

*INSIDE VIEW:*

# A STAR COMES TO NEW YORK

A conversation with Captain Kenneth Harstrom  
Master of Norwegian Star

by

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New York has seen many stars and as told in the well-known song it takes a lot to make it in this demanding town. Nonetheless, Captain Kenneth Harstrom, master of Norwegian Star, is confident of his ship's ability to succeed as she takes up residence in New York for the summer 2012 season, cruising a series of week-long voyages to Bermuda.

## *Driving The Star*

Norwegian Star is one of two Dawn class cruise ships sailing for Norwegian Cruise Line. Her sister ship, Norwegian Dawn, is well-known to New Yorkers. She was the first cruise ship to be based year-round in New York and was a popular resident of the Big Apple for many years. Thus, we know that the Star has the hardware to handle the waters around New York as well as to attract the New York cruising public.

During her season in New York, Norwegian Star will not be the only Norwegian ship sailing from Manhattan. Also sailing from Manhattan will be another Norwegian ship that has proven herself to New Yorkers, Norwegian Gem. The Gem is one of Norwegian's Jewel

class ships. But as Captain Harstrom explained, the two classes are quite similar.

"It is basically the same hull. The superstructure is a little bit different." For example, whereas the Star has two large 3,000 square foot villa suites near the funnel, the Jewel class ships have a number of smaller villas and suites surrounding the funnel in an area that is called the Haven.

Along the same lines, the interior layout is somewhat different. "The Jewel class has the spa on the top in front and we have it on the back. They have the bowling alley and those kind of things."

Also, during Star's 2010 refit, the forward observation lounge on the Star was replaced by a series of suites. "I think we have a little bit more cabins [now that] we changed this up here."

"There is also a difference when it comes to the technical things. We have four engines here. They have five smaller engines. [That gives the Jewel class] a little more flexibility when it comes to making adjustments and fuel saving and so on. They can use two engines, three or four or five. We have to use three or four engines when we steam."

"But otherwise, the technology on the bridge is exactly the same. You can't see any

difference at all.”

Norwegian Star is a fast cruise ship. As Captain Harstrom pointed out, the Star is capable of “24 or 25 knots.”

However, to do her New York/Bermuda itinerary, the ship does not have to go anywhere near maximum speed. “We need to go about 12 knots.”

This does not mean that the captain can merely sail out of New York harbor, point the ship in the direction of Bermuda and set the cruise control for 12 knots. Other considerations make driving the ship a more complex task.

For example, “we need to make [fresh] water. The first 12 hours [out of New York], you are in very cold water and we do not have the best capacity to make water in the cold water.” Therefore, the ship is run faster until it reaches the warmer waters of the Gulf Stream at which point the ship slows down.

“Also, going up and down from New York, we have to consider the current.” Ocean currents can help push a ship along or hinder its movement. Consequently, “we are very aware on the bridge from hour to hour the position of the currents and how they will affect the ship.”

“Ten years ago you only had charts [from which] you could see the current from month to month. But now we have a [satellite] update every six hours.”

This allows the officers to adjust the Star's course and speed so as to take advantage of the currents and thus save fuel. “Basically, in five weeks, we saved \$550,000 by optimizing these things.”

The Star's power plant is “diesel electric.” This means that her four diesel engines are used to produce electricity. This power goes to “propulsion, the air conditioning, lighting, cooking and everything. We use this 80,000 horse power as we like. It is a very flexible and smart way to use our

power.”

Thus, if the ship is in port, “we may only have one engine running for the lighting and air conditioning. We have nothing for the propulsion.”

On the other hand, in an emergency situation such as a medical evacuation where the ship needs all of her speed to make a rendezvous with a rescue helicopter, power from all four of her engines may be used for propulsion. “You have to shut down certain things like an air conditioning plant. When it comes to that type of situation, to have it one or two degrees higher in the cabins to save the life of one person is that kind of decision that you have to take.”

For propulsion, the electricity generated by the diesel engines is channeled to two electric motors, each of which is suspended below the hull in a giant steel pod. The motor turns a propeller that is mounted on the front of each pod. These pods are called “azipods” because of their ability to be turned 360 degrees thus making it possible to direct the thrust of the propeller in any direction. “This [ship] is much easier to maneuver [than ships with conventional propulsion systems] with the azipods.”

