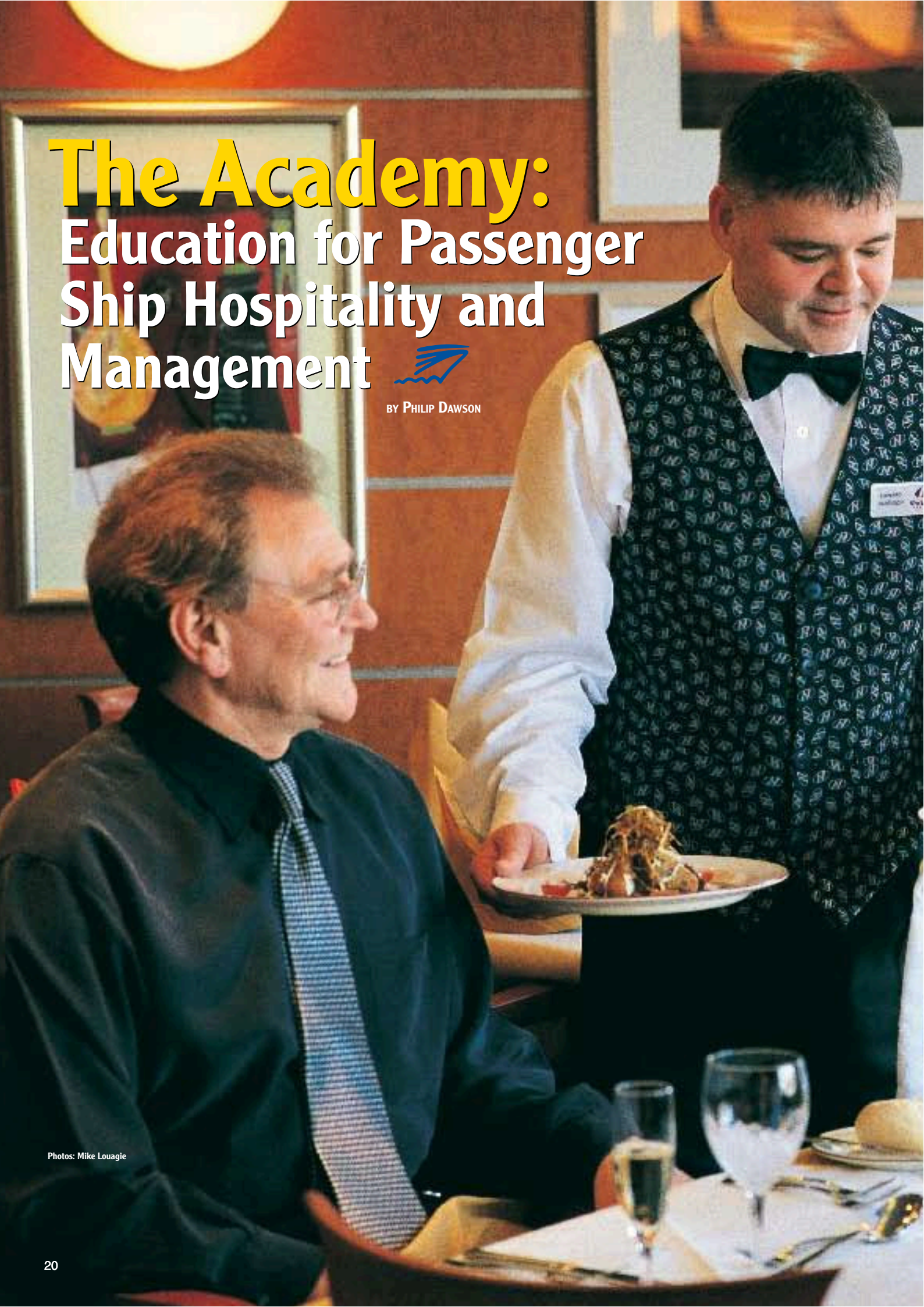


The Academy: Education for Passenger Ship Hospitality and Management



BY PHILIP DAWSON



Photos: Mike Louagie

The modern liner, cruise ship or ferry today offers the world's most advanced levels of hospitality and service. Highly self-contained and by far more complete than her counterparts ashore, with her mobility imposing special considerations of operational logistics, nationality and safety, she is a veritable microcosm of our civilisation. For well over a decade, the Maritime Hotel Academy in Salzburg and its affiliates around the globe have asserted their position as leaders in providing the training and education behind this specialty and its successes.





