

INSIDE INTERVIEW:

TALKING WITH CAPTAIN CHARLES

**A conversation with Captain Charles Teige,
Master of Liberty of the Seas.**

by

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Although Captain Charles Teige ("Captain Charles" as he is known around the ship) speaks with enthusiasm about his prior commands, he confides that Liberty of the Seas is "my favorite ship." This is quite an endorsement considering he has commanded some of Royal Caribbean International's most noteworthy ships including Voyager of the Seas, and Serenade of the Seas. He also was heavily involved in the building of Radiance of the Seas and Brilliance of the Seas and was the Project Captain for the lengthening of Enchantment of the Seas.

Captain Charles began his career with Royal Caribbean in 1992. Both the company and cruising have changed dramatically since then. "It is totally different. When I started, I would say that this was a traditional shipping company. It was not focused on the guest and on efficiency that we have today. Today, it is a business. You are competing amongst all your sister ships to have the best possible service for your guests onboard, the [best] safety for the crew and for the ship."

The ships, as well as Royal Caribbean's relative place in the industry, have also changed. Captain Charles' first Royal Caribbean ship was the 18,416 gross-ton Nordic Prince. "When I started here as a first officer, I was so impressed by the Nordic Prince. [However,] then I saw [Cunard's] Queen Elizabeth 2 [70,327 gross tons] and I was so impressed by this huge, big ship. Two years ago, Queen Elizabeth 2 was anchored outside [a Caribbean port] and I came up in Liberty of the Seas [158,000 gross tons]. Now she was the small dingy and we were the biggest cruise ship in the world."

Another change is that the hierarchical military style of commanding a passenger ship has vanished. "Respect is something you have to gain, you cannot demand that. You have to respect all the people. My rule number one is that I never underestimate anyone that I meet on the crew or a guest. [Members of] my crew can have a university education. If you are totally military, then people don't dare to talk to you and you do

not get the feedback that you need to improve the operation and the organization. If you want to have a happy ship, you have to lead by example."

"I am responsible for everything onboard the ship. [The captain is] measured on all that the ship is doing - - everything from ratings to revenue to energy use, all these different things. You have to be the team leader. You are a coach and you have to make your team perform. We need to talk to each other. I cannot decide things without listening to people. To have success, you have to listen to what people think. If you are too arrogant, then people do not say what they think. They say what they think you want to hear."

"I like to walk around the ship and I find it very interesting to do that. But you have to be careful not to put your nose in everything and disturb the operation. You have to let people do their jobs. At the same time, you have to make sure that they do what they are supposed to do."

In the past, all of the personnel on a ship tended to be from the same country. Now on Liberty of the Seas, the officers and crew are from more than 70 countries. "It is not where you are from today but who you are as a person. On the bridge, we have team members from all over the world - - I am from Norway, we have an American staff captain; a first officer from Canada. So we are a mixed team and I think that is what makes it a success. When you have just grumpy Norwegians together or [all] Americans, that does not work. I think what makes the cruise industry so successful is that you have all these people from all over the world together."

While the increase in the number of passengers aboard ships today makes it more difficult for the captain to meet everyone, Captain Charles still very much enjoys the personal side of cruising. "I like to be together with people. I like to talk to people. You meet everything from ordinary people to presidents and movie stars from all over the world. It is so interesting to meet all



Captain Charles Teige

those people and listen to all the stories. I think that is the big difference between an airplane captain and a captain of a cruise ship - - an airplane captain never meets his guests, he just takes the airplane from A to B whereas we have the pleasure to meet them. You get a very humble respect for all different cultures."

"That is why I want to be in Operations - - you have this fantastic ship with all this technology and you meet people from all over the world and then you sail to all these different places. On the other side, it is an amazing responsibility. You are responsible for 5,640 people and this asset that is worth \$800 million. It is a

big, big, big responsibility. You cannot forget that safety is always number one. My task in the world is the safety of the people and the ship and then, we can have fun after that."

