



Lisa Lutoff-Perlo with Celebrity officers, including Capt. Kate McCue, second right

## Women seafarer snapshots

Seatrade Cruise Review March 2019 issue features a cover story focussed on women working in cruise ship deck and technical roles. Writer Anne Kalosh provides profiles of the women seafarers she interviewed.

### Capt. Kate McCue, Celebrity Cruises

**Meeting Lisa Lutoff-Perlo at a captain's conference when both worked at Royal Caribbean 'really struck a chord. Her motto, "Find a way or make one," is so apropos,' Capt. Kate McCue says. 'I sent her the logo of our ship with the motto on the bottom.'**

At the time, McCue was a staff captain and when Lutoff-Perlo later took the Celebrity presidency, she asked McCue to become the line's first woman captain.

'My answer was hell yes!'

That was in 2014, when Celebrity had 3% women on the bridge. Today that number is 20%, apart from Celebrity Edge, where it's 30%. The one area that hasn't changed is the engine department. 'It would be fantastic to see more women engineers,' she says.

McCue's appointment sparked a media sensation, in large part because of the fact that she's also a US citizen.

Recognizing her chance to inspire other women, McCue started her Instagram account to show an inside look at a captain's life and all aspects of the maritime career. 'If you see it, you can be it,' she says.

A San Franciscan, McCue wanted to go to sea from an early age (her only family seafaring connections were a grandfather and uncles in the Navy). She attended the California Maritime Academy and started as a cadet on

a boat carrying bananas between Long Beach and Ecuador.

'I didn't enjoy it. I wanted to be on cruise ships since I was 12,' she says. Sending resumes was getting her nowhere, so she finally applied as a bartender at Disney Cruise Line. Instead, they hired her a third officer in 2001. With just two ships at the time, there wasn't much chance to advance, so McCue eventually went to Royal Caribbean, which was building the Radiance- and Oasis-class ships. She started as second officer in 2003 and rose to staff captain before hitting the glass ceiling.

As president and CEO of Celebrity, Lutoff-Perlo changed that, and together with Patrik Dahlgren, corporate SVP global marine operations, they're the 'dynamic duo' in McCue's eyes. 'Dahlgren is 'so passionate ... He has two daughters and wants to make the world better,' she says.

As staff captain, McCue had been sent for a psychological evaluation that all senior officers go through to make sure they've got the right stuff. She sailed through that, but for one snag: She was told she smiles too much and wouldn't be taken seriously.

But, 'The fact you can smile and be yourself makes you so much more relatable,' she says.

McCue maintains there were no special challenges for her to take the helm as captain, and she attributes that to the fact that her ship has 1,231 crew from 72 nations so 'all are a minority in some sense. That created an unspoken level playing field.'

**WOMEN WEAR THE STRIPES - PROFILES**

The external spotlight on her was 'a bit overwhelming.' But the only thing that rubs the wrong way is people calling her 'Kate.' She tackles that proactively by introducing herself as 'Captain Kate, but you can just call me captain because it took me 19 years of training to get this job.'

What sets women apart as officers? 'Women bring sincere empathy that people are not used to seeing. We think with our hearts,' she says. When it comes to guest interaction, she's a 'bit more maternal. I'm not a mom, but if guests are on my ship, I feel responsible to take care of them.'

McCue recounts a situation where her ship rescued

six people adrift on a sailboat. On board, it was mostly women who gave them money and clothes.

Given Celebrity's commitment to gender equality, on March 8, International Women's Day, ships across the fleet ring their bells and sound their horns, and everyone wears red. It's a highlight for McCue.

'It's not just celebrating women, it's finding that goal of gender equality. Men participate. It's really special.'

McCue is married to a chief engineer who's working for Virgin Voyages at the shipyard. 'The secret to a happy marriage is being 12 time zones apart,' she quips, adding that he gets a kick out of telling people he's the captain's wife.

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**Capt. Kate McCue, Celebrity Cruises**



**Capt. Belinda Bennett,**  
Windstar Cruises

**At her promotion to master in 2016, Belinda Bennett became not only Windstar Cruises' first woman captain but likely the first black cruise ship captain.**

Bennett, 39 at the time, had worked 11 years for Windstar, previously as chief officer. She hails from St. Helena, a British Overseas Territory encompassing Ascension and Tristan de Cunha, where she became a deck cadet at age 17 aboard RMS St. Helena. In 2012, she climbed the ranks as third officer then stayed an additional five years, ultimately serving as second officer.

