

# My Trip to Costa Rica to Sail on the Tenacious

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So, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, my father and I set out from our sleepy seaside town and headed to the hustle and bustle of Heathrow airport. The car journey was very smooth and we made it in excellent time. Once I arrived, I met Hannah and Oscar there, who were also venturing with me on the tall ship at Costa Rica. It was my first time flying, so I was very nervous about doing so, but thankfully, both Hannah and Oscar had flown before and were able to take me through customs and reassure me about flying. I actually quite enjoyed the flight. There was a bit of rough turbulence which really made me grip my seat but, other than that, I found it a doddle. After the long haul flight of nine enjoyable hours, it was an easy enough transition at Houston, for the plane to Costa Rica. I crashed out on this flight so the four hours passed rather quickly. We arrived at Costa Rica at one in the morning and headed straight for the hotel. The next morning we got a taxi from San Jose to Puerto Caldera, which is where the ship was docked. Let's just say the fear from the turbulence on the plane was nothing compared to taxi journey. At multiple points I kept thinking, "I would fail my driving test if I drove like this". Thanks to the careful, safe driving of the taxi man, we got there in no time and somehow, in one piece. We were able to find the Tenacious immediately, it was so grand to look at from the shore; it really was a marvellous vessel and it filled me with excitement to know that I was going to be sailing aboard. We got some of the local grub and then boarded the ship.

We were welcomed aboard by friendly faces, met our watch leader, I was in forward starboard; directed to our cabin and then we were formally greeted by the Captain as well as the Mates. There was no messing around, after we had been introduced and given a safety brief; we got straight to fastening our harnesses and then climbing the mast to the tops! This really was great fun, a bit daunting but fun nonetheless. Once everyone had been up and then came back down again, it was time for my first meal on the ship. The food was really good, that night we had mince in Bolognese sauce with rice, simple but lovely. I was continuously impressed with the food aboard the ship; I thought they served a good variety of delicious meals and kindly catered for my gluten free diet, serving me a gluten free apple pie on one of the days. After dinner, it was time for my first watch. This is where your watch party, forward starboard, get to helm, go on look out, and keep a log of the ship's progress. I was put on lookout. I really enjoyed this job as you got to gaze out at the beautiful scenery, and because it was night, the stars too! I was looking out for ships as my main priority, however. After the two hour watch had ended, our watch leader kindly bought the entire forward starboard watch a drink. Once the refreshment had been poured down my neck I went to bed after a fantastic first day.

I woke up the next day after a good sleep and ready for breakfast! There was porridge, cereal, toast and fruit, which was particularly nice. We set sail which involved all the watches on deck. There was lots of rope pulling and some heave-ho. I am not going to lie, half of the rope names went through my brain like a colander and it wasn't until the fourth day that I was beginning to get them. After the sails were up it was time for our first "happy hour". This was a euphemism for cleaning: oh joy. For this I was put on the deck for scrubbing armed with a brush, water and detergent. It was rather hard work and there seemed to be more deck than I originally once thought. Once the deck was

spotless, it was time for a well deserved lunch. Next was our watch. I was able to helm the ship which was really great fun! It involved you having to look at a compass and keeping to a course given. The idea of steering a vessel like the Tenacious was just brilliant, and I am really grateful to have had the opportunity to do so. After my watch ended, it was time for dinner and then to lower the sails.

The next day, we headed ashore to the island of Tortuga. We arrived ashore via the spare crafts that were on the boat. As we were coming to the shore and lovely sandy beach, the craft almost capsized! This was highly amusing and involved us jumping out to help keep the boat steady. The day ashore was relaxing, fun and highly enjoyable! I swam in the warm, turquoise sea; played beach ball, enjoyed a freshly cut coconut, and went on a banana boat. However, this day was not only fun and games. Once we had reluctantly been taken from the silver sand beach of Tortuga, it was my shift in the galleys. This was by far one of the hardest jobs I had to do on the ship. I had never worked in the kitchens before, but I did enjoy it. The jobs were fairly simple but kept your mind busy, and were rewarding once completed, including the washing up. Once all the washing up had been completed, I was utterly exhausted, so I headed to the mess to relax and then bed.

The fourth day in, and I was really feeling it on my body, however, I was not going to let that stop me! The first job of the day after breakfast was to put the sails up as we had lowered them the other night because we had anchored the night. For one of the ropes I was put at the front. I never realised how much hard work it was being there! I was exhausted afterwards from all the, "two, six, heave!" Once the ropes were pulled, some of us were sent aloft to release the main sails. I was one of the lucky ones who got to shimmy across the mast to release the sail. After lunch it was time for another happy hour, this time below deck. Tom and I were given the job of cleaning the clamps for wheel chairs on the floors. We made short work of this and were joking and laughing the whole time, talking in odd and different accents to each other. The job was completed and the clamps clean, it was finally some time off for me to relax and put up my feet. For this I was resting in the mess as there was air-conditioning and comfortable seats. However, much to my dismay, I had unknowingly missed a pod of fifty plus dolphins. It was then time for another watch for Starboard watch. As part of the youth leadership at sea scheme, I was made the watch captain for the first hour. This involved me organising my group, such as, who would be on the starboard or port lookout and the helmsman. I tried to make sure to get everyone on the helm and alternate the lookout sides, as the port side was directly in the blistering sun. After my time was up, there were a couple of dolphins playing at the bow of the ship, I was lucky enough to see them this time; this put a smile on my face. After we had our dinner, my watch relaxed in the mess. Once again, our watch leader bought us all a drink which was extremely kind of her. We talked, played the guitar, sang, laughed, and then soon enough, it was time for bed.

The last morning on the ship and I had to get up at six for an anchor watch. This was relatively easy; it just involved us looking for oncoming vessels and keeping a record of the position of the ship to make sure our anchor was doing its job. This went on for two hours and then I went to finish off packing. Once packed, it was time for one last happy hour. I was asked to wash the heads (toilets). I of course, accepted and endeavoured through the grime. Not a moment too soon and this joyous task was complete, however, it was also drawing close to my departure from the ship. We attended a debriefing by the captain, of what we had accomplished on board and where we had sailed. We then said our goodbyes and exchanged numbers to the many friends we had made during our time

upon the voyage. Then, with well wishes and many goodbyes, we set out on a boat back to the shore and I found myself taking one last look at the Tenacious fading into the distance.

I felt like I had learnt and gained an awful lot of experience during my trip and whilst being aboard the Tenacious. Not just about the names of the ropes and sails, but about myself and others. What continued to amaze me most was that, those aboard who would not have been classed as the able-bodied crew, were just as capable as those that were. I never once heard them complain and always saw them getting involved. They were just as independent as I and many others. It was a shame that I was never given a buddy officially however, I did manage to have many interesting conversations, learning about their lives and sometimes why they were in the position which they are now, as well as make a few of my own buddies. I found this trip highly beneficial, helping me to develop my confidence, leadership abilities and opening my eyes to those who are considered not able-bodied, but in many senses are just a capable and determined.

I am extremely grateful to all those who have given me this opportunity and the people I have met along the way. Thank you.



