

# BUNKERSPOT

## TAKING THE PLUNGE

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# No substitute for experience

BunkerExperience is a unique hands-on training course that takes students out of the classroom and introduces them to the practical side of bunkering. **Llewellyn Bankes-Hughes** examines the popularity and longevity of the course that originated 12 years ago in the Netherlands and has now been rolled out in Panama and Singapore

**A**s is often the case, the simplest ideas are the ones that work best. So it is with BunkerExperience, a straightforward three-day course, created by Dutch former bunker supplier and trader, Goris Vermeulen, to fill the gaping hole he perceived in the understanding and knowledge that desk-bound newcomers to the industry have of the practical side of bunkering. It soon transpired that this knowledge gap also applied to suppliers, traders, brokers and buyers who had been in the business for some time but had never attended a bunkering operation, let alone set foot on a barge or in a lab.

According to Vermeulen, it is always a surprise how many people with responsible jobs on either side of the bunker transaction have never attended an actual physical bunkering or witnessed or performed any lab tests on viscosity, density, flashpoint, pour point, cloud point, sulphur, and water.

This course was created to address that issue. It instructs students about how fuel oil makes a ship's engine run and what is needed for onboard pre-treatment. It teaches them how to take accurate measurements on a bunker barge and demonstrates why this is important. It allows students to take samples, to see and work with the bun-

ker fuel to appreciate its temperature and to smell its sulphur. Then it provides guidance on how to do a series of tests on fuel oil and distillate before letting the students loose on the equipment so that they can test the fuels and record the results.

BunkerExperience is structured to provide traditional classroom teaching each morning, followed in the afternoon by a visit to a bunker barge on the first day, a trip to a testing laboratory on the second day and a tour of the port on the third day. By the end of the course, each student will have become familiar with sampling and surveying procedures on a bunker barge and with ►



the core tests carried out in a lab – because they will each have taken turns in taking the barge samples and testing the fuels themselves. The third day of the course takes the students out on the water with a guided tour to see port activities close up, different types of ship and live bunkering operations.

The course content inevitably has evolved over time, tracking changes in the bunker market; now, for example, it covers mass flow metering, the latest changes in fuel specifications and new testing procedures.

### CLASSROOM

In the classroom, the students are given a thorough briefing on the oil and bunker industries. They are introduced to mass flow meters – how do they work; are they reliable; are they tamper-proof; what do they cost? They are taken through relevant definitions. They are taught about sampling and blending procedures. And they are instructed on tank and calibration tables, having to make their own calculations. They hear about Rotterdam bunker barge operations and are brought up to speed on regulations and legal matters. These lectures are delivered by a variety of local experts.

### BARGE DAY

On the first afternoon on the Rotterdam course, the students are handed clean overalls, goggles and hard hats and are bussed to a waiting bunker barge, normally one that is



laden with bunker fuel, moored and awaiting orders. Here, under the instruction of highly experienced marine surveyors provided by Bureau Veritas Inspectorate, they carry out the proscribed tests but also, led by the barge's Captain, explore the barge's bridge, engine room and relevant pipes, valves, samplers, fenders, hoses, booms and other equipment. The barges are operated by the VT Shipping Group.

### LAB DAY

On the afternoon of the second day, the students are taken to Saybolt's Rotterdam laboratory where they carry out fuel tests and are introduced to numerous pieces of lab equipment and testing procedures.



### PORT DAY

On the afternoon of the third day, the students are taken on a cruise through one of the leading ports of the world to see ships, barges, terminals and refineries close up. They learn the differences between distinct types of vessels, ranging from chemical tankers to very large crude carriers (VLCCs), from Panamax to post Panamax bulk carriers, to container ships, ferries, bunker barges and the vast array of specialist vessels of every shape and size. Since the beginning, Capt. Cornelius de Keijzer, an acknowledged expert and previous harbour master of the Port of Rotterdam, has conducted the 'Tour du Port'. As a result of the cruise, students become acquainted



with port infrastructure, loading installations, jetties and terminals. They also gain some understanding of operational problems, such as access for bunker barges, elevators, cranes, garbage and slop barges.

