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Brest Pilot



EMPA

Hello, everyone. I've been asked to introduce you to the most wonderful job in the world, and I am delighted to do so! I've been working as a maritime pilot for three years in some of the most beautiful harbours in Brittany (France): Brest, Concarneau and Roscoff.



Since the beginning, pilotage has been an intense and unforgettable adventure, and it still is: I live each day with renewed intensity.

I'd love to tell you that becoming a pilot has always been my dream since I was a little kid, but I'd be lying: as a child, I didn't know this job existed... I was born inland, in Angers with no sea in sight for miles. I only discovered the seafaring occupation late in my life when I needed to choose a career path. It was an exciting job that immediately made me dream because it offered wide perspectives and infinite horizons: you can tackle a wide variety of disciplines, from navigation and mechanics to medicine and fire-fighting - there's never a dull moment, and all of it is very stimulating!

After graduating, I worked on various types of ships. First, I worked on a container ship sailing between Europe and Asia. Later, I worked on ferries in the Mediterranean Sea. However, my career path led me to the French Oceanographic Fleet ships, which allowed me to travel the world. I was lucky to conduct exciting scientific cruises on French research vessels. Oceanographic research is limitless: there are always new parts of the seafloor to map, marine species to count, currents to measure... It was a fantastic voyage that was fulfilling both professionally and personally. In particular, it was on these research ships that my passion for manoeuvring emerged. I loved being challenged daily and constantly adjusting the manoeuvres I performed to do what the scientists required.



I remember that we had to grab seismic measurement buoys by positioning a vessel no less than 107m long right next to a 40cm wide buoy. We had to get within a few dozen centimetres of the buoy so that the bosun could hook it. A bit too far, and he couldn't get it, so we had to start again and lost precious time. A bit too close, and the buoy would pass under the hull and could be damaged. It was a real challenge but so stimulating !

Despite all the magical times I've had along the way, I've gradually felt the need to challenge myself more and try out a new occupation. And when the opportunity came by, I started studying to become a pilot.

Becoming a pilot in France is a challenge that requires candidates to attain a captain's degree, accumulate 72 months of experience at sea, and be under the age of 35.

When a pilot retires, an exam is organised to fill the position. This is not just any exam; it's a test of your knowledge, skills, and determination. Only the best candidate is chosen to be a pilot, and it takes at least 6 months of full-time preparation to stand a chance. The amount of knowledge required is enormous, and the competition is fierce. You need to strive to be not just good but the best.



This period presents a unique challenge for every aspiring pilot. It requires complete dedication and perseverance, often without immediate financial reward. This journey can be demanding not only for the aspiring pilot but also for their family. In my case, I undertook this endeavour while caring for a newborn at home. This was during COVID-19 lockdowns which afforded me some time at home. So I gave it 200%, and today, I'm proud to say I'm the 3rd female pilot in France. And I'm very grateful to the whole profession for putting their trust in me.

In Brest, we have five pilots and we all get along really well. We are a close-knit, high-performance team that understands and meets all the requirements and future needs of the business. We consult each other on all major decisions. We ask each other about the best way to manoeuvre when questions arise (for instance, when the weather gets rough), and we always share all the information and observations that might be helpful to each other.

Finally, I am also the proud mother of a wonderful 3-year-old kid who already knows a thing or two about being a pilot! He has already been out with me several times on the pilot boat to "see Mum climb the ladder." Finding the balance between life as a mum and life as a female pilot isn't always easy. Still, I know he is proud of me, and I hope that my example will remind him that anything is possible if you have the will to do it.



To all the young women reading my article: being a maritime pilot is not a man's job; it's just a job filled predominantly by men. It's a job that requires rigour, composure and a great capacity for analysis, which is one of the qualities that women know how to handle with great agility. So don't hesitate! If you think you have got what it takes, this job is for you!