Following a brief stretch as chief officer for SS Delphine,

a private charter yacht, and Isle of Man Steam Packet ferries, Bennett joined Windstar as second officer in September 2005.

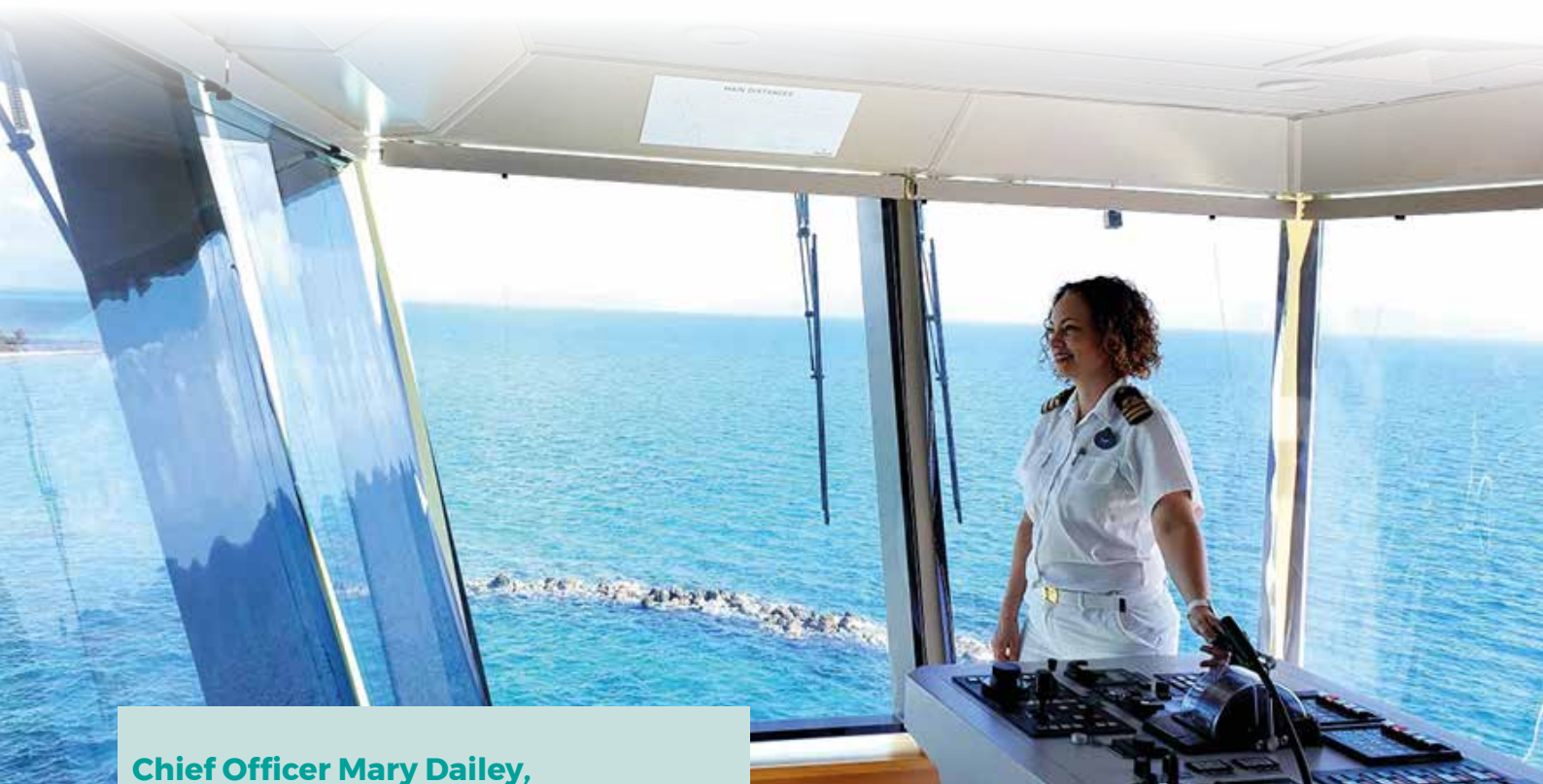
In 2018, Bennett was presented the Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service as 'the first black female captain in the commercial cruise industry.' She received the award from Princess Anne under the auspices of the UK Department for Transport and Maritime & Coastguard Agency,

'I hope that young people around the world will follow in my footsteps with hard work and dedication,' Bennett said upon receiving the medal. 'I have to thank my family, friends and work colleagues for their support over the years and every day we continue to learn. My career at sea has allowed me to see much of the world and its cultures of which I am thankful. This medal may be awarded to me but it belongs to all who have supported me over the last 24 years at sea.'