The collection of photos by Mike Louagie are from the NorthLink ferries, on which Maritime Leisure has a manning contract. All illustrations are by Cecilia Lundgren.

The experience of working in the hotel department of a modern passenger ship, whether in a front-line service function or as part of the management team, in itself demands a great amount of skill and special training, even for the experienced hotelier, restaurateur, croupier, entertainer or retail sales clerk coming from ashore. Working at sea usually involves living aboard within the confines of a compact international and multi-cultural community, a third of which is probably on duty at any given hour of the day or night. The unique style and level of service to the cruise passenger generally go beyond the expectations of even the finest resorts and hotels ashore by virtue of the ship's self sufficiency and near-complete isolation from other supporting amenities and full range of entertainment and diversions while underway.

Management functions demand the exceptional organisational and personal skills needed to work and live effectively in a self sufficient working milieu, where there is a functional duty to the captain, who is traditionally "sole master after God," and line responsibility to a head office directorate, located perhaps half way around the world. Teamwork is essential, with the hotel and other passenger service staff having to be able to work in full cooperation with the ship's owners and operators, her officers, deck and engine departments, as well as with the shore support personnel and government authorities at the terminals and other ports of call. Thus the level of authority is higher, often calling for important and influential decisions to be taken quickly and on one's own initiative, their consequences anticipated and reckoned with, with courses of action and expense justified later. Experience and education are the keys to being able to make the right decisions and choose the proper courses of action to the satisfaction of all concerned, especially the paying passenger.

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As a ship is first and foremost a means of transport, her operation is highly regulated by international conventions and standards that must be fully comprehended and applied to by the letter. Everyone in the ship's company is required to be familiar with these, and must be able to readily learn and absorb the information relevant to their own functions and responsibilities. Safety and security are everyone's concern. The entire crew, including all hotel staff, are the palace guard, police force, firefighters, and occasionally jailers, who must at all times be ready for the call to action in these essential life-saving services.

Nobody is born with these skills - they must be learned, practised and applied. As a world leader in hotel service and management education, Maritime Leisure Group's Maritime Hotel Academy holds a global position of leadership and excellence throughout the entire passenger shipping industry. Staff, especially those at or aspiring to management levels, will at some time in their careers receive training at the Academy's various facilities, its partner institutions of learning, and soon also by way of their new accredited "E-learning" systems of online education.

The wide range of education offered by the Maritime Hotel Academy is made up of two overall categories, management and leadership development skills courses and training in various passenger ship working specialties, ranging from pre-sea courses in basic onboard living and working skills, food and beverage, housekeeping, and reception training, to safety, crowd management in emergencies, environmental, hygiene and health studies.

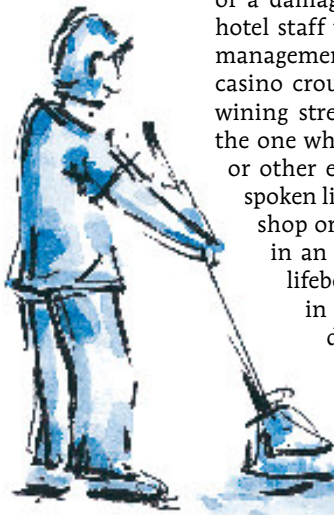
Cruise ship practice, working, environment and health

Training at this level mostly has to do with the specific job skills of shipboard hospitality, the interpersonal skills needed to do the work and learning the all-important living and survival skills unique to shipboard life and work at sea. Some of the key subject areas covered in the Cruise Ship Specific Courses that prepare the student for work and life at sea include:

- How to live and function in a close-knit multi-cultural community. This largely involves learning the interpersonal skills needed to live and function in compact accommodations and share communal living spaces with other people of different cultural backgrounds, languages and nationalities. This involves learning the traits of other cultures and peoples so as to be able to live with respect to their way of life and to live yourself in a manner that is non-disturbing to others.
- How to learn operating and safety standards. This involves mastery of the good studying practices and reading comprehension skills that enable you to quickly and effectively extract the information needed from long and detailed texts, often written in technical and legal language, and to be able to readily apply and share that knowledge.
- Service quality techniques of delivering the ship owner or cruise line's product to the passenger in the proper style and manner. For instance the Disney Cruises require all of their personnel to present themselves as "Disney Cast" as though in a theatrical production as is done in the company's theme parks ashore. Although this is less stringently structured elsewhere, hospitality staff are nonetheless expected to convey the essence of the cruise line or product they represent to their passengers. Sometimes this may involve learning to suppress certain traits of one's personal or cultural background in order to present the right service image. For instance, when the Maritime Hotel Academy started training personnel from the former Soviet shipping companies, the students had to learn to be more personable in their service approach, less suspicious of others and to smile more.
- How to properly handle heavy loads, dangerous substances and commercial/industrial equipment. Even in the most modern, well designed and highly automated passenger ships, "fetching and carrying" still seems to be a part of everyone's job, especially when one considers that, unlike a hotel on land, everyone arrives and departs the same day,

