

INSIDE VIEW:

A REAL SHIP

A CONVERSATION WITH CAPTAIN KONSTANTINOS PATSOULAS OF CELEBRITY MERCURY

by

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Captain Konstantinos Patsoulas is the master of Celebrity Mercury, a ship that occupies a unique place in the Celebrity fleet. Built in 1997 as the third ship in Celebrity's Century class, she is smaller than the new ships entering the Celebrity fleet. Also, unlike her sister Celebrity Century, Mercury remains substantially the same as she was when she entered service. Still Mercury remains a popular ship.

Although Mercury entered service some 12 years ago, Captain Patsoulas is clear that Mercury is not an old ship. "No, not at all. When the ship came out she was one of the most expensive ships in the market to build. It was a very good construction. She is very beautiful even now."

"It is a real ship. She stands up very well if you compare this ship with newer ships. Today, [most] new ships are like boxes. [Mercury] has a

long bow and good engines. You will not find such a stern in the market. That is why I believe that Mercury, Galaxy* and Century are actually very lovely ships. I think they are real cruise ships, not a box."

New ships tend to incorporate the latest marine technology but Captain Patsoulas sees that as essentially unimportant from the perspective of the passengers onboard. "The main features are the same. I agree that the technology is not the same [as on ships leaving the shipyard today] but we are doing the same job. [The captain of a new ship] can bring the ship along side in St. Thomas. I can bring [this ship] along side as well. We are doing the same job. It is more easy to maneuver a Millennium class ship than a Mercury class ship because the [Millennium's] azipods have the ability to rotate 360 degrees. But again we are doing the same thing - - the result is the same. The safe-

ty of navigation and bringing the ship from one point to another is the same."

When it comes to new technology, the question from a passenger perspective is whether "you need to have it to provide the guest services - - that is what [the passengers] pay for. They do not care how you will go, how you will handle the ship, how you will bring the ship there."

The industry trend is toward building larger ships with more features for the guests but there is still a place for ships like the Mercury. "There are many kinds of guests. Although we have newer and bigger ships, some [guests] prefer this class of ship. Many, many guests prefer this."

"It depends upon your needs and what you want from a cruise. Maybe [a new ship] cannot offer what we have here. Of course the ship helps but it does not make the difference - - the people make the difference."

"Everything on this ship depends upon the hotel. Everybody works for its success - - this is the target; this is the goal; nothing else. Our interest is the onboard experience - - to have as much as possible a better onboard experience. Our culture is to offer service and an unforgettable onboard experience. We have as the priority the guests - - the guest services, the hospitality and the Celebrity [philosophy]."

"Although we are an older ship than the Solstice class or the Millennium class, we are trying very hard and achieving results. Everybody [in Celebrity Cruises] receives the same training and everybody has to comply with the Celebrity philosophy. I can say that we are doing very well, very, very well."

"This is a medium size ship. She can go everywhere - - every port; every trade area. She is friendly to the environment. Very good technology. Very well maintained. All the equipment is good."

"She does not have plenty of cabins with balconies. Everybody wants balconies. [However,] they did a modification with the



Captain Konstantinos Patsoulas

Century [which added balconies]".

"The other thing that she does not have is a specialty restaurant. Specialty restaurants are very close to Celebrity's philosophy. But I believe in the next dry dock, they will take care of that."

Overall, on Mercury, however, "the internal spaces are in the philosophy of Celebrity Cruises. I believe we are a very different cruise line. From what I hear from the guests, we are very different. You cannot find this hospitality, this response to the [guests'] needs. I think that we are far away from the other cruise lines."

*Celebrity Galaxy is now Mein Schiff, sailing for the German company TUI.