'We are beyond proud of Captain Bennett not only for what she represents to the cruise industry but also her determination and perseverance in the very competitive and vital maritime industry,' Windstar VP operations Christopher Prelog says. 'Belinda is a great role model for our junior officers and cadets. We are happy for her success and the inspiration that is to be gained by her story.'

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**Capt. Belinda Bennett, Windstar Cruises**



**Chief Officer Mary Dailey,  
Disney Cruise Line**

**Canadian Mary Daley earned a university business degree but decided the business world wasn't for her, so she attended the Marine Institute in St. John's, Newfoundland, then went to sea to work toward her license. She advanced, eventually earning her first officer's license in 2002, having sailed on Maersk supply vessels and container ships, small ferries and fishing boats.**

Dailey signed on with Disney Cruise Line as a third officer in 2003 and has served on three of its four ships, currently, Disney Dream.

Her proudest accomplishment has been achieving her master's license in 2010. 'It's a major achievement. This is an amazing feeling,' she says. It's also gratifying when her team gets recognized for projects well done and vessel upkeep.

Ship handling takes up a very small percentage of time but is 'one of the best parts' of the job, 'something

you really need to work on to improve your skills' for situations like adverse weather conditions. 'All the time you build up your confidence,' Dailey says.

Canada aims to increase the number of women working in nontraditional jobs, so maritime institutes are 'trying to capture more females' and the maritime institute she attended likes her to return to inspire others. Disney, too, wants to recruit more women, and over time Dailey's noticed more women in deck jobs, but still not in the engine room.

As chief officer, Dailey is third in command, and the fact that Disney is building three ships is 'very encouraging' since this gives more opportunities to advance.

Whether she would suggest other women go to sea depends on the woman. 'This is not just a profession. It's a lifestyle,' she says. 'There are a lot of factors that come into it.'

***This is not just a profession.  
It's a lifestyle.***

Chief Officer Mary Dailey, Disney Cruise Line



**Deck officer on an upscale European line who wishes to remain anonymous**

**After a childhood love of sailing and a student job working at a cruise terminal, she studied to become a nautical officer and worked as a cadet on ferries and container ships. But after her job at the terminal, she always knew she wanted to work on cruise ships.**

She was actively recruited as a woman and now considers it a 'brilliant idea' to have mixed bridge teams, because they are less homogenous and more productive. 'Many, many times I now experienced how I was a more careful navigator than some of my male colleagues,' she says.

'We've had other women in the company who found it difficult to work together with other females, but I think however much discipline it takes, it's really worth making the effort to be friends no matter what. The male teams seem to feel more comfortable without us at times, and you really need to be quite a strong person to not feel belittled.'

She thinks most men don't realize when they're making it hard for women, especially if the women don't speak up (one colleague was miserable and left). She gets along fine with the men captains, who treat her more like a daughter than an officer. She volunteers to do jobs that her male colleagues avoid.

She likes her job and has steadily moved up, sailing as a first officer and a chief officer, and knows of one woman in her line's engine department.

'The working and living conditions on my ship are rather exceptional for all crew members, but as soon as you are a deck officer, you've made it,' she says. This includes privileges like dining in the passenger buffet, using the passenger gym and going ashore more often than lower ranking crew.

Some of the older passengers don't like having a woman on the bridge, while one remarked that he slept easier knowing she was in command. 'Experiences like that make me proud,' she says.

'The cruise industry is more welcoming and enjoyable for women than cargo ships ever will be. This is partly because of all the amenities, but also because of the size of the crew,' she says. 'There are other females in all departments as well and it's so normal to have laughing girls' voices in the corridors.'

Married, she took a break from a past job with the thought of having children. One cruise line colleague left to have a baby and was able to return, albeit at one rank lower with the promise she would be promoted as soon as possible, and that happened.