### ROTTERDAM

Since its inception, well over 450 students have attended the BunkerExperience course in Rotterdam, which has now taken place 25 times, attracting students from 189 companies in 47 different countries. Not all the students are newcomers – many have been in the shipping or bunkering sectors for five, 10 or even 15 years.

The venue used for the Rotterdam course – the Delta Hotel in Vlaardingen, near to the city of Rotterdam but right in the centre of the port – was selected because it sits on the north bank of the very busy River Maas, overlooking a constant stream of passing ships – up to 150 a day.

Although students from far and wide have been attending the course in Rotterdam for many years, it was perhaps inevitable that there would be demand for such training elsewhere, especially in regions with a high concentration of bunker suppliers and traders.

### PANAMA

Last year, BunkerExperience was run for the first time in Panama – in Spanish. This year, in March, it was run for the first time in Singapore. In both cases, the core elements of the original Rotterdam course are retained, with a few tweaks to reflect the unique market circumstances in Panama and Singapore.

The Panama course is aimed at Latin Americans for whom formal bunker training is not widely available. Panama's rapidly-growing bunker market, augmented by the opening in June 2016 of the Expanded Canal, provides a highly suitable location for the course, although some of the aspects of the Rotterdam course have been adjusted to suit the different market set-up.

The classroom content in Panama is similar to that in Rotterdam, but more focused on the Americas. Last year, the VT Shipping barge was refuelling a large container vessel in Balboa, on the Pacific side of the Canal, when the students took drip samples and on board measurements, including temperature and tank soundings. They also toured the barge's engine room and bridge. The sampling was overseen by surveyors from Bureau Veritas Inspectorate, which also provided the lab where the students carried out their own tests.

In Rotterdam and Singapore, the





students spend the third afternoon touring ports, terminals and ships but in Panama they are taken to the Melones terminal on an island offshore Balboa to experience a tank farm and its infrastructure. The Panama course is led by José Digeronimo, General Manager of VT Shipping.

## SINGAPORE

In March this year, BunkerExperience was run for the first time in Singapore. Here, the course was led by Nigel Draffin. The barge was supplied by Sinanju Tankers and the marine surveyors, Leon Chai and Prabakaran Paniselvan, by Bureau Veritas Inspectorate. Unlike Rotterdam, where the barge is typically laden awaiting orders, the bunker barge used for the course in Singapore was actively employed in a bunker delivery to a bulk carrier in the eastern anchorage, which meant that the students had to sail by launch, for over an hour, through the eastern anchorage to get to the ship.

The Sinanju barge, the *Marine Jewel*, was supplying the *Ore Sudbury* in a thunder storm and because the barge was mid-delivery, live drip samples were possible. The students were also introduced to the barge's mass flow meter system, including the hardware and software.

The lab used for the Singapore course in March was the Veritas Petroleum Services facility at Changi, where the first class of 11 students were shown a wide range of tests and testing equipment in operation but, unlike in Rotterdam or Panama, the students were unable to carry out their own tests for health and safety reasons.

On the third afternoon of the Singapore course, the students were taken on a waterborne tour of the western anchorages, the refineries, container terminals and storage facilities.

The feedback from BunkerExperience students is always enthusiastic and many well-established companies have long insisted on sending

all new trainees to the course in Rotterdam.

Now that BunkerExperience is also to be offered regularly in Spanish in Panama and in English in Singapore, this level of training – which appears to offer exactly the right mix of theory and practice to engage everyone on the course – is likely to attract even more enthusiastic students from around the world.

The next BunkerExperience courses will be offered in Panama (July), Rotterdam (October) and Singapore (November). For details visit [www.petrospot.com/events](http://www.petrospot.com/events)

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