

**My Internship Experience with
Blackbeard's Cruises
Summer 2008**



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Travel and tourism has always been a large part of my life which is why I decided to make it my college major. As a senior in the travel and tourism program at Western Washington University, each undergraduate is required to participate in a summer internship. Students went to Samoa, the Florida Keys, and others stayed at home but each of them choose an internship in a career field they were interested in entering. For me, I have always been interested in scuba diving and sailing and have wanted to make these areas part of my life and career goals. Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society (OWUSS) helped me make my long lasting dreams a reality. I was lucky enough to become a recipient of a scholarship from OWUSS and became an intern with Blackbeard's Cruises in Freeport Grand Bahama for the summer of 2008.

When I first learned that it was required to take a summer internship I had no idea what I was going to do. I knew I wanted to choose an internship that would feed the hunger inside me. I was hungry for adventure, hungry for a taste of what it means to work in the field of Travel and Tourism. I wanted to scuba dive and to sail, and I searched everywhere for an internship that would give me the best of the world I was looking for. When I came across the internship for Blackbeard's Cruises on OWUSS website, my heart skipped a beat. I read the paragraph that explained that Blackbeard's was looking for a summer intern over and over again. I remember thinking it was too good to be true, there is no way I will get picked to intern in the Bahamas. Little did I know that I would soon be packing my bags and have the best internship experience I could have hoped for. I had no idea what would lie ahead-- all I knew is

that it should be amazing. I was right, it was an absolutely legendary summer and I could not have asked for a better summer.

When I found out I was going to the Bahamas I could not have been any happier. I couldn't even stand, I fell to my knees and shouted as loud as I can and immediately began to wonder what the future would hold. I only had to wait two months before I would have the Blackbeard's experience and I could hardly wait. I immediately called a professor and let her know the good news.

From the moment I got off the airplane in Freeport, I knew that I had made the right choice. Flying in over the island I could not help but notice the crystal clear blue waters, and palm trees galore. I couldn't help but imagine what life lied beneath the surface of the pristine waters of the Bahamas. As a PADI Divemaster I couldn't wait to get in the water and start logging dives as soon as possible.

I got to Blackbeard's Place shortly after landing in Freeport and saw my new home for the summer. It was the size of a mansion. Blackbeard's has three 65 ft. sailboats and over 12 employees all staying under one roof. I was intimidated by the size of the house, but mostly I was anxious to see how the rest of the summer would unfold.

Being an avid sailor and boater, I was looking forward to getting out on the water and to do some sailing, let alone some epic diving. As soon as I got there I was introduced to the Blackbeard's crew and felt right at home. I took a tour of the boats and felt like I was in the right place. I arrived only to find out that in two days I was going out for a week on one of the boats to see exactly what it is that Blackbeard's has to offer the world.

Blackbeard's has three 65 ft. sailboats that can take up to 24 passengers for week long dive trips in the Bahamas. Passengers will get up to 18 dives a week and all the meals and drinks they could ask. I couldn't wait to be a part of the crew and to experience firsthand the Blackbeard experience.

One of my goals for the summer was to experience exactly what it is like to work in the field of travel and tourism. I wanted to gain a lot of experience in working on a sailboat, as well as working in the field of scuba diving. My first week out on the water I was already literally getting my feet wet. I went out on the Morning Star for a six day cruise with 21 passengers to explore the waters of the Bahamas. I was entrusted the job of being a deckhand and since I already knew my way around a boat, it was an easy transition.

My first day was full of instruction and was quite a learning experience. It became obvious that working on a boat is much different than going out on the water for a day; there was always work to do. My work ranged from helping divers in and out of the water, to deck watches, to doing the dishes. There may have always been work to do, but I was enjoying myself nonetheless.

I had been in the Bahamas less than a week and already I had sailed a 65 ft. boat and logged seven or eight dives and gotten my feet wet in the field. Going out for the week I was able to get to know the crew, as well as get to understand the product that Blackbeard's offers the market of scuba diving. I was beginning to feel right at home.

When I returned from my week at sea I had a meeting with the owners of the company. In the meeting we discussed what the goals they had for me for the summer. They told me

some shocking statistics that the numbers of youth in the market for scuba diving is disappearing. I was assigned with the mission of figuring out how and where to market to bring the youth back into scuba diving with Blackbeard's Cruises. It was at this time that I also became aware the Boy Scouts are the number one certifier of young scuba divers across America. The company originally began by serving Boy Scouts, and they had informed me that they had intentions of serving Boy Scouts once again. It was my assignment to market and design a website catered towards Boy Scout Adventure travel.