'#MeToo is a universal problem and the more we all speak out and make ourselves heard, the earlier will we create awareness and see change,' she says, having gone through bullying as the only woman at her former cargo ship job. 'I speak up against it and of course that is uncomfortable for many. But, so far, I was rather successful at being a strong and supportive friend to other women on board who are younger or less experienced.'

However, it's strange not to have a woman role model or mentor to look up to.



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**First Officer/Training Officer,  
Alia Oueslati,  
Carnival Cruise Line**

**Alia Oueslati, 28, from Sicily has been working for Carnival Cruise Line for nearly five years. She studied five years at the Nautical College and 2.5 years more at the Italian Shipping Academy. After working as a cadet for a year on oil tankers and other vessels, she passed her officer of the watch exam in 2012 and was promoted to third officer. In September 2014, she**

**joined Carnival, where she's a first officer/training officer.**

'I really look forward to working many years more and moving up through the ranks,' Oueslati says. She feels Carnival gives women and men equal opportunities to advance.

'Luckily times have changed and cruise companies are more focused on helping women gain employment within the various departments. I really love working at Carnival Cruise Line and to have many female colleagues to work with.'

Oueslati feels accepted as a woman in her job.

**WOMEN WEAR THE STRIPES - PROFILES**

‘The greatest challenge I face is to keep up my hard work and demonstrate that women can do this job. Motivating and inspiring other ladies to start a career at sea would be one of my greatest achievements,’ she says. ‘Times have changed and a bright future is waiting for all the ambitious women who are ready to feel empowered by this amazing career.’

Oueslati view her job as the best she could ever choose, and recommends seafaring life.

Her ambition is to become Carnival’s first female captain.

‘I want to leave footsteps for generations to follow. I’m proud of every step I take day by day and I’m grateful for all the people that have inspired me thus far.’

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First Officer/Training Officer, Alia Oueslati, Carnival Cruise Line

**Second Officer Kerry Ann Wright  
Princess Cruises**

Briton Kerry Ann Wright, 28, has always loved to travel and initially wanted to take her beauty therapist skills into the air as an in-flight beauty therapist in first class cabins. But soon after she qualified, that job was no longer available. Searching for an alternative way to travel for work, she came across cruise ships.

Wright spent four years in college and on ships getting her diploma in nautical science, then passed exams to gain an officer of the watch certificate. After 15 months at sea as a third officer, she went back to college and passed her chief mate exams in August 2018.

Wright has worked in the cruise industry for 10 years, and has been with Princess for six, starting as a deck cadet.

She doesn’t believe that being a woman played a role in her recruitment. ‘The industry has always been male-dominated, and when I was starting out there wasn’t as much of a focus for women to come into the industry as we are seeing today. So my recruitment was more about my skill, personality and personal drive,’ she says.

Wright has faced challenges as a woman in her job, but believes they’ve made her stronger as a person and a leader. She feels accepted by colleagues, and works hard to earn their respect, ‘so acceptance has never really been a struggle for me in this career.’

She also feels she can ‘advance just as quickly as a man at Princess Cruises with the right attitude, determination and hard work. Across the industry, it’s heartening to see the focus on increasing female participation in all seafaring positions as I think we bring valuable skills and voices to our roles.’

Wright aspires to become a staff captain and then a captain at Princess.



WOMEN WEAR THE STRIPES - PROFILES

When she joined the line, Wright wasn't aware the president is a woman. However, they got to interact at the shipyard where Sky Princess is being built when the officer was nominated by her peers to serve as float-out madrina, recognizing her 'Reach for the Sky' story. 'Seeing how amazing [Jan Swartz] is at her job definitely makes me proud that she's the president of Princess and leader of my team,' Wright says.

She would encourage other women to pursue a career in deck and engine: 'It's a very fascinating and a very rewarding job, being part of the technical side of the team. It's definitely the way to go.'

When it comes to having children, Wright says that being away at sea is hard for anyone, man or woman, who's thinking about starting a family. She believes that's why some women shy away from seafaring, thinking they'll get to a certain point in their career and then having to choose a child or the job.

'But it's something the industry is aware of and working to address,' she adds. 'For example, Princess has had a policy in place for a number of years. I am entitled to bring an infant as young as six months old on board along with my partner or a parent who can help to take care of the child while I'm at work.'

