



**WRITE WORDS:** Media relations officer Ivy Chiu was a journalist intern on a Taiwanese newspaper before joining the Logos Hope as a volunteer



**GLOBAL FLAVOURS:** Californian cook Matt Plotz used to work at Disneyland and is now the chief cook on the Logos Hope where he whips up multicultural cuisine to accommodate the crew



**ON DECK:** Roy Bwabi of Kenya and Ben Stracuzzi of Italy are part of the marine engineering crew on the Logos Hope



**MULTI-CULTURAL:** Katrin Helmsdal of the Faroe Islands worked as a waitress on the ship when it was a passenger and car ferry in the North Sea before being converted into the ministry ship. This is the third time she has sailed on the Logos Hope with her chief mate husband and their three children, including their youngest, Olivia

# Nations united on ship of hope

**A** FORMER Spur restaurant manager, Durban's Seelan Govender, is now the director of the ship and sails the world with his Capetonian wife Carlien and their children Tessa, eight, and Milan, three.

Like others who gave up a land-lubber life to volunteer on the world's largest floating bookshop and travelling humanitarian vessel, Govender does it because it gives his life meaning and because it brings hope to some of the world's poorest communities.

"The very nature of our ministry gets us in contact with the reality of what people face in life, like abject poverty that robs people of their dignity," said Govender, who has seen communities in the Philippines living in discarded stormwater pipes and fashioning makeshift shelters amid cemetery gravestones.

"We work with partners who are already involved in projects there and help with team skills, development and training. We try to help however we can, to give people a better life – even if it is just teaching them to wash hands so they don't get sick, because there are no doctors for them."

Govender, who has visited more than 70 countries, first sailed on the Logos Hope's predecessor, the Doulos, where he worked in the bookshop and on the advance preparation team which visits ports ahead of the ship's arrival.

"I was invited to be the director of the Doulos in 2009, but then I found out she was being decommissioned because she was so old."

By then, Govender was married to Carlien whom he had met in 1998 on a training course with OM Ships International, the organisation behind the Logos Hope, which they joined at the end of 2010.

The couple now have two children and share a family cabin suite consisting of a two compact rooms and a bathroom.

The parents sleep on a fold-out couch facing a small fridge and microwave and alongside an office

The 400 crew of ministry ship Logos Hope live on what one described as 'a city at sea' complete with everything from a sewerage treatment plant to a hairdresser. **Barbara Hollands** spoke to some of the multicultural crew about life onboard

desk, while the children occupy a narrow double bunk adorned with toys and cheerful duvets.

When the ship is at sea, seasick-prone Carlien Govender tends not to fold the bed away.

"I don't sail well," she confesses. "I usually go to bed and stay flat."

Daughter Tessa attends the ship's school along with 22 other children at the stern of the ship. Consisting of four classrooms, a library and a play area on the deck, which is netted in for safety, the school follows a British curriculum and caters for children up to 12.

When the Saturday Dispatch visited the Logos Hope this week, the children were on an annual two-night school camp at Inkwenkwezi Private Game Reserve near Chintsa.

"They have spent more of their lives on the ship than on land," said Carlien.

"We went to Lavender Blue the other day and just enjoyed sitting on the grass for hours."

Besides their own children, the Govenders are also the "ship family" to 12 young crew members who they meet for regular get-togethers in the dining room.

"People leave their families and friends and we try to create a family environment."

One of their on-board "daughters" is ultra-efficient media relations officer Ivy Chiu, 24, of Taiwan who joined the Logos Hope because working as a journalist intern at a newspaper had been a "struggle" about what was newsworthy.

"When I joined the Logos Hope I cleaned toilets and we have 201 toilets on board and follow 16 steps to clean them! Then I joined the communications office and I am so happy to use my skills to share positive stories."

Californian cook Matt Plotz, 25, was once a sauce cook at a jazz restaurant in Disneyland before joining the Logos Hope as chief cook three months ago. One dinner for everyone aboard requires

about 70kg of potatoes and 80kg of meat and the bulk of the food supply gets shipped from the US and Germany, he explains.

"Because there are so many nationalities on board we try to cook food from every culture like African, South American and Asian and I speak to the crew about what they eat back home."

Plotz hasn't got round to Kenyan marine engineer cadet Roy Bwabi, 27, who has yet to fulfil his craving for his favourite dish.

"I miss *ugali*. It's like pap, but harder," he says, while on a quick break from repairing a lifeboat winch on deck.

"We work on this ship with a different passion," adds fellow engineer Ben Stracuzzi, 32, of Italy.

"I have worked on commercial ships, but working here is not about the money; it's for the purpose of this ship."

Katrin Helmsdal, 34, of the Faroe Islands, is on her way to the hairdresser with her little girl Olivia when she bumps into the Dispatch.

Astonishingly, she worked on the vessel when it sailed the North Sea as a passenger and car ferry in and around the Faroe Islands and Denmark before it was transformed into the Logos.

"When I was 19 I spent a summer waitressing on this ship which looked completely different," said Helmsdal, who is married to chief mate Jon and has three children Fridrikur, eight, Ingi, six, and Olivia, two.

"This is our third time on the Logos since 2011. We love it and the children are really happy here." — [barbarah@dispatch.co.za](mailto:barbarah@dispatch.co.za)

● As the world's largest floating bookshop, the Logos Hope, is in port until Monday, it welcomes visitors to its bookshop.

The book fair is open to the public from 10am to 9pm today and from 1pm to 10pm tomorrow.

Entrance is R5 and free for children under 12, who are accompanied by an adult. Enter the harbour through the Hely Hutchinson Road entrance on the East Bank.



**ALL ABOARD:** Logos Hope director Seelan Govender, his wife Carlien and their son Milan enjoy a cup of coffee in the ship's dining room where crew eat three meals a day. The Govenders say their children have spent more of their lives at sea than on land  
Pictures: BARBARA HOLLANDS