



MY OFW DAYS SHAPED ME

CRISTOPHER PALANCA GAMBITO

Instructor I

Leyte Normal University

My first international lay-over flight via Thai Airways in October 28, 1999 from Manila to Bangkok, Thailand, Karachi, Pakistan then finally to the charming capital city of Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman was my first test of my inner strength as a strong-willed individual, who travelled alone at the age of 23. It was my ardent desire to leave my family and the Philippines after I obtained my college degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management (BSHRM) in Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte in March 25, 1996 at the age 20 for the reason of greener pastures.

I was one of the 35 Filipino hotel workers, who were hired during the pre-opening of the Radisson SAS Hotel in Al Kuleiah Street, Al Khuwair in Muscat via the ATCI agency in Makati City. Seemingly, my first work experience in which I was immersed in a highly- diverse environment apart from the local Omani from the host country, I was with the staff members from Russia, Finland, Sweden, Germany. India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Nepal and the Philippines. I was stationed in the award-winning steakhouse named "AL Tajin Grill "of the said hotel but I had the chance to work in various food & beverage outlets like the Olivos Coffeshop, the Banquet and the Room Service and also in the Front Office and Housekeeping departments especially during the holy month of Ramadan for Muslims.

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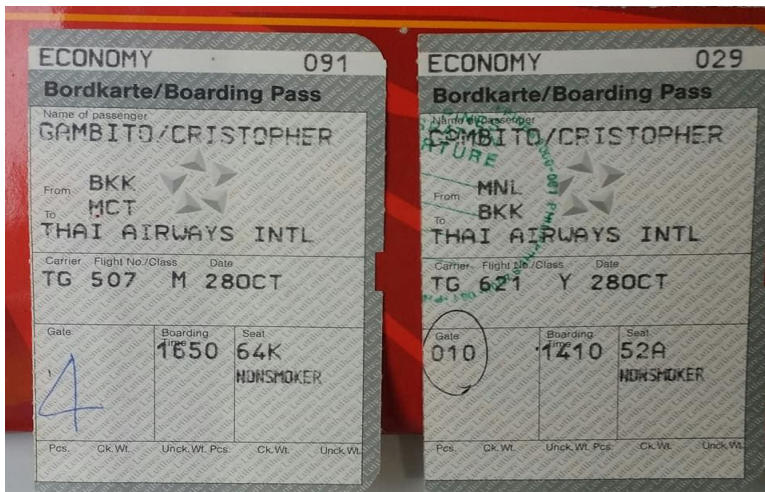
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I learned quite a number of things encompassing the Arabic culture, like the food, language, local peoples' belief and aspirations and their work ethics and their way of living. The same way with my colleagues from various nationalities. I gained friends both from locals and the expatriates and of course the solid Filipino community in the Sultanate. I improved my work ethics, my sensitivity and understanding to other culture and tradition, my spirituality and my



longing to my family. I left Oman after I finished my 2nd contract after four years because of an "Offer of Employment" in Jumeirah Hotels and Resort in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

I joined the pre-opening team of Mina 'A Salam Hotel in Madinat Jumeirah Arabian Resort in July 2004 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates from Muscat, Sultanate of Oman via a short-haul flight of Emirates Airlines. The said hotel is the first phase of the authentic Arabian resort with various components like the Souq, the Villas and the Al Qasr or the Palace Hotel which is in the second phase. I was stationed in the seafood specialty restaurant of the hotel and I worked with staff in the "Wharf Restaurant "from various nationalities such as from United Kingdom, Scotland, France, Germany, Morocco, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The workplace is highly-diversified too, the Zheng He's, Chinese fine dining restaurant of the hotel is manned by Chinese staff from both the production and the service. I learned an additional significant international standard in hotel operations during my tenure like the ISO in

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the hotels (International Organization for Standardization). I became more resilient in the sense that I managed my time and I survived through my physical and mental strength during the time I worked in the evening up to 3 to 4 :00 o'clock in the morning while I had my basic safety training for my seaman record book during day time for almost two weeks. I learned additional knowledge and skills in restaurant, bar and hotel operations in general. I learned more about lifes' reality. I brought my younger sister in Dubai via visitor visa sponsored by my company "Jumeirah "and helped her with a hotel job specifically as telephone operator of Radisson SAS Hotel Media City, Dubai since the Front Office Manager of the said Hotel was my former colleague in Radisson SAS Hotel Muscat. After my first contract, I started looking for another company since I am the type of person, who is willing to take risk and who is interested in broadening my horizon. I received an "Offer of Employment" as Restaurant Captain/Supervisor in Radisson SAS Hotel in Sharm El Sheik in Red Sea in Egypt but I politely declined the offer because I seized the opportunity in Oceania Cruises. I was supposed to embark on the Discovery Cruise in Miami, Florida, USA but I was not granted with the C1D U.S. Visa, it was truly disheartening from my end as I provided already my irrevocable resignation from my job.The Bulgarian Maritime Agency provided me with another cruise line company, the " Oceania Cruises" and I joined the first sister ship M/S Nautica in the port of Civitavecchia in Rome , Italy in 2006.



