

UK Sail Training International Exchange to Canada



Organised by ASTO and sponsored by the James Myatt Trust

In my interview for this exchange I was asked the question ‘What does Sail Training mean to you?’ I cannot fully recall my response, but I think it went along the lines of meeting new people and learning incredible new skills all of which while on a boat sailing which gives an empowerment and feeling of achievement like no other. After spending five weeks in Canada on this exchange my interview response stands, but more coherently; Sail Training is a community that isn’t isolated to just one boat or sailing body, instead, it is a worldwide group of people invested in developing young people’s attributes while prioritise experiencing nature and exploration.



On the 5th of July I flew to Canada; being my first ever fully solo trip, I felt an independence and confidence like no other and was buzzing when explaining to the people beside me on the plane what I was flying for – it has been an incredible privilege to represent both UK Sail Training and the James Myatt Trust on such an International level!

I was lucky to have a friend who I had met through Sea Cadets from Victoria BC who hosted me before I joined the ship – I had a blast catching up with her, camping in the gorgeous Tofino, hiking up Old Baldy Mountain and getting over some minor jet lag! It felt like no time until I was joining the ship in Victoria.



My sailing experience was with a organisation called SALTS which stands for the Sail and Life Training Society – they provide sail training experiences in a Christian environment; this was my first experience of this addition and one which as a Christian I very much enjoyed. As we loaded our luggage an orchestra was playing across from us in the dock which provided a rather dramatic background the classic awkward first hour of boarding a ship. The first mate came over to ask where everyone had come from and as I listened in to people ‘ohh’ at the far away distance of Texas I was ready to land the ‘I’m from Northern Ireland’ which gathered quite



a response of 'ohhs' (once we established Northern Ireland in the UK, not North Vancouver Island as was initially interpreted). I guess it took me a while to realise just how far I had travelled to be part of this voyage – being surrounded by people with similar interests on a boat made me feel instantly welcomed and at home.

We got to work on the pre-sail briefs and were soon making way towards our first (and possibly my favourite) anchorage at Princess Louisa Inlet right beside the incredible Chatterbox Falls. On our way here, we were met by a man called Bob Goff, a Christian author who's book we had coincidentally been reading as a watch at breakfast that morning – he catapulted salt water taffy at us and wished us well. It was a unique experience and followed by cruising through the Malibu rapids at slack tide to make our way to this phenomenal anchorage. I guess I was in major awe of nature, the dramatic coast of mountains combined with old growth forests coming right up to the waterline was in stark contrast to the UK's more rugged, rocky coastline that I'm used to!



As part of the ship's routine we had 'mug up' every evening which entailed some form of game or ice breaker followed by everyone filling the saloon for a sing a long with traybakes and hot drinks made by the incredible chefs! This provided a great opportunity for us to bond as a crew, we developed quite an attachment to the Sea Shanty 'Farewell to Nova Scotia' and found ourselves constantly singing it together whether during mug up or while whale watching (yes, we legit saw humpbacks!). The intentional effort made by the crew in engagement, love and enthusiasm set such an example for us as trainees and it paved the way for a very tight knit community to form – especially as we engaged in deeper, more intentional discussions during meal times with our watches.

The next morning, we were up ready to adventure over to the mighty Chatterbox Falls. This was my first Dory experience – the boat being a traditional Square Topsail Schooner carried these three rowing dories which we used to further explore almost every anchorage. There was one dory per watch and as Port watch, we soon mastered the fine art of balancing our dory and made it to the dock first (we were rather competitive in Port Watch). After hanging out in the waterfall and rowing back we rigged up two swings and had a blast jumping in surrounded by the most phenomenal scenery. This evening we began 'secret friends' – an age-old SALTS tradition where each of us is given a secret friend on board the boat to make things for and be kind too. It sounds a little naff, but it was so much fun surprising your secret friend/being surprised yourself with small gifts! I had Steve the First Mate and made a rather 'bespoke' shell necklace with a boat on it and a matching one with a wave on it for his soon to be wife – I hope they wear them at the wedding! I received a



myriad of things including a whale summoning badge that proved rather effective! (evidenced above)

On Day 4 we anchored on the North side of Savoury Island with the Pacific Grace, SALTS' other tall ship and we all raced our dories in to the island for a short hike across the island followed by a massive group swim and football match with over 60 of us playing! The next day we headed to small inlet and rafted alongside the Grace in front of Cassel Lake Falls – we went to Cassel Lake for a swim and after showering in the falls went 'slacklining' between the sterns of the two boats. Tonight, we had a joint mug up and had everyone on deck singing together while we were treated to vanilla chai latte and were treated to Nanaimo Bars – if you're reading this and haven't had one, I urge you to find a recipe they are delish! This was such an enjoyable evening as 60 of us were huddled together under the stars singing away – it's amazing how sail training accelerates you into feeling like such a community, even within four days!