Star's maneuverability is particularly handy for New York. Ships docking on the Westside of Manhattan have to turn across the strong currents in the Hudson River. Consequently, it “is considered one of the most challenging places for berthing.”

Of course, driving the ship is not just about hardware. It is also about the way the people who drive the ship are organized and operate. “We have a very high competence when it comes to navigation, which we have worked on for many, many years. What we are doing here now and have done in our ships and in our parent company Star Cruises for 17 years is what [other cruise lines] are starting to have.

I shouldn't brag too much but since Star Cruises took over [Norwegian], no major accident has happened. We have an extremely good record and that is because of the way that we are doing navigation.”

The Norwegian approach to navigation is a team approach. Each officer on the bridge has an area of responsibility. “The captain is the general manager of the whole operation.”

In addition, each operation, such as docking the ship or leaving a port, is planned beforehand. As the operation unfolds, “we do small, small adjustments all the time.”

This flexible system allows the people who are the most familiar with the ship and who are directly responsible for her safety to maintain hands-on control of the ship even when a pilot is aboard..“Normally, I am the one, as the captain, telling the guys to adjust a little bit. We don't wait for any orders from the pilot. We are the ones telling the pilot, 'now we are changing course.' If the pilot has something to add - - he might know that the current is a little stronger in that place and we might be a little more starboard of the fairway - - that is his advice. We, of course, will follow his advice. But the pilot has always really been an adviser. He doesn't have any responsibility if something happens - - they'd blame me.”

Norwegian's approach is non-traditional and for it to work requires not only hours of practice in a simulator but a change in mindset. “It doesn't take just one course [to learn this system]. It is something which takes maybe five years to get everyone aware. The captain and the staff captain, who are the team leaders on the bridge, have to adopt it 100 percent.”

#### *Coaching the team.*

**T**here is more to being a cruise ship captain than just driving the ship. The captain is the CEO of a multi-faceted enterprise. Reporting directly to him are not only the staff captain but the hotel director, the

chief engineer and the ship's human resource director. “In a way, you could see yourself as a coach, a team leader - - that is the most important part of being a captain [aside from the responsibility for the safety and security of the ship and her passengers].”

“My personal mission on the ship is to [create] a good atmosphere which is reflected to the passengers. A happy crew, a happy ship, a happy passenger. The style and the attitude come from the top. You need to spread the nice atmosphere, the family atmosphere, around the ship. I like to create a good atmosphere for those who are working. It is important.”

“I have my meetings [with the crew] every month in the Stardust Theater. I have little shows and tell them what is happening. I am very much involved in all kinds of service awards. We have a special lunch, where you can sit down maybe 50 people and they can tell me what is on their minds. If there is anything, I always encourage them to come up to the staff captain or me to sit down and talk. They can come directly to me to talk about it because they know [there will be] some result. We solve it in some way.”

In addition, Norwegian invests in its crew members by giving them extensive training. “The total amount of lectures onboard is maybe 6,000 hours during one month. We have lectures and classes going on the whole day, seven days a week. All the time, there is some scheduled education for crew members. They learn a lot.”

Such training, combined with good living quarters and pay that is often much better than anything available at home, creates loyalty. “Some of the crew members are getting 40 times more [than they could get at home]. They come home like a millionaire from the ship, starting up a small business after 10 years. It changes the whole life for their families and their future. They can afford to have their children in private schools and promote everyone in the family. There are a lot of

people who have been [with Norwegian] for 20 years, even 30.”

*Why Choose Norwegian Star?*

**W**hen asked why people should choose Norwegian Star for their vacations, Captain Harstrom began with her itinerary because, as he noted, many people make their vacation decision based upon destination. Captain Harstrom has sailed to many ports and for him, Bermuda “is the most beautiful island.”

Norwegian Star, of course, is not the only ship that sails to Bermuda but “I should choose it definitely because of the concept of

Freestyle Cruising.” Freestyle gives guests options with which they can tailor their vacation to meet their tastes. The Star has “14 restaurants. You have food choice with the churascaria, you have the Asian food, French, steakhouse etc. Also you have very high standards in the main restaurants.”

“But we also have quite an advantage when it comes to entertainment. For instance, the Elements show is two classes better than any show that I have seen at sea.”

“There is a show, a dinner, a menu for everyone when you come onboard a ship like this.”