Before taking on the task of making a website for Boy Scouts, it was suggested that I learn about Blackbeard's competition. I searched the internet for days looking at competitors' websites as well as looking at websites of youth scuba programs across the world. I researched what other live aboard scuba companies offered their customers, as well as examined their youth scuba programs.

As part of my program in college I had to design a recreational program for a city from scratch. It seemed that my classes and schooling as a travel and tourism major was going to pay off perfectly for this internship. As a group working on the project, we made a community recreation program for a town in Washington. We researched the area as well as interviewed residents of the community to get a brief idea of what it was the community would like to see in their town for recreational programs. Starting from nothing, as a group we designed a recreation program for the summer that catered to the needs and wants of the community. In a sense I was about to do the same for Blackbeard's by starting a youth program from scratch.

I knew the first thing I had to do was to research Boy Scout Adventure travel. I wanted to talk with scout leaders to find out the criteria they use when going on a Boy Scout high adventure trip. I soon found out that active Boy Scout troops take one to two trips a year seeking high adventure. It was our goal that Boy Scouts would start taking high adventure trips with Blackbeard's Cruises regularly.

Boy Scout troops had regularly been taking trips with Blackbeard's for the past two years; however we hoped to grow the number of Boy Scouts taking trips with us on a regular basis. Shortly after I had returned from my first trip at sea, I was assigned to go out for a week again. This time I was going out for a week with a boat full of Boy Scouts and troop leaders. Before we left for the week, I had been assigned to acquire as much information from the scouts as well as their leaders regarding Boy Scout travel.

While I was out for the week I interviewed scout leaders and scouts. I became aware that active troops take a high adventure trip once or twice per year and there is an interest in taking scuba adventure trips. First I spoke with the scouts before their leaders because I felt since they were the ones enrolling in the program they would be my best source of information. Each scout gave me excellent feedback in how to design a recreation program catered towards scouting needs, wants and desires. Each scout had similar interests. They each wanted more than merely scuba diving; they were all seeking an epic adventure, one in which they could go home and tell their friends about for years to come. They wanted sailing, scuba diving, beach exploration, bon fires, fishing and of course the famous halyard swing.



Throughout the duration of the trip I was making observations as to the morale of the passengers as well as the leaders. I took the feedback I received and directly communicated it to the skippers to try and cater the trip to the desires of the Boy Scouts. The scouts on this particular week took a trip with us in the prior year, which gave us an excellent opportunity to change the trip to accommodate the group's current desires. At the close of the week, nearly all of the scouts had come up to me to mention that they had had enjoyed themselves more on this trip than they had in the past year. I simply listened to their feedback and what it was that they desired in a week long adventure.



Also at the end of the trip I conducted interviews and discussions with the leaders who were on our ship. We discussed prices, packages, as well as activities they would like to see and what they felt other scout troops might like if they were to take a trip with us. They informed me of places to advertise to market our product, as well as what they felt was a fair price to charge for a trip aboard with us.



Upon my arrival back at Blackbeard's headquarters I held a meeting with the owners of the company to inform them of my findings. I handed them a written report of comments and suggestions that the Scouts and leaders had given me. We had taken all of the information from what we learned on that trip and used the information to cater towards the next group of Boy Scouts that was traveling with us the very next week.

I was asked once again to go out for the week with another group of Boy Scouts to acquire more information about Boy Scout high adventure travel. It was also a goal to use the

feedback and input from the scouts who went out the week before to imply an enjoyable high adventure program. With the information I received from the scouts from the prior week, we took the feedback from them and applied the activities and suggestions they had recommended to this group. The outcome was absolutely fantastic. All week long scouts came up and mentioned how much fun they were having and that their experience was one of the best adventure trips they had ever been a part of.



Now that I knew what Boy Scouts and leaders would like to see in a high adventure trip, I had to figure out how to reach them by the masses. I needed to get in touch with hundreds of scout leaders and ask them exactly what it is that they look for when searching for a high adventure scouting adventure. I assumed a lot of leaders would use the internet in searching for the perfect trip. I needed to know what key words they would use to search as well as what they would look for in a website designed for scouting high adventure trips. With the intent of gathering information, I made a survey using survyemonkey.com. [Click here](#) to read the survey. In the survey I asked what keywords a scout leader would use in a search engine to find a high adventure scouting trip, as well as what is the most important factor they consider when

booking a trip. I also asked if there were scouting websites specifically designed to search for high adventure trips, and what leaders look for in a website designed for scouting high adventure trips.

