

The STARS Cruise Experience
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What an experience! And what a perfect balance between learning and leisure! We boarded the KA'IMIKAI-O-KANALOA (KOK) on May 24, 2010 and headed into seas that became a little rough, but settled down nicely the next morning. Immediately I was struck by how many people worked and lived aboard this University of Hawaii research vessel. This was information I wanted to share with students - all of them, not just the science "geeks". There's a job for every ability level at sea!

Among the first people we met was Justin, whom UH pays to assist researchers and visitors like us with handling the equipment deployed to the depths below. He instructed me and others on what to do to launch and retrieve the CTD rosette which goes hundreds of feet down near Station ALOHA.

On the first day we also met the galley crew, Robert and John, the chef. We were absolutely spoiled by their excellent food, and I really appreciated their friendly and easy manner, too. John shared with me his career path to this job and all the ups and downs that come with being a chef at sea. The job pays well, as almost all jobs at sea do, but job satisfaction has a lot to do with who is on the crew. Robert agreed, and both John and Robert felt that the captain and staff aboard this vessel got along pretty well. It probably helps that they dock each weekend, with most leaving for their homes on the Big Island and other places (some call distant states their homes, and they stay away from home for months and months - but it's mostly a choice). Robert informed me that you can become a galley worker with just a little safety training, and earn much more than similar work on land. This can be something students could try soon after graduating, to get their sea legs before deciding if a life at sea is really what they want. Catching dinner fresh from the ocean is one of the many perks!

I also got to know Bob, the chief engineer, who gave us a tour of his "office" on the lower deck. He's a veteran of the sea, and got a lot of training over the years to be able to fix virtually anything that goes wrong on the ship. He's paid the price though - his work environment is very loud, and sadly when he started out as a younger man, there were no rules about protecting your hearing (note, visitors to the engine room must now wear ear protection, just like Bob and his trainee).

Later in the cruise we met Scott, an able-bodied seaman, and Capt. Ron. Both gentlemen agreed that most careers at sea are good ones to enter; however, their positions took years of training to prepare for. As with some other men and women onboard, Scott got his start in the military.

Lastly, the many graduate students and their instructors impressed me. They work tirelessly around the clock, where they take part in a night time plankton tow. All in all, I left the ship with loads of science career information to share with students, and not just a little envy that I am not rocked to sleep every night like those aboard the KOK, resting so easy knowing the chores will be done for me, and my only task is a little homework to do when I can manage it!