

FINGERPRINT

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 1 FEBRUARY 2017

Cruising Around the World by Tiina Hiis '14



Go to school. Study. Find a job. Work. That's the path that many of us follow these days. Have you ever wondered though, what it'd be like to take that path and spice it up a little? Fellow RMT Nick Lakhan '10 is someone who did just that. Rather than staying in Toronto to work, he decided to take his skills abroad to explore the unknown and head for the seas (literally), by signing a contract to work on a cruise ship. He was finding himself in new cities and countries almost daily! This is a lifestyle that most don't have the chance to experience. Luckily for us, Nick was more than happy to reminisce and share some of his stories with us.

Before we can even take off with the adventure, I want to know where it all began. What made you decide to travel and work as a massage therapist?

My parents have shared with me a lifetime of adventurous stories about their immigration in the 1970s from South America to Canada. I've always admired their experience and wondered what it could be like for me. My father has been on many cruises and his excitement is contagious. One time he brought home online references for jobs at sea for me to look at. Visiting these sites painted a good picture of what life on board could be like, and that's when daydreaming turned into reality. I was ready to see the world, and earn some money while doing so!

Once you decided you wanted to work on a cruise ship, how did you get started?

My adventure started in October 2011 at Steiner Training Academy in Harrow Weald, UK [where they prepare trainees for life on a cruise]. After five weeks of training, I committed to a seven month contract with Crystal Cruises. I started my placement aboard the Symphony Luxury ship on a world-touring itinerary. Next, I signed on to spend two months with the Disney Cruise line aboard the Wonder Premium ship. With Disney I visited the Mexican Riviera, California Coast, Hawaiian Islands, and Alaska. After that contract ended, I returned to the UK where I began backpacking throughout Europe with a friend I had met in the Academy. In nine months I visited 45 different cities.

A typical workday in Toronto could entail waking up, going to work to do four to six massages, calling it a day, and maybe seeing some friends before heading home. However, life on a cruise ship is very different. Can you shed some insight into what a standard day looks like?

A typical day is atypical! It's safe to say though, that it's usually long, fast paced, and contains many laughs. It could go something like this:

- Cruising 2 -

My alarm goes off – good morning! I take the Yonge Street of hallways from my cabin to the crew mess for brekky. Gazing out the windows, I try to see what port we're in (it becomes a blur)! At 8:45 a.m. I attend a brief pre-shift meeting, prepare my treatment room, and am ready for my



Nick Lakhan

first guest by 9 a.m. After three treatments, it's time for lunch. We are in Brazil, so I decide to visit a local restaurant with a friend. After lunch it's back to work for another three to four treatments. By 6 p.m., it's time to finish up and head to dinner. Before making plans for the night, I decide to enjoy a quiet steam bath and hot shower in the spa. Feeling refreshed, I think about the many options to choose from for evening entertainment. My roommate is going to a crew party, but there is also karaoke at the crew bar, and “wine night” at the crew mess. I choose to don my semi-formal wear and watch a stage performance with some coworkers. After a full day, I head back to my cabin and go to sleep at a

decent time. I do still have to work in the morning! Tomorrow is a Port Day, meaning it won't be as busy for me – three to five treatments followed by lunch fit for a king in the guest restaurant.

That sounds like an action-packed day! Do you ever have time to explore the port cities as well?

Whether you want to take a tour with coworkers, try authentic local cuisine, hit the beach, or get lost walking in the city... There is definitely time to do it. Massage therapists are entitled to 1.5 days off per week, plus there are job performance incentives to earn more time off. It's a great deal compared to the majority of on-board jobs. You can schedule days off to correspond with the ports you most want to visit. You can take three half-days and visit three different cities in one week. On some occasions the ship may dock overnight or longer... Get out your dancing shoes!

It sounds like the lifestyle on a ship is busy, but comes with a lot of fun adventures. What did you love most about the work and experience?

My current practice involves a lot of sports massage. I attribute my good technical base to my on-board experience. Though luxury spas are associated with relaxation, there are plenty of crew (servers, stewards, dancers) who need treatment-based massages. I enjoyed the volume and variety of treatments. Trading treatments with massage therapists from all over the world was great too. What I enjoyed most about the whole ship experience was the people I met. Great friendships and memories were made in the Training Academy. It was always a pleasant surprise when we crossed paths again months later as coworkers, roommates, or just randomly in port. In ship life, crew contracts start and end frequently. Some friendships last only days or weeks, but many I've kept in contact with. I find myself talking to friends all over the world. It was truly a life-changing experience.

How did you find the experience compared to working in Ontario where massage is regulated?

For starters, massage isn't regulated on ships. Compared to a work environment in Ontario, I don't think there is a big difference between how the business operates or what the job description of a

- Cruising 3 -

massage therapist would be. There are differences among the therapists though. On board there are massage therapists from so many countries. The majority have received their education in places with no regulation, or at least where it's much less extensive than what we see in Ontario. That leads to contrast in general competencies such as assessment, treatment planning and self care. However, the UK Training Academy prepares all candidates to provide service at their required standard, and there are many excellent therapists trained world-wide.

To finish off, do you have any tips to share with other massage therapists who are contemplating the idea of working abroad?

1. I believe the most important attribute for making this a successful experience is adaptability, or at least being willing to learn how to become an adaptable person.
2. Before you commit, make sure you are prepared and well researched. There are great websites that will help you to get started and paint a picture of what this adventurous life entails, such as steinerleisure.com and cast-a-way.com.
3. Being away from family and friends can be difficult. Be prepared to feel a bit homesick at times. I was fortunate that I never got seasick, but that is something else to consider as well.
4. Be prepared to provide documentation with your application: your massage diploma/license documents, police background check, and various medical letters. As for fees, the only major expense for me was the initial flight to the UK Training Academy. There were some minor expenses associated with medical and uniform requirements, but all other living and travel costs were arranged and covered by Steiner.
5. It can be a big step to take, but it's a fun one. The memories you make, people you meet, and places you see help make it an incredible experience. Bon voyage!

Thank you to Nick (presently at fitnessaspex.ca) for taking time to share his experiences with FingerPrint readers.

Do you know someone who should be at Sutherland-Chan?

You see them in your clinic – meet them in your neighborhood – they may be acquaintances; they may ask you about your profession and more importantly they may inquire about your education. We know that our greatest source of referrals is from those who say, “A Sutherland-Chan grad told me about the school!”

Please encourage those who express interest in the massage field to consider Sutherland-Chan. Direct them to our website or suggest they contact the school for a tour.

Our grads are our best resource – we thank you for your ongoing support of the school!

Jennifer Schembri, Admissions Coordinator
(416) 942-1107, ext. 23
jennifer@sutherland-chan.com