I gathered over four hundred e-mails of scout leaders from across the nation. I sent them all a letter explaining that I am a travel and tourism major at Western Washington University researching Boy Scout High Adventure trips. Each e-mail had a link to the survey I made on surveymonkey.com. I received over twenty responses to my survey. Each response had a different answer but it helped give me an idea of what to put on the website and what leaders look for when they book a trip for high adventure travel. Once all the responses were in I compiled an outline of all of the answers to use as the foundation of a website with specific criteria to market to the scouts.

It was at this time however that I had a pain in my knee. Shortly after I returned from my second trip out with the Boy Scouts my knee had managed to swell up to the size of a softball and it hurt very badly. I quickly learned that infections in the tropics are a common site and that bacteria loves to fester in a warm, humid climate. I soon learned that I had a bad staph infection in my leg and would need to be on antibiotics. I took my prescription as suggested, but the results were not as expected. I had to go to the emergency room two days after starting antibiotics only to find out I would need knee surgery. This was the lowest point of my summer. I figured that this was it; I'm probably going to have to pack my bags and head for home. I spent three days recovering from a minor surgery in the hospital in the Bahamas and spent the time

recovering on IV antibiotics. After three days in the hospital they discharged me; I thought I was out of the woods but little did I know I was not.

Two days after returning from the Bahamian hospital, it was apparent that the antibiotics were ineffective and I would need to go to the U.S. for further treatment. I flew to Miami and went to the closest hospital. They took a look at my leg and told me they would need to operate again and that I would need to stay for a few days getting IV antibiotics for a second time. I know had a second operation on my knee and then returned to my home in Washington to recover.

I had a good recovery and had to remain at home for four weeks. However those four weeks almost seemed like torture. It was painful to be sitting at home when I knew that I should be in the Bahamas participating in the greatest internship I could have hoped for. I stretched my leg, did physical therapy, and made sure I took all of my anti-biotics so I could return to the Bahamas as soon as possible.

Once I returned to Blackbeard's I had a new fire inside me. I was going to finish what I had started. I had a mission and I was going to be sure it would be completed before I had to return home. I was going to make the best website I could for Boy Scout Adventure Travel with Blackbeard's Cruises.

I started to compile pictures and began writing. I looked at websites of other youth scuba programs and generated ideas for our site. I knew it had to have plenty of pictures, colors, and activities listed for scouts to get an idea of what a trip with us would be like. The site had to be versatile in that it would appeal to scouts, parents, and the leaders of the troops. It

had to be catchy, entertaining, and had to put a desire into all people who viewed it to buy a plane ticket and to discover the unknown.

After about a week working in front of a computer for hours on end, I had what I thought to be a good website. There was no way to tell if it would appeal to scouts and their leaders however without asking them. I decided it was a good idea to make another survey with the intent of gathering information and opinions or suggestions of our website. My goal was to find out if the website I recently made was appropriate for Boy Scout Adventure Travel. [Click here](#) to look at the survey.

For the second survey I searched the internet high and low and collected over 1500 e-mail addresses of scout leaders across the nation. I sent out the survey to several hundred leaders in hopes of gaining responses. Questions on the survey were designed to help us get an idea of how the website appeared and how easy it was to navigate. Using the information from the survey, we adjusted the website to cater towards the scouts, leaders and parents. You can look at the new website at www.blackbeard-cruises.com/scouts.

Throughout the summer I learned a great deal about the dive industry. With a company like Blackbeard's I learned for example that marketing is everything. They have an office in Ft. Lauderdale that markets to dive shops, makes brochures and pamphlets, and there is an employee who travels across the nation going to dive shows and conferences. Their website is designed specifically to appear at the top of Google listing against other competitors. If you search for Bahamas and diving or live aboard diving, Blackbeard's comes to the top. The owners have worked hard on the success of their marketing campaign, and it shows.

In concluding my internship I felt I was leaving with quite an experience. I had learned a lot about the dive industry and what it is like to work in the field. Blackbeard's is an excellent company with an amazing crew. I couldn't have asked for an internship that fit me any more perfectly.

This internship without a doubt has changed my life forever. I know that I want to work in the boating/scuba industry. Interning for this company opened my eyes to a career in scuba diving. Without a doubt in my mind this past summer was the best one I ever had. I fed sharks, sailed large boats, made a youth program from scratch, made great friends, and enjoyed the Bahamas more than I had ever expected. I went to the Bahamas for an internship, but I feel like I left with a big family. Would I do it over again? Absolutely! However, I could do without two knee surgeries.

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