which usually also happens to be the time that all stores and provisions arrive and must be stowed. Everybody's bedding and towels are also changed then and the whole ship gets a thorough cleaning. If you can't handle your share of the load, are liable to spill industrial solvents all over yourself and your fellow crew, or allow yourself to be twirled and flung around the dance floor by the commercial-grade floor polisher you are supposed to be using, then you are a liability, even a safety hazard, rather than a valued player to the rest of your team.

- Safety, including crowd control, shouted commands, fire prevention and fire fighting, evacuation and abandon ship procedures, launching and handling of lifeboats, and rafts, deployment of evacuation chutes and other escape devices. If there is an emergency at sea, deck crew may be involved with fire-fighting or other damage control work, or simply might be unable to reach various parts of a damaged or sinking ship, leaving the hotel staff to also handle emergency crowd management and evacuation. In essence the casino croupier who has just scuttled your wining streak at the roulette table may be the one who saves your life if there is a fire or other emergency. That petite and soft-spoken little blonde girl working in the gift shop or beauty salon might be called on in an emergency to launch a five-ton lifeboat filled with terrified passengers in the dark from the heavily listing deck of a burning ship. Those people's lives are in her hands, and she has one, and only one, chance to do it right, and must rely upon her training, the practical exercises that were a part of it and the periodic drills held as



special and often far reaching special considerations to their application at sea by virtue of the ship's unique service characteristics and the international nature of passenger shipping.

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Housekeeping, for instance, is especially important in cruise shipping, where the cabin, stateroom or suite is the passenger's home away from home in a far more complete sense than a hotel room is ashore. The role of the housekeeping staff is thus more significant and personal. Yet the level of service must strike precisely the right point of being attentive and even intuitive without ever intruding and being invasive.

Perhaps less obvious to the casual observer than the finer points of restaurant and bar service may be, is the fact that housekeeping entails far more than merely making up beds, vacuuming the cabins and cleaning the en-suite bathrooms. Cabin staff can, for instance, merely drop a throw cushion onto a bed or settee, or they can place it with care so that it appears attractive and inviting to the guest. The way that passengers' personal belongings are handled in the line of duty is important, and the care taken in folding and placing pyjamas or a night dress can make a significant statement as to the thoughtfulness and consideration ultimately shown to the passengers themselves. Yet hotel staff must also learn to work quickly and use their time effectively to complete the many tasks involved in servicing modern ship's cabins and suites. While the restaurant, bar, lounge, shop and casino staff serve and interact with passengers directly, housekeeping personnel build their service rapport largely through the work done while the passengers are out of their cabins. In



part of the job.

The Academy offers various courses and customised training in all aspects of cruise ship and ferry hospitality, including food and beverage service skills, bartending and sommelier, culinary development, housekeeping and shipboard reception. Other training covers the environmental and health issues of food preparation, including hygiene, food safety legislation, hazard analysis, cleaning and disinfecting procedures. Familiar as many of these subjects may be to the land-based hospitality industry, they all have

essence the ship's cabin steward or stewardess chance to smile for his or her passengers most often comes through the care taken in making up the cabin in the way a lady's nightie is handled and how those pillows are placed.

Courses in cruise ship practice and working environments are given at the Maritime Hotel Academy's affiliate locations in Europe and the Far East, where there are kitchen labs, restaurant, bar and cabin mock-up. Safety training is arranged with nearby deck-and-engine schools where there are facilities for hands-on

demonstrating and practising fire fighting, lifeboat handling and other emergency and evacuation procedures. Arrangements can also be made with the Academy for in-house training and education to be given at a customer's own location or aboard their ships.

Most students at the cruise ship specific and cruise practice skills levels are cruise-line sponsored. These are people already with hotel experience or who have started working as sea, and show promise of making long-term service careers with the companies hiring them. There are also others who come to the Academy locations in Poland, Russia and China directly from high school or with onshore work experience, for the basic training to enable them to apply for their first job aboard ship. As a general rule the cruise industry tends to avoid offering pre-employment education in the manner the airlines train their cabin service personnel. In many instances their maritime hotel and hospitality studies are partially subsidised under various programmes run by the institutions of learning the Maritime Hotel Academy's affiliates in these countries are associated with. Graduating students in this category are given reference lists where they can apply for work with the Academy and the Maritime Hotel Association.