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Second Officer Kerry Ann Wright, Princess Cruises



**Third Officer Martje Bos,**  
Holland America Line

**Born in Aruba and having spent most of her life in the Netherlands, Martje Bos, 26, wanted to be an airline pilot but the school cost €150,000. Her father suggested pursuing a maritime career instead.**

She earned both engineering and bridge licenses from the maritime institute in Terschelling so she could pursue either job but chose deck because 'I like navigating. I enjoy having the view.'

Some 120 people started in her class and 80 finished. Roughly 10% of the students were women.

Bos was on a cargo ship for 180 days before she graduated with a certificate that allows her to work on cruise, container or cargo ships. She needed to sail a year to become chief mate then worked an additional two years at sea to get her chief license. She's been sailing for more than a year as third officer.

Bos started on the Statendam, then worked on Prinsendam and Noordam before getting a job aboard

Nieuw Statendam, signing on at the shipyard last May, a new and motivating experience. Later, she was selected to be on stage as Oprah Winfrey named the ship in Fort Lauderdale.

Getting to train at Carnival Corp. & plc's CSMART center helps seafarers grow, Bos says, adding that she's learned a great deal about ship handling with Azipods.

Bos feels 'very accepted on board,' adding that Holland America Line is 'very open and they try to get more ladies.' She knows women who are first and fourth engineers and also feel 'very accepted.'

The cruise industry is more popular for women, and the way of living is easier than on a cargo ship, in her view. It's possible to socialize with women in the hotel department, so it's not as isolating as a cargo vessel.

'The environment is very good here. Cargo ships are more old school,' she says.

Passengers have reacted positively to seeing a woman on the bridge: 'Most people are surprised, and most of the time they're impressed.'

Women, Bos believes, have the 'same opportunity as any guy in the company. Do your work. Be open to learn and you can go as far as you want.'

Still, she's not sure she'll make it as a captain: 'At a certain point I would like to have a family.'

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Third Officer Martje Bos, Holland America Line



**Third Officer  
Alexandra Busuioc,  
Carnival Cruise Line**

**Born in Romania, at 7 years old Alexandra Busuioc moved to Italy with her parents. When she was 14, she moved with her twin sister from Turin to Camogli, where they attended the nautical high school, Cristoforo Colombo, for five years before she joined Carnival as deck cadet. Now 23, Busuioc holds her third officer's license and recently underwent CSMART training in the Netherlands.**

'It can be harder for a woman to get a job on board because women still represent a small portion of the maritime industry but this is changing,' she says. 'A lot of companies, including Carnival, take pride in their female officers and their achievements.'

'Most of the time passengers are excited to see women on the bridge, especially if you are the only one. Regarding superiors or colleagues, I can say the same but with one different perspective: you have to prove that you're smart, determined and ambitious.'

'I think first days on board can be challenging for everyone but if you're doing this job with passion and good knowledge nothing will stop you.'

Busuioc dreams of becoming a captain.

'A special moment that I will always remember was my first ship maneuver on Dec. 26, 2017, in Miami, at 22 years old, on board Carnival Splendor,' she says.

'The funniest thing is when passengers or crew members get confused about me and my twin sister. We have the same passion for this job, and we feel like the sea connects us more, and we are very grateful to work for the same company.'

***A lot of companies, including Carnival, take pride in their female officers and their achievements.***

Third Officer Alexandra Busuioc, Carnival Cruise Line



**Third Officer  
Maria Busuioc  
Carnival Cruise Line**

**Maria Busuioc attended 'one of the oldest and most prestigious high schools in Italy – Istituto Tecnico Nautico C. Colombo Camogli – for five years, where students could choose either the deck or engine department. Upon completing studies, she received her cadet license and 12 months' service at sea aboard three Carnival ships.**

'Busuioc, 23, has been working for Carnival for two years and is now third officer.'

'In all jobs it can be challenging for a man or a woman to be hired, but when there is passion and seriousness

nothing can stop you, just as it happened to me. Don't start to do something in life just because everyone does the same. Be different,' she advises.

Busuioc says she's had the pleasure of working with professional and respectful people 'who don't look at gender when hiring ... I did not face any big challenges by being a woman on board, and other passengers frequently stop me and I could see that they are thrilled to know they had met perhaps a future female captain.'

Busuioc is proud of getting her third officer's license, to be on her way to her goal of becoming a captain.

She believes the cruise industry, and Carnival especially, give everyone shoreside and shipboard equal opportunities to advance.

'I would encourage all young women who are still looking for a career or a bright future to look at working at sea as there are infinite opportunities waiting for them,' Busuioc says.

