

CRUISE-SHIP JOBS HAVE THEIR PROS AND CONS

Many cruise-ship jobs take advantage of how desperate people can be for not being able to find a decent job in their countries of origin. But as bad as it sounds, these offers have their advantages.

The cruise staff works so that their customers have the vacations of their lifetime. It is the type of job that many young people look for, with or without college degrees, who are eager to have new experiences and to save as much money as possible.

“Discover exotic destinations while working”, “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity”, “broaden your knowledge of other languages and meet tourists”. These slogans often appear on different cruise-ship jobs websites, promising a series of unforgettable experiences. **However, what is it really like to work in one of these floating hotels?**

The usual requirements of cruise-ship jobs are advanced English, experience with the position, and availability to sign a contract for six to eight months. However, the offer never discloses the pressure to which the staff is subjected to. In a standard cruise ship, the number of passengers doubles that of the crew. So there is one thing that is clear: some see it as a playground above the ocean, while others have to ensure that passengers continue to enjoy their experience while addressing any problem that may arise.

In the ship’s everyday life, you probably will only get in touch with 30% of the crew if you are a customer, including massages, swimming pools, buffets or visits to the gyms. Even if you do not see them, the employees on board could be working a minimum of 12 hours a day, with salaries that are usually not exactly ideal. The selection process goes often through employment agencies where the first step is to send your CV via mail. If you are chosen and meet the profile, you move on to an interview that may be in-person or online, which is almost always done by a former crew member.

“They are overworked and very poorly paid,” explains Jim Walker, a specialized lawyer. “Those who have the most physically demanding jobs, such as waiters and janitors, tend to receive poor medical care when they are injured,” he emphasizes. At most, as the lawyer points out, “they will be given painkillers and sent back to work, even if their injury requires more attention. Many of them do not complain about their conditions because if they do, they can see their chances of opting for a new contract diminished”.

Michael Winkleman, another lawyer, is an expert in all matters concerning maritime proceedings, who agrees with the opinion of Walker: “Companies can get away with it if they treat their workers poorly with low wages, since they are recruited from countries with limited economic opportunities,” he explains. “It’s

always the same story: back in their countries of origin, they cannot have savings due to their salaries, while they know that they can earn much more on a cruise ship. So they see it as a bargain, and are willing to endure difficult working conditions or tolerate abuse”.

Employees face great difficulties when reporting cases of work harassment or exploitation. This is because many times, companies have settled their businesses in tax havens like the Bahamas, Panama and Bermuda, with relatively lax and permissive laws. In addition, companies often include clauses in contracts that make explicit the use of arbitration to resolve conflicts, which restricts the ability of employees to file a suit against them.

This option sounds promising since it involves the presence of an external person as a defense against the company, but the arbitrator can grant the company a more favorable decision to increase the chances of being called again in the future.

If you decide to enlist in one of these vessels, one of the things that you will also have to face besides your bosses or employers, are the customers. Keep in mind that tourists take advantage of these trips to behave in a very different way than they would in their daily lives. Despite everything, life is made up of experiences and we can learn from everything, even the bad ones, so both Winkleman and Walker agree that joining a cruise ship crew is not a terrible idea; after all, it's a job far different than spending eight hours every day in an office.

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