Management Skills education

As the passenger shipping industry becomes more sophisticated, more highly regulated, and the services offered to its clientele more diverse, there is increasing

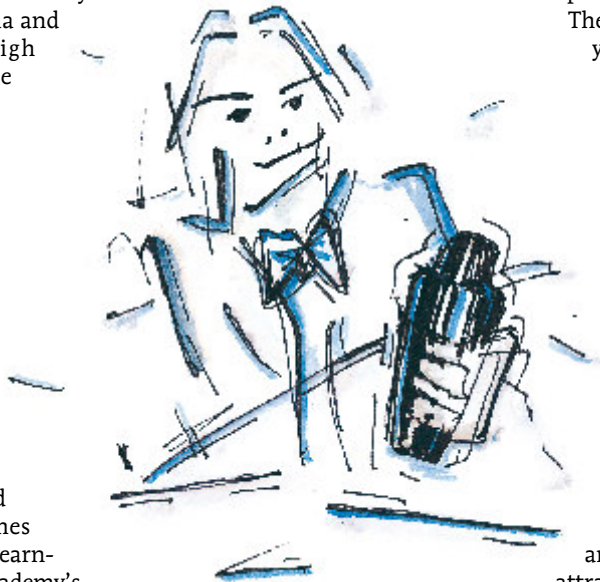
Maritime Hotel Academy is established as world leaders as an institute of learning in this speciality.

The Maritime Hotel Academy offers some twenty different management courses on subjects ranging from self management, personal effectiveness, interpersonal communication, team building, group development and leadership style, to the art of negotiation, preparing and controlling budgets, human resource planning, project and risk management. The Onboard Management Development Programme is organised into a diploma syllabus for senior shipboard hospitality management.

The prerequisite for this is three years shipboard experience in a supervisory or management role.

A key exercise in the residential Onboard Management Development Programme is to plan a new ship, with given passenger and crew capacities to fit into an existing fleet offering world-wide luxury cruising. The students work in small groups, where they must define the overall design features, onboard facilities and decor, service and amenities that they think will attract passengers to their own new cruise product. Although they are spared doing the detailed naval architectural and engineering work, their proposals must be technically plausible, with proper provision being made for life-saving equipment, machinery spaces and other support facilities. The groups have several days, usually over a weekend, to prepare their designs and proposals, which they must then present for the entire class and their lecturers for evaluation and critique.

This is an assignment that gets everyone's adrenalin



emphasis on the role of hotel department and hospitality management. Where passenger service was once the responsibility of an ocean liner's purser, himself responsible to the captain, shipboard hospitality is now organised on a similar basis to the shoreside hotel and resort industries. With the broad range of food and beverage, retail, entertainment, casino, conference and business services now offered even on overnight ferry crossings, the requirements for control and management of the ocean-going hotel goes far beyond the realm of the ship's purser and his or her staff. Thus the

flowing, as the students are already experienced cruise ship staff, who know what they like and dislike about the ships they have served aboard and who have their own ideas about passengers and how they should be served. Time is limited and the pressure is on. The lights burn well into the night, the pulse quickens, brows become furrowed, palms perspire, and sometimes tears shed. Some pace the corridors as they try to come up with the solutions, Others chain smoke, or talk to themselves out loud. As each group finally makes its presentations, there is a sense of blessed relief and great

accomplishment.

Later you realise that you have also learned a lot about ships, how they work and why they are designed the way they are, and the reasons perhaps for some aspects of the product, service and its management with which you have always taken exception or been critical. Most importantly, though, you have shown yourself that you can cope with the immediacy and resourcefulness that your ship and the cruise line that employs you, and no doubt sooner or later will demand of you as an effective maritime hotel manager.

The courses teaches you to think creatively. If you are asked how an egg could survive the ten metre drop to the parking lot outside the classroom window, you must realise that the real answer to the question has more to

gains kudos and recognition throughout the organisation of which it is a part. Objectives are accomplished more quickly and effectively, crew or staff turnover is reduced and in the end greater customer satisfaction is reached. For the team leader or manager this opens up possibilities for transfer or promotion as one who is seen to be a leader and innovator who is adaptable to change, and above all, who has vision and the ability to communicate effectively. In turn the chance opens for someone else to be recognised as being ready to step into his or her shoes

When Jürgen Scharkosi himself is conducting a course session, which he enjoys doing as part of his own exhaustive business activities, he spends much of the time asking his students questions. The technique is also



do with making sure that a breakable object is moved securely from one place to another without the risk of it being dropped: One group of students even went so far as to make a tiny parachute to slow the descent of virtually the only egg to survive an actual free fall to the asphalt below.

