

## **What to Expect Aboard Ship:**

*A Personal Note to Volunteer Candidates from Dr. James Swift*

You can get to Anchorage, Alaska how/whenever you want. I will arrive at least one day ahead of the charter flight that takes us from Anchorage to Dutch Harbor, an island out in the Aleutian chain. Dutch Harbor is a commercial fishing port and the closest port to the Arctic Ocean where the Healy can dock and fuel. We will probably start living aboard the ship right away. (By the way, Dutch Harbor has bald eagles the way a farm has crows ... they're all over the place.)

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Healy (<http://www.uscg.mil/pacarea/cgcHealy/>) is a large icebreaker, 420 feet long, 82 feet wide, 16,000 tons, with two drive engines that develop 30,000 HP. People live in the part of the ship that is above the main deck, so there is very little noise in living spaces from the engines or icebreaking. There is noise, however, from the 130+ people onboard, even though everyone tries to be quiet! It can be hard to sleep during daytime -- it helps if you use earplugs -- but people manage.

The science staterooms are "2+1," with two bunk beds and a sofa that converts to as real a bed as the bunk beds (not like a couch sleeper one might have at home). The beds are OK. This cruise, the ship will be full so that's 3 people per cabin. You will share with others in the science team ... the Coast Guard has separate quarters.

Cabins are same-sex. Each cabin has a sink. There is just barely enough locker and storage space for 3 people. Most cabins share a "head" (toilet and shower) with a next-door cabin. Sometimes the people you share the shower/toilet with are not the same sex as you, but it's only one person at a time, and this is not a problem. You take turns cleaning your heads and cabins. (There are no stewards or maids.) Personally, I sleep well onboard, I have no problems with the showers, etc. The main problem comes when you are working nights and trying to sleep days. This is not every day ... it just happens sometimes. Like I said, earplugs.

There are steep stairways connecting the decks. We call them ladders, but they are more like stairs than ladders. They have very secure handrails on both sides. You are always going up and down the ladders. Use that Stairmaster at the gym ahead of time, if you want, but you won't need to use it at sea!

The ship is constructed for and operated by the military (Coast Guard), so it's metal (doesn't burn) and the pipes, etc. are exposed in most spaces. It's very utilitarian, and it's fine. There are watertight doors to go through time after time after time. These are easy enough to use but it's very different from home. (We can practice door handling on an Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO) ship at the dock if you want.)

Everyone eats together in a large mess hall. This is wonderful compared to other Coast Guard ships that have separate messes for the crew, chiefs, officers, etc. The food is served cafeteria style and is hearty and usually amply filling. The crew are young and have big appetites, and the food is aimed at them. There is a salad bar and it will be very popular until the fresh food runs out. The only time there is a food problem is when a lot of people are working at night, in which case the galley puts on a midnight meal but it is sometimes not enough, or at least enough of what you want at that time of day. There is snack food, fruit drinks, etc. If you want to lose weight at sea you will have to watch out what you eat! If the crew has  
(more on back)

pizza, we have pizza. If they have steak, we have steak. There is some allowance for vegetarians, but it's best to let the Coast Guard know way ahead of time so they can prepare. I like my whole grains, and rarely get enough of them at sea. I manage fine. By the end of the cruise, fruit and vegetables will be canned and frozen.

There is a big self-service (free, including detergent) laundry, a big gym (these "Coasties" love to work out), a little store that sells candy and personal supplies (helpful if you run out of toothpaste). Sheets, blankets, and towels are supplied. SIO or I will supply special Arctic clothing for the volunteer. It is helpful if you bring your own steel-toed waterproof boots (\$35 at Boot World).

We are each issued a pager, so when someone wants you to call them, they send a pager message. But there are still messages on the PA system from time to time during the day.

The science areas are all in one place in the aft (back) of the ship. There are toilets back there so when you are working you only have to go forward to eat.

There will be plenty of time to enjoy sightseeing. Just being on deck during icebreaking is a total hoot - as good as it gets. There are some non-public areas on the ship but they are few. You can go outside almost any time (and it will be daylight all the time) except there are restricted areas when they are operating helicopters. It's not a problem.

The crew are very energetic, respectful, proud, and a lot of fun. The science team is smart, serious, and experienced. Life on board seems very strange the first few days, and then, voila, it's just fine. The ship rides very well, and though very different from a home or office, is a fine place to spend a month or two, though you will be glad - as all are - to get off at the end.

Oh, and do not forget to get a tour of the engineering spaces (the engine room, equipment rooms, etc.). It's fantastic (and the ship's engineers love showing off).

-- *Dr. James (Jim) Swift*