

FROM SEA TO LAND

YOU REALLY ARE AT THE MERCY OF THE WEATHER AND THERE IS A VERY FINE LINE BETWEEN BEING A BRAVE AND SEASONED MARINER TO PUSHING THE LIMIT AND PUTTING YOURSELF IN DANGEROUS SITUATIONS

When Vaughan Poynter took his first job as a relieving deck officer over 10 years ago, little did he know that his love of the open sea would result in him working for the Prince of Dubai on his private yacht, catering for celebrities like Beyonce and Jay Z and being caught up in the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami.

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Photography by Andrew Watson

Now back on dry land, Vaughan is launching a book titled *The DeckCrew Guidebook*, to share his knowledge and experience from 12 years of working on luxury yachts, to help others gain employment in the industry. The book covers 22 topics of maritime training and includes yacht terminology, crew customs, expectations, crew positions, medical safety, manoeuvring and mooring, tenders, security, piracy and much more. "Up until now all training has been on the job, so the book will hopefully give potential candidates an edge when applying for work within the industry," Vaughan says.

Vaughan's love of the water saw him start a marine science course, but deferred part way through to do a trainee cadetship out at sea for a large international shipping company. Once he had met his sea-time requirements he enrolled in a professional maritime college to study nautical science, so he could be a commercial navigator on any ship anywhere in the world.

"For me the attraction was the satisfaction I felt sailing over the horizon to a new destination miles away and being a part of making that happen, rather than just being a passenger," Vaughan says.

He has worked on many luxury yachts over the years but his most recent and prestigious position, was that of second officer navigator on Motor Yacht (M.Y.) Dubai, the largest and most expensive privately owned yacht in the world. Owned by the Crown Prince of Dubai, positions on this yacht are highly sought after and Vaughan spent three and half years working on

this floating palace. Vaughan's position was primarily as navigator, liaising with the captain to plan the safest passage for travel and also oversee helicopter landings, arrivals and departures.

"It was a unique experience working on the M.Y. Dubai and very different to working for a western owner. There was always an entourage, muslim customs and orders never came direct from the crown prince but through one of his entourage so it was unusually quite formal," Vaughan says. "There was also a lot of standby time, but when orders were given, you were required immediately."

Vaughan also states that confidentiality is of huge importance for anyone working in the luxury yacht industry as many clients are VIPs in the public eye and all crew are required to sign confidentiality agreements on commencement of employment and are often bound by these for years afterwards.

However, Vaughan's biggest test was the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, when he and the captain on M.Y. Samax, managed to steer their yacht straight out to sea after noticing the early warning signs only minutes before the first wall of water crashed on to the beach in Phuket.

"I was on the beach about 15 minutes before it happened and the boat had just picked me up and taken me back to the yacht. I looked back towards the beach and it went from high tide to low tide in a matter of minutes and the floating pontoons were sitting on mud flats," Vaughan says. "Our instruments onboard said we were in only three metres of water and we knew something was wrong as we were about one kilometre from shore."



ABOUT THE BOOK

The *DeckCrew Guidebook* aims to teach newcomers about the luxury yachting industry and increase their chances of securing their dream job. The book covers 22 topics of maritime training ranging from security and piracy to yacht terminology, crew positions, medical safety and even the manoeuvring and mooring of yachts and tenders. It's a unique publication that will reinforce lessons for professional crew and provide specific information for novice candidates who wish to work on the world's ever-growing luxury yacht fleet.

Vaughan said the first wave passed underneath the yacht as they headed out to sea and they were able to ride over it because they were in deeper water, but the backwash from the first wave pushed them further out to sea. They then just drifted in deep water until sunset, without putting down the anchor, to avoid any possible aftershock. The following day they went to Phi Phi Island to help with the clean up after the disaster.

Vaughan says aside from tsunamis and pirates, cyclonic weather is also a major hazard of the job. "You really are at the mercy of the weather and there is a very fine line between being a brave and seasoned mariner to pushing the limit and putting yourself in dangerous situations," he says.

Looking back over the last 12 years Vaughan has many fond memories, from lovely gifts he received from clients like designer watches and laptops, through to killer whale teeth he was given by some local Indonesian whale hunters.

"I am now looking forward to weekends and leading a more normal lifestyle, but the sea may lure me back again in the future, after all anything is possible," he smiles. **CL**