

SMA graduates complete UK-backed sailing course

Four graduates and a lecturer from the Seychelles Maritime Academy have received their Royal Yachting Association certificates, after having completed a specialised two-week sailing training course under the internationally recognised UK-based body.

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Mr Dove



The four graduates and lecturer who have completed the training course



Minister Ferrari congratulating the students

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The course was delivered by three instructors from the Ocean Sailing Academy, a certified training centre operating under the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) framework. The RYA is approved by the United Kingdom's Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), making its certifications relevant not only for leisure sailing but also for certain commercial maritime roles.

On the final day of the course yesterday, the Minister for Fisheries and the Blue Economy, Jean-François Ferrari, presented certificates to head of programme for Nautical Science, Lee Tirant, Eliel Meriza, Lance Chang-Yunn, Charlotte Henry and Alec Julie.

Director of the Seychelles Maritime Academy (SMA), Captain Mahesa Abeynayake, explained there was a requirement from the

ministry for yachting to be viable prospect within the industry.

"A year ago, Minister Ferrari asked me what we do about yachting and I looked at the situation and realised that the academy did not have people with skills in yachting and sailing. I approached RYA to enquire what it would take to come train our learners for the Seychellois yachting industry."

According to Captain Abeynayake, the course was expensive since they had to bring in the instructors from overseas as no one was available locally. The conversation with the RYA continued for several more months before the European Union issued funds through the Seychelles Fisheries Authority (SFA) to finance the project.

Unfortunately for the practical side of things, only five learners

can truly take advantage compared to as many as possible for theory, explained Captain Abeynayake and therefore, one of the most crucial aspects of this pilot project was to make one of the lecturers, in this case Mr Tirant, a future instructor.

"He will go on as an off-shore skipper and will probably go on to be an instructor. The idea is for the SMA to have its own sailing school."

Robert Dove from Ocean Sailing Academy who was one of the three instructors, skipper and examiner, explained that the two weeks were split with the first focusing on the theory aspect while the second was reserved for practical.

"The first part of the theory, a five-day course, is trying to ascertain what sort of experience they have in boating and marine activities," he shared.

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"They have quite a bit and it allowed me to work quickly through the work that I was required to do and I was pleased with them because they caught on quickly and all of them passed their assessment paper which is not always the case and SMA provided quality candidates."

Mr Dove said this week's practical bit went well although it was an intense course as the learners were migrating from power-boating into sail boating. He shared they struggled with wind awareness.

"Motor boating with wind awareness is not such an important aspect and they were struggling with the finer points of wind awareness. Sail setting was a thing we had to learn and general seamanship, along with navigation, rules, and we sailed at night yes-

terday looking at all the lights at the buoys and the ships."

However he commended them for their competency. "They all have the ability to continue and progress from day skipper to young master."

For his part, Mr Tirant said although there were attempts in the past to introduce yachting course, unfortunately there was no one at SMA with the expertise. They had worked mainly with cargo vessels, tankers or bulk carriers.

"This is something that we are trying to venture into, in order to make sure that those who do it have the baggage when they start work. We can only do so much but the workplaces also have to help the youth," shared Mr Tirant, adding the course was also an opportunity for self-development.

Eliel Meriza acknowledged that the two-week course was demand-

ing, particularly in balancing the theoretical and practical components. While much of the material had already been covered at the academy, it had to be reoriented and applied within the context of sailing. "I really enjoyed it and in the future, perhaps, I may be sailing a yacht," he ended.

For his part, Minister Ferrari concluded that after the four graduates, the ministry would like to see SMA offering this course to its students and for others to join.

"Yachting and pleasure boating is one part of tourism that is growing fast and we want to train our locals to be able to carry on this knowledge," he stated.

The accompanying photos show some highlights of the final day of the course yesterday.

Sunny Esparon
Photos by Kurtrine Albert