***Don't start to do something in life just because everyone does the same. Be different.***

Third Officer Maria Busuioc, Carnival Cruise Line



**Third Engineer  
Giorgia Angileri,  
Carnival Cruise Line**

**Giorgia Angileri, 23, graduated from the Technical Nautical College M. Torre in Trapani, Italy, and began working as an engine cadet for Carnival in 2015. In 2017, she earned her third engineer license.**

'I strongly believe that opportunities for women in the cruise industry are the same as for men,' she says. 'I would like to encourage all young women who would like to work in this industry to believe in themselves and remind themselves that as long as they are dedicated and have the passion for this job, they can achieve anything. One must never give up.'

Asked if she's treated differently as a woman in the engine room, Angileri explains that 'Since the beginning, my male co-workers constantly asked if I needed any help with my tasks. After I got the promotion to third engine officer they helped me even more. I could tell when they were giving me tasks, they were sharing their responsibilities and asking

my opinions. That was when I understood that I had earned their respect as an engineer.'

Angileri says she never gives up and tries to learn as much as she can all the time.

'One of my most inspiring moments was when I saw the look on the guests' faces when I shared with them that I'm an engineer. They were amazed to see that a woman as young as me could work in the engine room. It's a great feeling to see that reaction and how surprised they are. It definitely makes me feel proud of my achievement. It's as if they said: "Yes, girl! You can do it!"'

Angileri thinks the cruise industry offers the same opportunities for men and women. 'Young women and men always ask me "How did you get this position?" or "How can I start to work in this industry?" You just have to believe in yourself. You must fight for what you want. If it is not today, maybe it will be tomorrow and, in the meantime, there is always a chance to improve your knowledge.'

Her short-term goal is to become a second engineer. 'My professional ambition and long-term goal is to be not only a licensed chief engineer, but a true leader that will inspire other women to follow my path,' she says.

***I strongly believe that opportunities for women in the cruise industry are the same as for men.***

Third Engineer Giorgia Angileri, Carnival Cruise Line



**Third Engineer  
Irenemaria Sallemi,  
Carnival Cruise Line**

**Irenemaria Sallemi studied at nautical school in Pozzallo, Sicily. Once she earned her diploma, she underwent the mandatory STCW training before going to sea as an engine cadet. She started with Carnival in 2014.**

'Seafaring can be an arduous task especially in the engine department as every day we have to operate all machinery on board and we must be prepared mentally and physically at all times. However, I don't think I have been recruited because I am a woman, but because of my determination and because of other women in the maritime industry, which is a growing phenomenon.'



**WOMEN WEAR THE STRIPES - PROFILES**

Being accepted in a man's world can be challenging at times, Sallemi says. 'Because of my strong character, I didn't give up, mostly at the beginning of my career when I faced my first challenge.'

She would recommend working at sea to other women but says they have to be brave to leave their families and face a completely different environment. 'After that, they must be focused and believe in themselves and of course, they must love this job,' Sallemi says.

'I think this is the main key to being successful in the maritime world.'

Sallemi's next goal is to become a second engineer, and she's appreciative of Carnival for giving her the chance to achieve her dream – 'to travel around the world, to grow both personally and professionally and especially because I found a wonderful person in my boyfriend. I am very proud of my company.'

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Third Engineer Irenemaria Sallemi, Carnival Cruise Line

**Deck Cadet  
Elizabeth Marami,  
MSC Cruises**



**Kenya-born Elizabeth Marami started studying at a maritime academy in Egypt in 2009 to follow her dream of working at sea. When she completed her first studies, the head of the Kenya Maritime Authority, a woman, heard about her and helped her get a trainee job on a container ship where she worked six months before joining MSC Cruises in September 2018.**

'MSC 'welcomed me with open arms,' Marami says. She joined MSC Bellissima as a deck cadet officer for the final phase of construction at Chantiers de l'Atlantique, where she gained an understanding of shipbuilding dynamics.

A woman assistant safety officer worked alongside her during the training.

'I have spent 10 years training for this moment,' she said the day MSC Bellissima was named in Southampton. Marami aspires to work her way up to third officer, second officer, first officer, safety officer, staff captain then master.

'It may take 15 to 20 years, but I want to do this to pave the way for other women to go to sea,' she says.

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Deck Cadet Elizabeth Marami, MSC Cruises