

INSIDE VIEW:

A Conversation with Captain Marco Fortezze of Caribbean Princess

by

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Captain Marco Fortezze was born in Genoa, Italy, a city with a long seafaring history. As a boy, he enrolled at the San Giorgio Nautical Institute. However, in order to determine whether he had a true passion for his chosen career, Fortezze spent his summer vacations working as a deck boy on ships. "I decided I loved it. I was working with the sailors, scraping and cleaning - - lots of dirty work. I think it was good because I learned the basics."

The next step was to become a cadet with the Italian Line, which had a corporate history that included such legendary ocean liners as the Michelangelo, Raphael and Andrea Doria. While his dream was to work on passenger ships, Fortezze was assigned to the company's cargo division, which included primarily container ships. Once again, the work was rigorous. "Most of the officers came from being in the [Italian] Navy. We were very much square and disciplined."

Still, Fortezze sees the experience as having been quite valuable. "The officers took good care of a young officer. They taught me how to shoot a star with a sexton. At the time there was electronic equipment [for navigation] but we were still navigating in the old style as well just to keep

up. They wanted to make sure that we learned the right way to navigate."

In addition, the officers involved the young cadet in the actual running of the ship. When a cargo ship is going to pick up cargo, a plan is drawn up as to how and where the containers will be placed in order to, amongst other things, ensure the ship is balanced and to facilitate the efficient off loading of the cargo. The senior officers had the younger officers study and comment upon the plan. Then, "we were on the deck, checking the containers and making sure that the containers were secured as planned. We were not in an office, we were walking around."

Fortezze credits this hands-on experience with having helped him advance rapidly through the officer ranks. In 1989, he was able to fulfill his dream of working on passenger ships when he was offered a position as a third officer with the Italian cruise line Sitmar. Shortly before that, Sitmar had been purchased by P&O Line and soon after Fortezze's arrival, Sitmar was merged into P&O's American subsidiary, Princess Cruises. After passing his master's license exam in 1992, Fortezze continued up the chain of command at Princess, becoming a captain at age 40. "I don't regret the discipline of the time because I believe it was

good. It probably helped me be at my position at a young age."

Nonetheless, Fortezze's style of command is not authoritarian. On the bridge, he is clearly in charge. However, he does not have to have his hands on the ship's controls every minute. Instead, he allows his subordinates to participate in driving the ship. "I have always allowed my officers to put their hands on and not be afraid. I try to pass on what I know to others."

Rather than barking orders, Fortezze watches what is going on, interrupting only occasionally. "I never try to impose myself. I always suggest: 'Maybe it is better to reduce speed. Shall we do this' and a pause to let them think about it. I don't talk much, I just observe that they do the job properly."

Driving Caribbean Princess

Captain Fortezze's experience has included driving all the various classes of ship in the Princess fleet except the variation on the Grand-class that was built in Japan (i.e. Diamond Princess and Sapphire Princess) and the small R-class ships. "Each ship is a bit different. Each class of ship acts more or less in the same way."

The majority of ships in the Princess fleet now are based on the design first introduced with Grand Princess. Fortezze's current command, Caribbean Princess, has one more deck than the original Grand-class design and is sometimes referred to as a Super-Grand class ship. "I love these ships because it is a very maneuverable ship. It is like driving a car. I treat my car very carefully and I treat my ship very carefully."

"These ships are like a big sailing boat," he says referring to the fact that the tall sides of Caribbean Princess present a huge expanse to the wind. "So, the ship acts in different ways [depending] upon the wind, how much it is blowing, the direction it is blowing."

The wind is a particular concern when the ship is docking or leaving a berth. "Yes, I have been in New York a hundred times but today I do not know what can happen. Things happen, the wind starts to blow. I want to be always on alert. I try to keep a very high standard every time I enter or leave a port."

To maneuver the ship and counteract the effect of the wind, Caribbean Princess has three 2992 horse power bow thrusters and three 2339 horse power stern thrusters to give her sideways thrust. Her two fixed-pitch main propellers give



Captain Marco Fortezze

fore and aft thrust and used in combination with her two rudders also influence the ship's direction.

The ship's computer guidance system can be set to bring the ship along side a pier. "The computer can basically adjust the power of the engines and propellers to move the ship in that direction. Personally, I enjoy thinking about what I have to do rather than [relying on] the computer."

Under normal circumstances, Caribbean Princess does not need help from tug boats to dock or undock. "If we are along side and have 25 or 30 knots on the beam, the chances of the ship coming off the dock are very slim to nothing. We cannot work the thrusters at full power because at full power I do not have any extra if I need help. If I do not have the spare power, I call for a tug boat. Through everything, safety is always first in what we need to keep in mind."

When at sea, the ship is usually operating under her computer guidance system. This system uses information gathered from the radar, the GPS and other systems in order to control the ship's propulsion and steering. Thus, the ship's officers



can program in a course and the computer will maintain that course making adjustments for wind and currents. Of course, the ship's officers oversee the system at all times.

"The computer drives the ship from point A to point B. My officer has to make sure that everything is working properly and if we have any doubt, we immediately go to manual steering."

One complicating factor is the weather. "The safety of the people onboard is the most important part. So I personally check and my officers check the weather forecast. We try to avoid entering a storm. When unfortunately there is nothing I can do [to avoid a storm], I adjust the speed accordingly. I take every precaution and make the passengers aware that we are entering bad weather."

The ship's computer guidance system also comes into play in those situations where the ship cannot dock and must use her tenders to ferry passengers ashore. If the ship can anchor, the anchor will keep the bow in a fixed spot and "then the computer will keep the ship in the same position with the same heading, pushing the stern accordingly. We can then operate [the tenders] safely on the [leeward] side."

In those circumstances when the ship cannot anchor, "the computer keeps the heading plus it keeps the GPS position. It knows where we are and that we want to hold this position with this heading. It uses the thrusters, the main engines and the rudders all together to keep the ship on our design."

Beyond driving

As captain of Caribbean Princess, Fortezze is in ultimate charge of all aspects of the ship's operation. "We are structured as in the old days - - the captain has full responsibility."

To perform this function, the captain must necessarily rely on his three principal direct reports. "They are the front line. The passenger services director is in full charge of the hotel operation. The chief engineer is in full charge of the electronic and technical part. Then I have a staff captain who basically runs the deck department and the security department. Of course, they are all important to me but I do not interfere with the operations. We all share information and we do meetings where everyone expresses their opinion. We decide things together if there is something to decide together."

There is also a social aspect to the job. "My first part is to drive the ship but at the end of the day, the contact with the passengers onboard is very enjoyable - - our official function like the Welcome Aboard Party, the Captain's Circle Party and the Most Traveled Passengers Party. There are also some groups that invite the captain. I also enjoy when I walk around to stop and talk to any passenger I meet. It is a very nice experience meeting people coming from so many countries."