

Boating Etiquette

Know your Skipper: After you receive your sailing assignment, the Skipper of the boat you will be sailing on, will give you directions to the boat, an "assignment slip" with telephone numbers, etc. At this time you should discuss the menu, arrival time, ocean vs. harbor, and make sure you have signed and turned in the "Assumption of Risk and Liability Release Agreement".

Especially Remember: Ask for a job, even if you know NOTHING about a boat. Skippers are easy: they'll give you a job. At the end of the sail, ask to help put the boat away. There is work to do, tidying up, cleaning the boat, installing covers, etc. You should ask to help do that BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE BOAT. Pay close attention during familiarity briefing. If you have a disability, tell your Skipper. Declare all medication to your Skipper. Inform your Skipper of your sailing experience. Remember the Skipper is in charge. You are an on-board guest and should pay attention to the house rules.

Most Skippers like for people to help sail the boat. Some Skippers sail more aggressively than others, and some boats require more manpower than others. So there may be more or less work to do on different boats. Watch the Skipper and those handling the boat. Ask what they are doing, and why and how you can help. Learn. Help when you can and be willing the rest of the time. When taking the helm, remember to respect the Skipper's property and directions.

Smoking: There is a general No Smoking Policy on all boats. Some boat owners may allow smoking under certain conditions. Always ask before the boat leaves the dock. Never assume.

Bring or Wear: Non-skid shoes, sunglasses, sailing gloves, top or shirt, slacks or shorts, hat or cap, sun block, motion sickness remedy. For late evening or cooler weather also, bring a warm top and pants, real gloves, jacket, etc. Be ready for weather.

Shoes: Wear soft-soled shoes with light colored soles. White-soled tennis shoes are great. Black soles or leather soles are not welcome; they will leave hard-to-clean marks on the boat. Some brands of dark shoes will not leave marks on white decks. Verify before wearing them.

What to wear: The weather may turn colder while we are out there. The sail may take a little longer than we planned on so bring a warm jacket just in case. However, keep it to a minimum - small soft-sided duffel bag. At night, it can be down right cold. For a day sail, bring layers to add a sweater or sweatshirt and a lined jacket to block the wind. For a night sail, bring a knit cap, warm gloves, and a good jacket.

Odds and ends: Bring a hat that cannot be blown off or is tied to your jacket with a string. Don't forget sunglasses, sun block, and motion sickness pills. And keep your glasses from going overboard with a string or corakie type eyeglasses retainer. Soft-sided coolers are preferred.

Gloves: If any line on a boat slides through your hands, even a little, it can burn them and leave painful blisters. Wear gloves. Many people like gloves with the tips of the fingers cut off. Sailing gloves are available at boating stores, but bicycling or weightlifting gloves seem to be a suitable alternative as well.

Optional for raft-ups and tie-ups: a bathing suit will help the tan and sometimes swimming off the boat is in order. Bring towels.

Drugs: NO ILLICIT DRUGS ON BOARD ANY BOAT. Do not bring illegal drugs on board. The USCG has zero tolerance. If the Coast Guard finds drugs on any boat, they can (and will) impound the boat. As a result owners cannot afford to be tolerant. There is zero tolerance. Do NOT bring illegal drugs.

Prescription Drugs: Declare all prescription drugs, medical conditions, and physical limitations to the Skipper upon boarding.

Late Arrivals or No Shows: Remember no-show is a NO-NO. Other people are depending upon you to show up on time and participate. If you are going to be late, or can not make the sail, please make every attempt to contact the Skipper via phone. It is always a good idea to contact one of the other crew persons should you not be able to speak directly with the Skipper. If, for any reason you must cancel your sailing date, let your Skipper know ASAP. He or she may like to invite someone else.

Timelines: Arrive early! From the time you get there, and the time the boat leaves the dock, you will have to stow your part of the food, stow your personal gear, learn your way around the boat, in addition to helping get the boat ready to sail. Do not keep others waiting at dockside.

