

THE VICTORIA TALL SHIP FESTIVAL

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So what is a Tall Ship really? Well, I really had a hard time finding that out. If a boat is capable of traveling on the open seas, then it's generally accepted as a ship. It seems that a Tall Ship needs to have at least two masts. Tall Ships are traditionally rigged sailing vessels that have more than 30-ft. (9.14 m) waterline length. I think that is pretty close to all the defining characteristics.

Over the years, many tall ships from all over the world have visited Victoria. I believe that this is the first time the Tall Ship Festival has been held in Victoria. On Thursday June 23, 2005 approximately 30 Tall Ships started gathering near the entrances to Esquimalt Harbour and Victoria Harbour. I thought I would get an early start to avoid any anticipated crowds. My target was the Victoria Breakwater protecting the Inner Harbour. My granddaughter and I went about an hour and a half early to find that that thousands of people had the idea long before me. I managed to find a parking spot and worked my way out on to the breakwater.

There was an endless stream of people along the half-mile stretch of breakwater that extends into the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the end was covered with Tall Ship fans. Soon the boats started sailing toward the breakwater.

The Cuauhtemoc is a training tall ship for the Mexican Navy. It was built in Bilbao, Spain July 29, 1982. The Cuauhtemoc is known as the "Ambassador and Gentleman of the Seas". Generations of officers have trained on it and it has sailed approximately 400,000 miles so far. It is huge, 90 meters in length, 12 meters wide, with 23 sails. It can move at 9 knots under sail and 17 knots under power.



The Cuauhtemoc - 2nd largest festival vessel
Photo by Ron Kirstein

The 23 sails are supported by a tremendous amount of rigging. The wire cables all are covered with soft material (made from frayed rope) to prevent the cables from tearing the sails in the wind. The sailors call it saggy wrinkles.



The Endless Stream of People on the Victoria Breakwater
(Photo Courtesy of Ron Kirstein)



The Cuauhtemoc - rigging - lots to take care of.
Photo by Ron Kirstein

The show continued until around 1:00 PM when the first ship entered the Victoria Inner Harbour. The Pacific Swift, a Victoria based Tall Ship was the first. The two largest ships, the Russian vessel Pallada and the Mexican vessel Cuauhtemoc had to wait until the evening high tides to enter because of their large draft.

Victoria's Inner Harbour was teeming with interesting activity as Sea Planes tried to maintain their commercial schedules, Harbour Ferries scooted around, the Coho Ferry tried to leave on time, kayakers everywhere, all manner of pleasure craft coming and going - and all the while, more than 30 Tall Ships docking. The Victoria harbour master, who was orchestrating all this traffic must have had rock solid nerves.

Someone asked me why you needed to board the vessels as you can see most of the ship from the street above. The features throughout the ship are truly amazing as demonstrated by the immaculately finished wood shown below. There are lots of displays, rigging, brass, wood and interesting equipment on the ship.



The Cuauhtemoc - Lots of well maintained wood and brass features
Photo by Ron Kirstein

The staff on the ship was decked out in traditional navy whites and all were very



Tall Ships Approaching the Victoria Breakwater
(Photo Courtesy of Ron Kirstein)



First Mate Madison - Tall Ship Expert
(Photo Courtesy of Ron Kirstein)

I did not attend the first full day of the Festival, but heard it did have some big hick-ups. The large crowds that attended created huge line-ups everywhere. The organizers addressed the issues and Saturday, when Linda and I attended, went a lot better. The lines were long in the morning but shrunk in the afternoon. There was a lot to see and do. The biggest line-ups were to see the Pallada and the Cuauhtemoc.

friendly and accommodating. Most were young men and trainees.



The Cuauhtemoc - Linda with three of the finest. I
Photo by Ron Kirstein

In addition to the sites on shore, the harbour was full of activity and the many perches on the ship offered a great view of the harbour activity.



Whale Watching craft heading out - pleasure craft heading
in to the
Inner Harbour!
Photo by Ron Kirstein



Tall Ships Lineup Worth the Wait!
(Photo Courtesy of Ron Kirstein)

We were standing in line to see the Cuauhtemoc when someone called out to say that they were looking for 30 people to visit the Zodiac. The Zodiac was the 3rd largest vessel and due to the low tide, it was a bit hidden. We walked down and were the first people to go on the Zodiac. It was a beautiful and built for the people who became wealthy in manufacturing. The Zodiac was designed to epitomize the speed and grace of the historic North American fishing schooners and was modeled on the Blue Nose (made famous on the Canadian dime).



The Pallada Tall Ship - Sea Plane Terminal and
tiny harbour ferry next to the Palladal
Photo by Ron Kirstein

Tall Ships Zodiac - a beautiful wooden boat!
(Photo Courtesy of Ron Kirstein)

The line for the Cuauhtemoc had shrunk some, so we joined it. It moved along reasonably well, but it did take an hour to get to the 2nd largest vessel in the Festival.

