

INSIDE VIEW:

DOING SOMETHING RIGHT

**A conversation with Captain Panagiotis Skylogiannis,
Master of
Celebrity Eclipse**

by

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Passengers on Celebrity Eclipse often comment on how such a young captain has command of such a large and important ship. However, Captain Panagiotis Skylogiannis' youthful appearance masks the facts that he has been a captain at sea for nine years and that he has sailed as an officer aboard practically every ship that has ever been in the Celebrity Cruises fleet. In fact, Captain Skylogiannis began with the line even before there was a Celebrity Cruises, starting out in cruise ships with Celebrity's predecessor Chandris Lines in 1988. Before that he was an officer in the Greek Navy and spent time on passenger ferries in the Mediterranean after graduating from the Merchant Marine Academy in Athens, Greece. "If I look young and am a young captain, it makes me happy, very happy," he laughs. "I guess I did something right or I wouldn't be here."

Indeed, Celebrity clearly thought so when in 2008 it gave Captain Skylogiannis the responsibility of

commanding Celebrity Solstice and bringing that ship into service. The Solstice was the largest ship built up to that time by Celebrity. More importantly, the ship was to combine new exterior and interior designs that were to serve as platforms for innovative concepts in entertainment and dining. Since the line had already contracted for four more of these ships, it was vital that the first one start out successfully.

To this end, Captain Skylogiannis, who had prior experience bringing out new ships, spent eight months at the shipyard in Pappenburg, Germany, working with the designers and building the team that would take Solstice into service. "Because it was the prototype, the first one, it was different. You have to do everything from zero."

Solstice entered service in late 2008. "The Solstice class was successful from day one. We won so many awards - - Conde Nast, and many more."

Celebrity once again turned to Captain

Skylogiannis to bring out the third ship in the Solstice class, Celebrity Eclipse. This time, it involved only a four month stay in Germany. "The Solstice and the Equinox were already done so we had a little bit less of a load of work to do - - a lot of things were already done because they are sister ships."

"We had a very good start-up, an exceptional start-up, even better than the Solstice. It was very hard to beat the start-up of the Solstice."

"It has minor changes, minor touches. Usually, on the first and the second [ships in a class], there are a few things that we find operationally that you are able to change with the third. The [interior] layout is similar. The colors are nicer. The staircases look bigger. Technically, nothing much has changed since the Solstice. The Solstice class was successful from the beginning so very minor things were changed, nothing extremely significant."

Still, "we say as seaman that every ship has a different soul and different characteristics. There is something about the Eclipse that is better than the [other] two. It is my preference; it is personal taste."

Designed for seakeeping

Celebrity is directing Eclipse toward the British market and so she will be based in Southampton, England from April to October. Of course, the weather in Britain is different than in the Caribbean and cruises from Britain to the Canary Islands, Spain and the Mediterranean involve transiting the notorious Bay of Biscay. However, Captain Skylogiannis who lives in England when not at sea, does not see the weather as posing any problems for Eclipse. "Supposedly, this time of the year is summer and you have nice weather. It is not winter with very bad weather in Biscay."

Even were Eclipse to encounter bad weather, the Captain is confident of Eclipse's ability to handle it. This confidence is based upon his experience with Celebrity Solstice, which handles "very, very well, extremely well."

Her ability to handle so well follows from the fact that Eclipse, like Solstice, was designed with her seakeeping qualities foremost in mind. "It is one of the few ships that was designed for hull efficiency. First they designed the hull to have fuel efficiency, speed and, of course, seaworthiness in bad weather conditions and



Captain Panagiotis Skylogiannis

then they built the interior. With many cruise ships, they decide what they want to do with the interior and then they try to shape the hull."

"That is why [Eclipse] is so hydrodynamic. We have the spoiler in the back [so the aft section does not sink down like a speedboat] into the water as we speed up. It floats better. [The front of the ship is flared] and her bulbous bow is long - - all these things help to break the waves and give you speed. We can do 24 knots with much less power than other ships this size. It is all because of the hull."

Along the same lines, while much of the praise that the Solstice class ships have received has been directed at her interior hotel design, the ships have also been engineered to provide a high degree of safety and efficiency in ways the guests never see. For example,



Celebrity Eclipse

they have "two engine rooms with two engines each. This is again for durability in case something happens. We can run with one engine room, the full ship."

Delegation and responsibility

Driving the Celebrity Eclipse is not a one man operation. Accordingly, prior to every arrival and prior to every sailing, Captain Skylogiannis holds a meeting with the officers who man the bridge of the Eclipse. "It is so everybody is going to be on the same page. [They know] what they are going to do, the weather conditions, the environment, where is the pier, how things are, what speed to go. In case something is not what we said, they will know something is wrong."

Various responsibilities are delegated to the different officers. "For example, somebody has the communications, somebody will have the radar, a couple will have the command controls." Indeed, in order to give them training and experience, the Captain may delegate the actual maneuvering of the ship to the staff captain or one of the more senior bridge officers.

While this is in many respects a team effort, it is all done under the captain's supervision. "If you are the captain, you are in charge. The decision is yours. It is not the team's. It is not a democracy. It is nice to have feedback but at the end of the day, you have to make the decision."

A captain's responsibilities extend far beyond driving the ship. "The captain is in charge and has the full responsibility and authority onboard. Definitely, the

safety of the vessel and every one on board is at the top of his list [but] then you have everything else, the hotel operation, the guest satisfaction, maintenance."

Here too, a captain must rely on his subordinates. "We are part of a team called Celebrity Eclipse. Everyone has a different field. At the same time, they all work for the same person with the same goal. The day-to-day operations should be dealt with by them. If there is an issue that they cannot decide, then it comes to the captain."

Why pick Eclipse

There are many ships sailing out of Southampton in the summer months and even more sailing out of Miami where Eclipse will be spending her winters. Nonetheless, Captain Skylogiannis has no trouble explaining why people should choose Eclipse over these other ships for their holidays. "I think because we are better than the other vessels. Nothing is for everybody in life. There might be a few people who do not like it but the majority though they do. We think we are better than the rest who compete. The service is at least four-star. We have a beautiful ship, a beautiful product, and lovely people. It is the people who will make this product live. Ships are beautiful but without the people who are here with a nice smile, with a friendliness, their service - - at the end of the day, we are in a service business - - that is what makes Celebrity Eclipse, Solstice, Equinox and Celebrity Cruises popular and successful."