

Update 7: almost at Morocco (and just off the Canaries – finally on UK time!)

I am beginning to feel like I am in NASA – since we are talking a lot about re-entry at the moment! Finals are coming up and I have a stack of marking (or grading as they seem to call it here!)

Coming back will be hard. We've lived in this little microcosm since the start of January surrounded by a community of about 600 voyagers (plus the crew). You recognise most everyone – you know most of their names and stories. I have 87 student and about 60 staff/faculty that I see at least every 2 days when I am on ship. You've travelled with them on incredible adventures in port, sometimes for many days together.

You've watched pollywogs become shellbacks (see Neptune Day write up previously!) Now those shellbacks are emerald shellbacks as we crossed the 0/0 point on the map.



In fact you've got up at 6am with the rest of the ship to see the buoy that marks this point on the map – and sailed around it in a 'cruise' ship whilst the Captain blew the ship's horn.

You've shared stories, experiences, frustrations and events (plus germs as we all caught each other's colds!) Thus the SASer community (of Spring 18 and the other 123 voyages before mine) become the only people that will truly understand what it was like. The World Odyssey has been my home and my cabin my refuge – and I am going to miss it dreadfully.

But before I have to 're-entry' I still have another major port – Morocco – and to reflect on the previous port - Ghana

We left Ghana on the 3rd April having spent three days in Takoradi and two then in Tema near

Accra. It was hot and humid – the hottest so far and the country the most like the ones I know in Eastern and Southern Africa. I had two field trips and I indulged in two nights in an air-conditioned hotel with a view of the beach!



Stingless bees

I visited the stingless bee social enterprise to learn all about their activities. They are much smaller than the bumblebee and produce more propolis rather than honey. This NGO works with farmers to have hives on their farms and buys the honey from them



I also went to see some coffins! A tradition that is emerging in West Africa is that of ornate coffins, carved in shapes to represent people's livelihoods (like a fish, hairdryer, car!) or aspirations (like football boots!). Families in a community get together in groups about to hold joint ceremonies that focus on celebrating a person life; often waiting to bury three or four persons in a massive party.



Coffins!



The final visit was to a Kente Cloth weaver. This is a traditional Ghanaian cloth, mostly produced on hand-made looms by small individual microbusinesses or individual entrepreneurs often located in the home or shack on the roadside.



We've been sailing to Morocco for about a week. We've had loads of events on board during this time like the crew talent show and the auction to raise funds for the scholarship programme

We were due in on 11th but it's been put back one day because of a couple of storms in the area. So we had to slow down and take a particular route to avoid the worst of the swells. This is probably the rockiest the ship has been in the entire voyage. Swells of up to about 15 feet are expected. I am fortunate that I've not been

seasick at all (touch wood!) but giving lectures on a swaying stage is a challenge. Especially the last few days as we are wrapping up classes and many of the students have presentations to give. Now they know the challenges I've faced lecturing!

It was a bit of a pain coming in late as we are now only in Morocco for 2 nights/3 days so field trips and impact journeys have to be amended. But better safe than sorry!

The ship is also being made ready to hand over in Germany to the company that has it for the summer. Then SAS gets it back in September 18 for the fall voyage that goes back the other way. So things are being packed up and moved around so it all feels a bit disconcerting.

We also had another time change so now we are finally on UK time and the free news channel is showing Sky News!!!!!!

There are mixed feelings on the ship. Some are excited about going travelling in Europe and getting off the ship finally. Others want to go home and see family. Some people are really sad – knowing that this unique experience is inexorably coming to an end and this tight-knit community is about to scatter to the four winds and our safe little 'bubble' is about to pop! They say the SAS friends you make are friends for life – I can believe that given how close we all grow.

One of the most common questions as a faculty member I am asked is whether I would do it again. My answer – in a heartbeat!

But we saw dolphins yesterday and apparently someone saw a whale and a couple of people saw a shark. And we still have Morocco, the alumni ball, convocation and our triumphant entry into Hamburg where loads of SAS parents (some of whom sailed on the ship themselves as students) will be waiting to cheer us home.

So it's not quite over yet.

Diane