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# CRUISE DOCTORS

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## Medicine aboard luxury cruise liners, a doctors tale.

Welcome to the niche world of maritime medicine, specifically Cruise ship medicine. It is strange to



me that many physicians around the globe have never really considered or heard of this niche speciality. As a South African doctor, it is deeply imbedded in our medical culture. As soon as the kids finish up 6 years of medical studies, they endure a grueling 2 years of internship, followed by another most educational year of community service. South Africa's 1st world medical facilities (almost), coupled with a lack of resources and 3rd world population dynamic, makes it the perfect learning environment for a junior doctor. South African doctors are in my opinion, (I have worked for years with practitioners around the globe), the best general practitioners in the world.

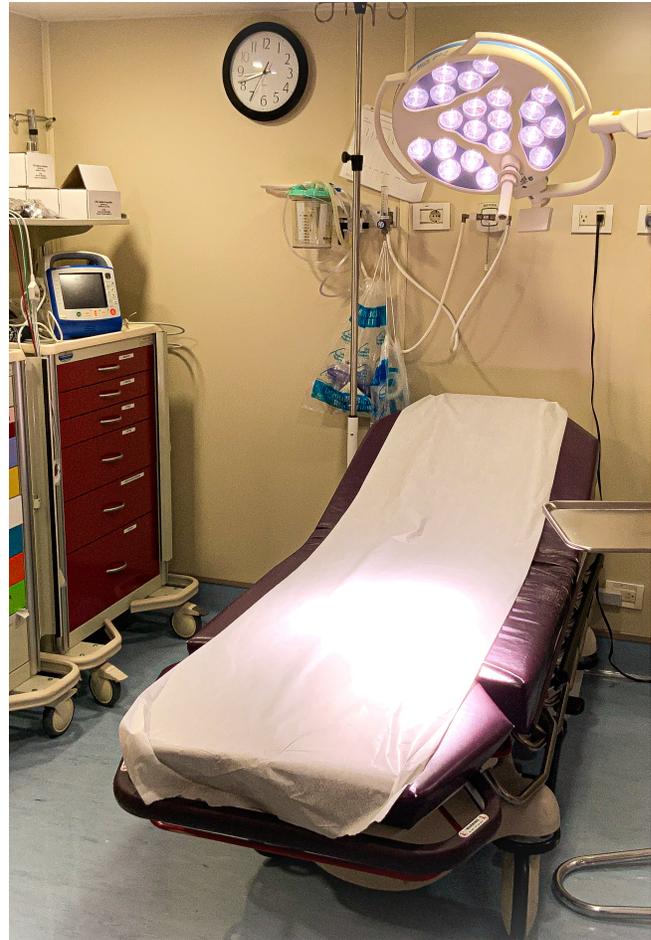
**The Cruise ship industry was booming at record highs, before the coronavirus pandemic. It is now the most badly affected industry.**

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SA docs have been exposed to almost every medical speciality, more importantly they have actively practiced within these fields. For example, every SA Intern has performed their own caesarean section delivery (they need to do a minimum of 20 to fulfill requirements). In most developed countries you would need to have many years of practice in the speciality of Obstetrics and Gynecology before being awarded this great privilege.

So... We are great General Practitioners at a young age... So what? Well, this just so happens to be the perfect recipe for entering the niche speciality of maritime medicine.

Cruise ship medicine, in essence, is like practicing rural medicine. With a twist, because on most Cruise Liners you will find surprisingly robust medical facilities. Your typical medical center aboard one of these luxury liners is not very different from a small hospital or emergency department. You can expect to find an array of diagnostic equipment which includes but is not limited to, digital x-ray machines, point of care ultrasound, an on board laboratory capable of providing surprisingly large array of tests, ophthalmoscopy slit lamps and more. Treatment facilities include, a room with basic ICU capabilities, resuscitation bay, a minor procedures room, isolation rooms, and other treatment rooms.



A medical center resuscitation bay on board a luxury cruise liner.

## Who works the decks?

There are 3 types of doctors you can find aboard a cruise ship. The young, fresh, out of the battle fields of South Africa, emergency room doc. These guys and gals typically work the industry for 1-4 years before deciding that it is almost impossible to have a normal family life living out at sea, they then move on and progress to their desired niche, always reminiscing of the good old cruise days. The second kind are the old timers. They are usually retired docs in their mid 60s, looking to cruise the world with their significant other while still keeping their skills and mind sharp. Last but not least you will find the insanely interesting, and generally just insane, career cruise ship doc. These folks fell in love with this unique lifestyle, enjoy fast paced action and adventure, have not only travelled, but have lived and worked in every corner of the globe. You will always hear an interesting story from these folks.

**“Working on the ship is extremely rewarding, but highly challenging at the same time”**

- RN MANUELA NEAGOE

## Why cruise ship medicine?

Let's get into the many pros of practicing medicine aboard a cruise ship. Firstly the pay. This is not limited to doctors, as all cruise ship personnel get paid well in comparison to what they would make on land.

Additionally the pay comes in the form of a strong currency, like USD, Euros, or British Pounds. This is obviously appealing to people who come from economically unstable countries.

In many instances the pay can be fully tax exempt. This is dependent on the laws in your country of origin and time spent outside of the country, ( you need to be working out of the country for at least 6 months of the year).

Lets not forget that every cent you make, can be safely stockpiled in your bank account. While being on board you incur zero costs(if you so choose). Everything is taken care of, your accommodation, food, entertainment, laundry, and more.



The cruise ship working environment is what i would call, para-military in its structure. There are officers, ranks, and different privileges for higher ranked personnel. The physician on board is a senior officer (at least having 3 shoulder stripes). This means you would be entitled to the full array of luxuries provided. A large beautiful living quarter(with 24 hour room service menu), meals in any restaurant the luxury vessel has to offer, access to all facilities aboard the vessel (the spa, gym, swimming pool, sporting activities, and more depending on the ship).

Now the real cool stuff. The travel.

Many of these vessels travel to the most exotic and remote corners of the globe. In a just a few years of work, you can experience and see a large portion of this earth. Sure, its more like an experience "tasting menu", as you wont be able to fully immerse yourself in the culture because of limited shore leave.

Generally speaking you will have about 6-12 hours to leave the ship and explore the destination(At times you will have 24 hours). Spending the day in Tallinn or Palma de Mallorca will leave you with a sense of wanting more, and that is just fine... Your work schedule will allow you to indulge in as much travel and adventure as you please. Doctors typically work a contract of between 10-20 weeks. When this is over, you will revel in a 8-12 week vacation.

Ever wondered what its like to live like a rockstar? These folks will tell you all about it.

For more information [Click here](#)