

Since arriving in Belfast Harbour for a three-week stay, Logos Hope has been drawing curious visitors aboard to explore its floating book fair and meet the international crew who call the ship home.

Berthed at Albert Quay, the vessel offers much more than books, with cultural exhibits, interactive experiences and the chance to learn about its global outreach vision.

During a special tour of the ship, volunteer crew members Samuel Tan and Schani Wong shared what life is really like on board and the experiences that inspired them to join its journey around the world.

By Dani McAllister

When Logos Hope last visited Belfast in 2009, it left a lasting impression both on the city and crew members alike – with the latter saying they've received regular enquiries over the years asking when the ship would return.

Plans for a visit were delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but after several years of preparation, Logos Hope has finally made its long-awaited return to the city.

Experiencing different cultures is one of the highlights of life on board Logos Hope. And with the ship travelling between continents, every destination offers something new.

Project Manager Samuel Tan says Belfast's slower pace has been a welcome contrast to city life in his home country of Malaysia.



"Coming to Belfast is so peaceful compared to what we experience at home," he says. "It really gives us the curiosity to explore and see how life is for people in Belfast."

Crew members also value the opportunity to connect with local communities, often forming friendships that continue long after the ship has sailed.

Life on board is busy, with crew members working across everything from catering and housekeeping to engineering, events and technical operations.

"It's a unique place to live in because it's a small community, so you will constantly bump into each other aboard ship," says Samuel.

But despite the challenges of living in close quarters, crew members say the international community on board – representing around 60 different nationalities – is one of Logos Hope's greatest strengths, creating daily opportunities to learn from different cultures and perspectives, with new recruits being encouraged to be F.A.T. – Flexible, Adaptable and Teachable!

All volunteer crew members receive safety and job-specific training, with opportunities to develop skills across multiple departments. Samuel began as a deckhand, or 'decky', and has since gained experience in a range of roles, including learning to steer the ship during anchoring operations alongside the captain.

Even while at sea, preparation is constantly underway for the next destination.

Alongside their regular duties, crew members spend time restocking books, planning events and making practical arrangements ahead of arrival in each port.

For some crew members, the drive behind the work is deeply personal. Samuel first visited Logos Hope as a child and still remembers the experience.

"I had never been on a ship before. I remember that experience for life," he recalls.

Now serving as a volunteer crew member himself, he hopes to inspire young people in the same way while promoting a love of reading and learning.



Samuel Tan & Schani Wong

While Samuel jokes that Belfast is "good craic", he and Project Coordinator Schani Wong – who also happens to be his wife – say Africa has provided some of their most memorable destinations.

Visits to countries including Sierra Leone and Ghana were particularly impactful, offering a powerful insight into different ways of life and the importance of access to books and education. The couple say the Logos Hope feels more important when it is in places with fewer educational opportunities as it gives people a chance to have access to books when they might not usually have such a privilege.

For Schani, Mexico also ranks highly thanks to its vibrant culture and cuisine. Having been staying in Belfast for a number of weeks to prepare for the Logos Hope's visit, both Samuel and Schani appreciate the warmth of the welcome they've received in the city – with Samuel even admitting he's quickly become a fan of the Ulster Fry, particularly our famous potato bread. Schani too is equally complimentary of the local people they have met.

"We appreciate when people show interest in knowing you," she says. "In some other places you'd never get that."

Logos Hope will be berthed at Albert Quay in Belfast until October 21st.