



Captain Belinda Bennett Awarded the 2018 Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service by HRH Princess Anne As the First Black Female Captain in the Commercial Cruise Industry



HRH Princess Anne Presents Captain Bennett with the 2018 Merchant Navy Medal

Seattle, WA, October 16, 2018 — Charting a course to success in the cruise and maritime industry, the Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service has been presented to Captain Belinda Bennett of Windstar Cruises, as ‘the first black female captain in the commercial cruise industry.’ Captain Bennett was given the award for services to the promotion of the maritime sector under the auspices of the U.K. Department for Transport and Maritime & Coastguard Agency.

Her Royal Highness Princess Anne presented the Merchant Navy Medal honor, earned by those “who have gone above and beyond in their service to the maritime industry,” at Trinity House in London.

First established in 2016, the awards marks the crucial contribution that members of the Merchant Navy make to maritime safety, seafarer welfare, training and the wider blue economy. There were 19 recipients in total and Bennett is the second person at Windstar to receive this medal.

“Our Merchant Navy is crucial to keeping the U.K. thriving – helping deliver goods, energy and food to our homes. These 19 people are a credit not just to the maritime industry but to the wider nation. They have gone above and beyond their duty for the benefit of others,” U.K. Maritime Minister Nusrat Ghani said, adding, “...Belinda’s trailblazing is [an example] of the outstanding service provided by our mariners.”

"It is an absolute honor to receive this medal. I hope that young people around the world will follow in my footsteps with hard work and dedication. I have to thank my family, friends and work colleagues for their support over the years and every day we continue to learn. My career at sea has allowed me to see much of the world and its cultures of which I am thankful. This medal may be awarded to me but it belongs to all who have supported me over the last 24 years at sea," said Captain Bennett.

Captain Bennett is Windstar's first female captain and is the first black captain in the commercial cruise industry. She has been with Windstar Cruises for more than 13 years. In January 2016, Capt. Bennett was named Master of [MSY Wind Star](#), a 4-masted sailing ship accommodating 148 guests, 101 crew, with four decks and a gross tonnage of 5,307 GRT.

"We are beyond proud of Captain Bennett not only for what she represents to the cruise industry but also her determination and perseverance in the very competitive and vital maritime industry. Belinda is a great role model for our junior officers and cadets. We are happy for her success and the inspiration that is to be gained by her story," said Windstar Vice President of Operations Christopher Prelog.

Hailing originally from one of the most remote islands in the world, St. Helena – a part of the British Overseas Territory, Bennett naturally became immersed with life at sea, having started as a deck cadet at age 17 on her home island ship the *RMS St. Helena* – a cargo ship that transports vital supplies to the remote island from the African coast. Just four years later, she had climbed the ranks to Third Officer and ultimately stayed on board for an additional five years, until departing in 2003 as second officer. Following a brief stretch as chief officer for private charter yacht *SS Delphine*, and Isle of Man Steam Packet ferries, Bennett joined Windstar Cruises as Second Officer at the Port of Monaco in September 2005. Bennett has worked on a variety of Windstar ships over her 13-year career progressing to chief officer and now captain with the small ship line.

To learn more about authentic small ship cruising with Windstar, contact a travel professional or Windstar Cruises by phone at 800-258-7245 or visit [www.windstarcruises.com](#).

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About Windstar Cruises

Windstar Cruises operates a six-ship fleet of small sailing and all-suite ships sailing throughout Europe, the Caribbean, Costa Rica and the Panama Canal, Asia, Alaska and British Columbia, Canada and New England, and cruising year-round in Tahiti. Windstar's fleet is the market leader in small ship cruising with a total of 1,242 passenger berths calling on off-the-beaten-path and popular ports in nearly 80 countries. The boutique cruise line carries 148 to 310 passengers on six small ships and takes travelers on cruises that are 180 degrees from ordinary. Windstar is known for immersive experiences and destination authenticity, port-intensive itineraries, exceptional award-winning service, and an innovative culinary program with culinary-themed cruises as the Official Cruise Line of the James Beard Foundation. Windstar Cruises is a part of Xanterra Travel Collection, an award-winning, globally diversified travel company offering once in a lifetime experiences in some of the most beautiful and iconic places on earth.



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