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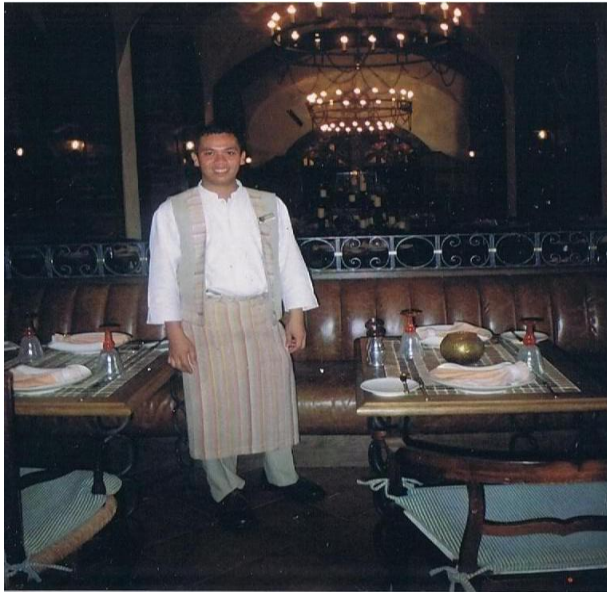
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My first international flight bound to Europe was full of mixed emotions still although I was already 30 years old. I embarked via KLM from Dubai, UAE to Civitavecchia, Rome Italy for my first contract as Snack Utility with Oceania Cruise on one of the sister ships M/S Nautica. It was truly a challenging job and I had realizations like life is tough at sea, you will be stationed in cabin without windows, you will work long hours from

embarkation day to disembarkation, from port days to sea days, from cruising to other country and to other continents like from Europe to Africa and finally Asia, you will be adjusting to 1 hour forward and backward situations, you strictly adhere with cruise ships safety and security protocol like crew, passenger drill, periodic cabin inspection and the EU ship sanitation and USPH cleaning, you will be embarking in a highly diversified environment with people of different races and culture, you will familiarize international menu to bar you from embarrassment during daily briefing conducted by the Executive Chef and the Maitre 'D.

As a snack utility, i worked early in the morning especially if there were tours and excursions during port days and not so early during sea days. I was assigned in the buffet set-up every breakfast, brought ice cubes from deck 5 to Deck 12, replenished food on the buffet stations and coffee/tea and juices from its dispensers. I met mammoth crowd of guests onboard including Herr Eugen Fritz Jaiser and Frau Inge a German and an Austrian, both a long-staying guests onboard Nautica. I gave them a free Muscat City tour in the Sultanate of Oman including the visit

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of my former hotel company, the Radisson SAS now Blu Hotel in Muscat, in Al kulieah street particularly. They both disembarked in Singapore after a month stay in the ship.

I was promoted to an Assistant Waiter half way of my six-month contract and it was so because



of my plan of quitting from the job and I was given a chance by our beloved Italian Maitre'D to prove to him that I can work as Assistant Waiter. I was assigned to a station in grand dining room, handled by a senior Filipino Waiter and after three hours of working I was told by our Maitre'D that I should change my uniform the following day. Seemingly, I was promoted to an Assistant Waiter half-way before my contract ends. I disembarked in Hongkong.

I joined M/S Insignia in my 2nd contract as an Assistant Waiter in Venice, Italy and the ship is stationed within the continent of Europe for the whole duration of my contract. I worked in various F&B outlets during the day and I was assigned in Toscana, Italian restaurant during the evening. I was promoted to a Waiter before the end of my 2nd contract My Italian Head Waiter was instrumental in my promotion. I was even given a chance to choose either to work in the restaurant or in the bar and I opted to be in the bar department. I was stationed in various

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beverage outlets like the martini bar, horizons' bar, grand dining bar, waves pool bar, the insignia lounge etc. I learned the art of upselling, suggestive selling due to the pressure that earnings in the bar is through commission basis. I learned to compete with my colleagues in terms of selling but I made it without tarnished relationship with my colleagues in the bar. I underscored relationship over money.

My ships' life ends after i embarked M/S Regatta in Los Angeles, California, USA, after my six-month stay onboard and disembarked in Dover, UK. Regattas' ports of call were from countries in North America and the Caribbean except Canada. During this period, I learned bartending skills because the bar waiter and bartender worked closely. I received information of the whereabouts of my former guest in M/S Nautica, Herr Eugen Fritz Jaiser and also his intention to visit the Philippines. I went back to the university and took Teacher Certificate Program (TCP) after I decided to stop working on the cruise line. My first teaching job was when I was hired as a part-time hospitality and tourism college instructor in ABE International Business College in Tacloban city while I was also a TCP student of my beloved Alma Mater, the Leyte Normal University. After three semesters, I took my Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) Review at the Philippine Normal University in Manila and I hurdled the LET in September 2012.

My 2nd teaching job was in the Department of Education Southern Leyte division specifically in Hinunangan National High School, three years in the junior high school as TLE Teacher 1 and 2 years in the senior high school department as TVL Teacher 2 and at the same the first senior high school program coordinator. I provided my resignation in DepEd and embaked in my 3rd teaching job in the university as hospitality and tourism management program faculty member.

The life lesson I learned during my OFW days is a big part of who I am today. Apparently, it broadened my horizon and influenced my cultivated personal set of values and virtues. I will be forever grateful to my former colleagues, to my international employers, friends I have made and people I have met during those times when I was an expatriate in the Middle Eastern countries

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and the time when I was a crew member. Above and beyond to our Lord God Almighty Jesus Christ Savior and Redeemer for His orchestration in my life and His Lordship over us "And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." Colossians 1: 17



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