

## Jacob sets sail

### Life on a VOC-ship is rough

*Jacob doesn't like it in the orphanage. He wants to leave; go with a VOC ship to India. One day, the headmaster has a great message: the VOC is still looking for a ship's boy! But is life on a VOC ship really that great?*



It is not easy, living in an orphanage in 1740. The children have to work hard, including Jacob van den Berg. He is 14 years old and does not have parents. Occasionally, however, he receives a visit from an uncle who is cook on an East-India vessel. He makes long trips at sea and sometimes brings back amazing things for Jacob. One time he brought a real bow and arrow! But unfortunately the headmaster immediately confiscated it. Jacob doesn't like it in the orphanage. He wants to go away, sail on a ship.

-Well, young master Van den Berg, you have too much energy I understand? I've had a request from the VOC-chamber; they are still looking for a number of ship's boys. And I understand that you've talked about this quite a lot lately. So I say, go pack up your belongings, say farewell to your mates, then go to the dormitory and tomorrow morning at 7 am [... you depart].

Jacob was overjoyed. He gets to sail! A rowboat takes him to one of the big VOC ships. Together with the sailors he is received by the Boatswain, their boss.

- So newbie. Did you bring everything you own?
- Eh, eh, yes sir, eh, eh, no sir.
- What's in there?
- A, a bowl and sir, and a knife, and clothes, sir, and... and in this, look, Alex gave me this, apparently they like it there, I can exchange it.
- Oh, you're planning your own trade expedition and leave the Company at a disadvantage?
- Trading?
- Well, you can keep that, but this stays here. There. Will you show this lad the way?
- Yes, Boats
  
- Hey Jan, what's actually down there?
- You do not know much, do you? The ballast and the merchandise we will take are down there.
- Ballast? ... Weights?
- Yes. Otherwise, the ship doesn't lay deep enough and would capsize during a small storm. But it is useful ballast: cannons and stones for the fortresses in the Indies. Well, other than that there are bales of textile, some bottles of wine, and all the way in the back our food for the journey. But come, I'll quickly show you the rest of the ship. This mast is an important place on the ship; the part behind the mast is off limits to sailors like us and especially for ship's boys like you.
- But, I scrubbed the deck there this morning.
- Well, for chores you can go there, but otherwise it's off limits. That is, except of course for the Skipper and his Officers, and for the passengers of course.
- There, you see those baskets are on the quarterdeck? There are chickens in there that lay fresh eggs for the passengers every day.
- Well, I wouldn't mind having that the morning too!

Jacob is now on his the way to 'The East' for 29 weeks, they aren't there yet. The rations are diminishing daily, all the chickens, goats and pigs have been slaughtered. They cannot drink the water anymore because it is full of worms. More and more crewmembers fall sick, keeping the ship's surgeon busy.

- Why is it, that they are sick?
- Look. This is a sign of scurvy. His teeth fall right out of his mouth. Listen how short of breath he is. I hope he makes it to the Cape.

Scurvy is a disease that is very common on the VOC-ships. This is due to the lack of fresh food and vitamin C. Many crewmembers die because of this. Jacob fortunately survives. After a year at sea, he arrives in Batavia, in the Indies. Jacob finds life at sea fierce but beautiful. He is determined to travel to 'The East' often.