Liberty goes to Europe

2011 is a milestone year for Captain Charles' current command Liberty of the Seas. First, there has been a major change in where the ship sails. Since entering service in 2007, Liberty of the Seas has been focused on the Caribbean. In May 2011, she began her first European season, sailing the Mediterranean from Barcelona, Spain. After returning to the Caribbean for the winter, plans call for her to do another European season in 2012.

Liberty's change in itinerary reflects the addition of Allure of the Seas to RCI's fleet. With the giant Allure and her sister Oasis of the Seas serving the Caribbean year-round, the other ships in the RCI fleet can be deployed elsewhere. Thus, Liberty can be used to serve the rapidly growing European cruise market.

Taking Liberty to Europe for a season necessarily requires a transatlantic crossing as well as a crossing to return for the winter season in the Caribbean. The weather on the Atlantic can be more severe than in the Caribbean and so ships like Queen Mary 2 that are intended to make high speed crossings of the Atlantic are built differently than ships that are intended for cruising. Nonetheless, Captain Charles is confident in Liberty's ability to handle the Atlantic.

"I was with Queen Mary 2 in Europe when we were there with Voyager of the Seas. She is a beautiful ship but a totally different brand than we are. It is an Atlantic crossing ship and it is meant for that. This ship was built for the Caribbean and is more open to nature. But you see where we operate today - - we are all over the world. So this is also a very good seagoing ship."

"This ship can be in the largest waves ever. [It] is constructed to be in a hurricane. I was in Rhapsody of the Seas in a hurricane. [The waves] were 45 feet. This ship can take it but there are guests who cannot take it." Therefore, to maximize the guest comfort, the weather is an important consideration in planning the ship's route.

Liberty's May 2011 crossing was the first time that the four year-old ship crossed the Atlantic with passengers and her maiden crossing was met with enthusiasm. "We are fully booked which is very exciting - - a lot of experienced guests".

Doing a season in Europe requires more than just moving the ship across the ocean. "In the old days, you had guests mostly from the United States and Great Britain. Now you have guests from all over the world.

On Voyager, when she was in Europe, we had guests from 120 different nations. Of course, you need to be very ahead of your game on what the different markets like. You have to adjust. For example, Independence of the Seas [which is based in England all year] has to adjust to the U.K. market."

"Your approach to an American is different than your approach to a European. An American is very easy to get to know and talk to. A European can be more reserved and maybe sometimes want to be left alone. It is a big difference in culture."

Enhancing Liberty

A second milestone in Liberty's life came early in 2011 when Liberty underwent a major refit during which a number of new features were added. "We got the big TV screen on Deck 11. We got the 3-D movie, which we are very excited about. We got the Cupcake shop on the Royal Promenade. We also got a nursery for kids up beside the Adventure Ocean. We also have these new information boards in all the lobbies so you can find your way around the ship and that has also been very successful."

In a related move, Royal Caribbean also enhanced Liberty's programming/entertainment offerings. "We introduced Saturday Night Fever as a show onboard Liberty of the Seas and we are very excited to take that to Europe. Also, the Dreamworks Experience, all the characters from Dreamworks - Shrek and the Madagascar characters - - are aboard Liberty of the Seas and that is also very, very popular."

Liberty, with only four years of service, under her belt is a very young ship. Moreover, she has been a popular ship. Why then make all of these changes?

One reason is that Royal Caribbean is not the only cruise line that has recognized the potential of the European cruise market. "We want to be the most exciting cruise ship in the European market. [Norwegian] Epic is going over as well and we want to be the ship that people are choosing."

Another reason for the changes "is all of the success that we had with Oasis of the Seas." Oasis and her sister Allure of the Seas are unlike any cruise ship that preceded them. In order to have more consistency throughout its fleet, Royal is enhancing its existing fleet. "The biggest successes of [the Oasis class] were rolled back to the Liberty. Of course, there was a lot of feedback from the guests on what would you like and what are you missing and this was the things that the guests were looking for."

The changes have been well-received. "We have been full all of the time since the ship came out."