his UBC studies and took the

STCW course in Fort Lauderdale. While he was in class, a captain appeared and asked for a deckhand. "I was the only one who raised my hand," Stephanian recalls. "So I joined a 60-metre powerboat on a delivery from Florida to Malta. No guests. I cleaned and stood watch. It helped that I'm an avid sailor and have worked summer jobs for the Coast Guard."

His contract paid for a plane ticket to any port, so he chose Nice, having learned it's one place to find work. He took day jobs on yachts-between-charters while continually networking with other yacht crew.

That's how he caught another delivery to Kiel, Germany, on the Open 60 raceboat *Hugo Boss*. "It was fun but only paid \$100 a day," says Stephanian. "Sailboat service is a different world from power. For me, sail is preferable but it's much less lucrative."

In retrospect, Stephanian wishes he'd stayed longer as yacht crew. "With longer service I'd have saved more for tuition," he says. "If you're thrifty, you can build a good nest egg. Especially as you have no expenses while aboard."

Stephanian recommends talking to everyone to nose out other opportunities, ▶



especially when starting out. "You meet crew who know about other boat work. It's just old-fashioned networking. And take any job that comes along. Be willing to start at the bottom and work hard," he says.

He also suggests finding a starting location that's inexpensive. "While waiting to find work, you have to stay where yachts congregate," Stephanian explains. "Fort Lauderdale is way cheaper

than, say, Antibes on the Côte d'Azur. There, the yachts are lined up on the Quai des Milliardaires, or the Billionaires Quay!"

Finally, he offers cautions about the certifications offered by both government and private agencies. "Some yacht courses don't qualify you for commercial employment. For example, a 200-tonne yachtmaster ticket isn't recognized by Transport Canada the way a 200-tonne

commercial ticket is. So make sure your tickets are internationally recognized if you want to stay in the marine field," says Stephanian.

**DANA GLOVER** Over the past six years, Dana Glover has found employment as a freelance stewardess. Raised in Victoria, the lithe, attractive 30-year-old studied events management at Camosun College, which she says comes in handy when you have to quickly organize a beach lunch for 35. She'd toured Australia and New Zealand and figured yacht service would provide more travel opportunities. She took the STCW course in Miami in 2011. "I networked through the Boat Show organizers," says Glover. "I chatted up people. That's how I got my first job aboard a 103-foot yacht. It lasted eight months and we cruised the Bahamas. I was cook and stew, part of a crew of three."

"Did you have experience cooking?" I ask.

"No," responds Glover. "It was cooking by Google, always looking for recipes. Trial and error. It helped that I could buy the nicest foods. Although I must emphasize that the way things are done on boats all differ. Charters have an advanced provisioning allowance, a budget that determines food, booze, fuel and communication costs," she says.

Glover has been aboard yachts ranging between 40 and 300 feet, cruising from the Caribbean to Maine. "I work nine to 10 months then take off for home for two or three months. I need to nest sometimes. That's the advantage of being a freelancer. The disadvantage is that without permanent assignments, there are no benefits," says Glover. She much prefers smaller yachts with minimal crew. "The smaller boat gives you much more variety. Besides cleaning, I serve on deck, help in the galley. Big boat service can be boring," says Glover.

She recounts a typical day on her most recent 86-metre (282-foot) yacht with 29-crew. The day starts at 07:00 with morning duty performed by the head housekeeper and four stewardesses. The captain's domain, all public spaces, gym, cabins and heads, bridges, pool and hot-tub areas are cleaned and polished. No fingerprints can be left anywhere. Everything must be shiny, pristine.

Glover also reveals that on superyacht charters, the stews unpack the guests' belongings and place them in

closets and drawers. Each item is photographed and logged. "It's to prevent mix-ups. The practice prevents theft while also protecting the crew from false accusations. Even guests' laundry gets identifying ribbons so no shirts or socks are lost."

She adds that aspiring yacht employees must accept there is no time clock to punch. The days can easily stretch into 16-hour service, especially during charters. She wryly recalls spending up to 14 hours a day in the laundry. She likes the work, the travel, the exotic places, playing on the water toys. But she misses family and friends. "It's tough to maintain relationships when you're gone for many months. And often, the exotic places don't offer electronic connectivity either. It's very isolating," says Glover.

Finally, she cautions that long-term superyacht employment for women may be problematic, even for those who are part of a couple working aboard. "If you want kids, it's difficult. You can't strap a baby on your back while working on a yacht. So depending on your job goals and gender, it may be time limited."

**YACHT CREW AGENCIES** You can find agencies around the world—one partial list can be found at [superyacht-crew-academy.com](http://superyacht-crew-academy.com). Crew agencies perform like any employment bureau—matching a request from yacht operators to an employee, some organize lodging for crew awaiting placement. The employer pays the associated fees, not the employee. Fees range widely. Some are fixed, some require a percentage of the employee's wages for the first year, some charge one month of the employee's annual salary.

I spoke with Edie Guzman of Fort Lauderdale's Bluewater Crew Agency about the intricacies of recruitment. She first emphasized that Canadians, or other non-U.S. citizens, cannot work on a U.S.-flagged vessel—only U.S. citizens or green card holders can. For "aliens" to work in U.S. waters on a foreign-flagged vessel requires a B1-B2 visa. (For further explanations on these visas, consult the [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov) website.)

Bluewater assesses crew by their experience, their longevity on similar vessels—frequent boat hopping may indicate an uncooperative attitude—and especially, references. If the boat owner asks, drug testing and criminal background checks will be performed.

"We check references and verify certifications," says Guzman. "References are what get people the jobs. These show whether they get along and are willing to work and learn."

Greg Mosley, of Seattle crew agency Lacasse Maritime also stresses the importance of references. "This can be a rewarding career if you stick with it and behave responsibly. Thirty years ago, crew would walk the docks, get jobs and

morph into professionals. No more. Today to build a career, you need education, certifications and be a clearheaded professional without attitude," he says. Lacasse's Rita Kapuscinski, who places crew around the world, added that captains look for healthy, physically fit, disciplined staff, non-smokers preferred. "There are many, many people looking for these jobs," she says. "Thus, the competition is fierce." ▶



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