As a student you learn an effective and progressive approach to modern management in terms of a visionary approach to leadership, teamwork and the skills of motivation and empowerment toward achieving the goals and objectives of the vision. This stresses the importance of a networking approach to the sharing of information and use of a consultative strategy to imparting knowledge and instruction. The hobgoblins and bandits of time management and personal development are addressed, along with effective techniques for dealing with the burdens of information overload and continually changing technology.

The training also deals with the issues of achieving success, job ownership, satisfaction and security that concern us all in today's highly competitive world. This shows that the visionary and open approach to team-building and motivation creates the sense of involvement, worth and satisfaction that everyone wants from their work. This in turn increases job security for each *player* through the effectiveness of the team as a whole as it

followed by most of the Academy's lecturers and instructors, who are themselves well experienced in shipboard hotel management. The objective is to get you to think creatively and to work out the answers for yourself. He knows from his own experience that this is exactly what you have to do when you are at sea and are in charge, and when everyone else looks to you for leadership when the totally unexpected occurs, as it all so often does.

The object is to draw from the talents and skills that we already possess to respond in such situations and to hone these into the practice of intuitively finding practical and workable solutions.



Many of the Maritime Hotel Academy's management programmes are run at Salzburg, where these bring together people from the more than 25 major cruise lines who regularly send their front-line and management staff to the Academy, as well as from various other passenger shipping lines. This in itself adds value to the training by fostering the exchange of experience, knowledge and ideas throughout the industry for the benefit of all and in creating the valuable industry-wide networking opportunities for graduates to

maintain in their working careers. Among the more senior people in particular, these relationships are sustained and developed through participation in various conferences, seminars and other events held either at the Academy or other venues including the biennial

Hotel Pavilion held at Cruise + Ferry in London.

The Kavalierhaus Klessheim, where the Academy was started in 1990, is unfortunately no longer used for training as its rooms are unequipped for modern audio-visual and multi-media digital presentations, lacking as they do, the necessary cable and network connections,

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black-out shades and other technical facilities. Facilities are now used in the hotel complex where Maritime Leisure Group and the Maritime Hotel Academy have their offices, with kitchen labs and other special facilities being used at nearby hotel schools. Graduation ceremonies and other special functions are still held at Klessheim, where the beautiful Marble Hall is used for receptions and commencement ceremonies, and group photos are taken in front of the building's magnificent neo-classical exterior.

Looking to the horizon

As the cruise industry continues to grow, so too does the need for quality trained hotel service and management people. The Maritime Hotel Academy is itself growing to meet the demand, expanding its range of courses and other training through its affiliate institutions around the world and with other nautical training schools. The Academy is working out licencing arrangements and other services with various deck-and-engine educational facilities eager to expand their services into the fields of onboard service and hospitality. E-learning is being developed as the way of the future for covering much of the detailed service and academic material, with students being able to work as their own time permits and at the pace best suited to themselves. Examinations will still be conducted in person by Academy lecturers who will spend time in different parts of the world where their services are needed. This approach will in turn also make more time available to Academy teaching staff for the group and interactive sessions where people are brought together for lab work or team exercises such as the newbuild proposal development.

The Academy is also bringing its training and other services right to the client, with courses, workshops and conferencing arranged directly aboard their own ships. Staff can learn and practice directly in their own familiar working environment, without the expense and time taken out to travel to institutions of learning

ashore. The Academy staff works with the shipowner or cruise operator to tailor these courses specifically to their own needs.

Where many cruise lines were once reluctant to invest in training and education for their hotel department and hospitality staff, most are now committed supporters of the Maritime Hotel Academy, both as satisfied clients and as contributors to the institution's scholarship programmes.

The California-based Maritime Hotel Association awards scholarships and bursaries, funded out of the proceeds from their not-for-profit trade shows and other industry events staged as part of their activities

The consistently outstanding customer satisfaction achieved throughout the industry has clearly come a

long way to asserting the value of accredited hotel and hospitality education on much the same basis as the schooling and system of rating for ship's officers, engineers, deck and engine ratings.

Education is the way ahead - See you in class! 