We waved goodbye to our Grace friends and continued to an anchorage by Little Tahiti Lake. On our journey we encountered quite the squall coming through Desolation Sound. We rapidly took down our courses and staysails and all stayed on deck to witness the transformation from sunshine into hailstone and then almost as quickly return back into calmness; a phenomenal display of the unpredictability of the weather when at sea! We had now entered what the crew described as the 'day 4,5,6-time warp' in which all of these days warp together into one. The time warp is symbolic of how close we became as a crew in those 4 days, we had swum, sailed, climbed the mast, sang and shared so much of each of our lives that the three days flew by. We were blessed with good weather however sailing-wise the wind was often not favourable for our 455nm journey right from Victoria in the South of Vancouver Island to Port Hardy in the North. As most of my previous experience on tall ships was with square riggers it was awesome to get to know more about gaff sailing and I learnt a lot through sitting the Intermediate written exam, including taking a sounding with a lead line in fathoms (vintage I know!)

On the last few days we had morning raves, weighed the anchor manually (270ft in 15 minutes after a stellar team effort) a talent show and ship Sunday; an evening where everyone took some time to do a life line activity and then we took time to share and reflect on our lives, where we are now and where we were going while the Skipper shared a story from the Bible. It was an enjoyable time to just be together and share more about our lives of all faiths and none. On day 8 we were treated to a humpback doing a full body breach followed by a show of several whale tails – this is a sight I will never forget and the buzz aboard as people clambered up ladders to see it was incredible!



As we approached Port Hardy everyone gathered contact details and we sang 'farewell to Nova Scotia' on the boat for one last time. While I didn't leave the boat until later that evening I found myself in a strange position. Not only had I flown 4,378 miles across the pond to sail a gorgeous topsail schooner, met many new people who I know will be friends for life, but I had experienced what sail training truly is – a community that crosses any national or geographical boundaries and bonds those of us who love sailing and adventure regardless of background, race or lifestyle. Ultimately, sailing is a way of life – an active choice to throw away the 'luxuries' of living in one place and instead to be an ocean nomad meeting with new people and nature along the way.

I stayed two nights in Port Hardy and thoroughly enjoyed spending some more time with the crew and getting ready for the next part of this phenomenal adventure. After 5 days away from sailing I had made it to Vancouver and was itching to get out again – I got into contact with Tony who owns Adventure Sailing Canada and had the privilege of sailing with him from Vancouver across Howe Sound on the sunshine coast and into Gibsons Island. It was brilliant to get back out again and reach a mighty 7 knots on his 40ft Jeaneau while exchanging sailing and life stories. After this I headed away from the coast and into the Rocky Mountains for the next part of my adventure!



My 19th Birthday present is the Rocky Mountains tour which I did with Trek America and added onto the experience. It involved



camping and hiking our way through some of the most gorgeous areas I have ever seen. Who knew mountain ranges could be so.. rocky! I had the privilege of hiking on the Athabasca Glacier which I was incredibly stoked about, but also hard-hitting to see the amount the glacier has receded with it being predicted to have fully

melted in 40 years' time. We canoed on Clearwater Lake, rafted on Kicking Horse, saw bears, deer, eagles and a moose and visited incredible National Parks and Lakes – notably Emerald Lake, Lake Louise, Lake Moraine, Peyto Lake and did a hike up to the Plain of Six Glaciers and Sulphur Mountain along the way. We even got to see an incredible show of lightning at 5 bolts per second at Minnewanka lake!



Each night we took it in turns to cook and set up a campfire by our tents, we had to bearproof everything which was an unusual part of camping for me! As I travelled along it was incredible how many people had heard of SALTS and were interested in my exchange which shows just how

incredible of an opportunity it was and with such a reputable company! I was able to meet one of the other trainees in Calgary and we went mountain biking before my evening flight!

The five weeks I had in Canada absolutely flew by, the sailing, people, nature, and general kindness and sense of adventure I encountered has inspired me so much and I will always remember this summer! Travel has an incredible ability to empower an individual to explore and engage more and I have certainly left this trip feeling so grateful for the people who taught me new skills, supported me from home and all those at ASTO and SALTS who made all of this adventure possible – I could never have done it without the logistics support of Marcia and Sherilyn and the sponsorship of the James Myatt Trust.

A Massive thank you to Marcia, Lucy and James at ASTO along with Sherilyn and Glynis at SALTS and Fiona De Fonblanque from the James Myatt Trust this trip would not have been possible without all of you and I am so incredibly grateful for every part of it along with all your support along the way!

Also if you're reading this and considering applying for the exchange I urge you to apply and give it your all, it is an incredible unique opportunity in how it is organised around you and really lets you experience Sail Training on a truly International Level providing a great platform to bring back knowledge and experience to our Sail Training here in the UK – feel free to get in touch with me if you have any questions about my experience! (laurajane.hampton@gmail.com)