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End of Sail: At the end of the sail, help get the boat ready to be left for a week. Fold sails, put the cover on, fix the halyards so they do not slap against the mast, make up lines, put instrument covers on, hose down the cockpit crumbs, tidy up below, and maybe even wiped down the cabin sole. Do whatever the owner wants with the leftover food. Carry out the garbage. And try real hard to get all your personal gear off the boat. Then ask if all the work is done before you leave. Every boat gets put away differently. Remember, the Skipper invited you to his or her boat, which could also be their home. Be a considerate and helpful guest. Always double check to ensure that you have removed all of your personal items that you brought on board.

Head (toilet): Get instructions from the Skipper relative to proper head operations. No two marine heads work just exactly alike, so ask the Skipper for instructions, which would include the disposal of toilet tissue. Use just enough to do the job. Excessive amounts of toilet tissue cause expensive and messy clogs. Always ask. Never assume.

Before using the head, find out if the valves are open and whether it is operational. If you are not absolutely certain how to operate it, ask the owner. If there is a plastic bag beside the head or hanging on the doorknob, then "If it didn't go in your mouth, put it in the bag".

Food (What to bring): Some Skippers have certain preferences, others do not. Generally, we have a rule in Polaris; bring enough for yourself and the Skipper. Most people bring their favorite foods to share with everyone. Cold sandwiches, chips, veggies, dips, grapes, melon slices, bananas, etc. are a fine way to stock a day trip. Pasta, potato, lettuce, macaroni, or bean salad will be a hit. Soft drinks, tea, orange or apple juice, etc. will work well. Your own favorite recipe is welcome too. Do remember paper plates, utensils, napkins, condiments and **SOME EMPTY PLASTIC BAGS FOR TRASH**. Trash **WILL** be carried off the boat with you. Check with the Skipper and the other crew members on that sail.

A longstanding Polaris tradition is that the captain brings the boat, and the crew brings the food and drink. However, captains have widely varying preferences. Some like leftovers some do not want any food left on the boat. Some like to eat simply while sailing. Some like to anchor and luncheon with more style. Ask each time. Find out what your Skipper wants and then talk to the other crew members to coordinate who brings what. If you eat while sailing, keep it simple.

Food (Leftovers): Plan to leave the food on board unless told otherwise.

Most Polaris boats sail on the ocean: If you prefer to sail in the bay on your first time out, let the Vice Commodore of Sail know. The Vice Commodore of Sail will try to find you a boat that will sail in the bay.

Safety Gear: The Skipper will provide a familiarization and safety briefing. If not given, ask for it. Ask to be checked out on safety gear including the VHF radio. Skippers want a safe boat and that means everyone should have an orientation to the safety gear. Do not be bashful - ask. No two boats are alike. They perform differently. Therefore, the Skipper's directions may differ.

Emergencies rarely happen. Nevertheless, you should know where the life jackets and fire extinguishers are, and how to use them. If this is your first time, be prepared. Normally, you can spot them by looking around the boat. If you do not see them, ask.

If this is your first time: If this is your first time, be prepared. We cannot predict the weather. Some days the sea is rocking and rolling even when there is no wind. Tell the Skipper if you have taken anything or are beginning to feel ill. Bring your own medicine. It is not up to the Skipper to supply it. Some suggestions are Bonine (Meclazine), mints, gum, ginger, etc., or contact your personal physician for recommendations. Always start taking the medication the day before the sail. Waiting until you feel ill is too late.

MANDATORY: The Skipper is always in charge and will always have the final word. Most Skippers are comfortable with an easy conversational style when all is well. They get formal and firm very quickly when all is not well. Try to understand the situation and what the Skipper wants done. Do take orders as they are issued, try to do what he or she wants, and do not take anything personally. Listen carefully and follow instructions. Do not debate. This is not the time. Most problems get resolved quickly. Safety is always paramount, always more important than everything else.

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Alcohol: Inquire about the particular Skipper's policy for his or her boat as there is a time and place for everything. Don't assume. ASK.

California Laws Regarding Boating While Intoxicated

In the State of California, boating while intoxicated carries similar definitions and penalties as driving while intoxicated. California states that no person can operate any boat or personal watercraft (including manipulating water skis or an inner tube) if that person is under the influence of alcohol. As with DUI, California specifies a legal limit for intoxication of .08%. Anything over .08% will bring fines, possible license suspension, and possible jail time. No matter the situation, boating while intoxicated in California can have serious repercussions.....

The person operating the vessel is not the only one at risk (intoxicated passengers are also at risk of injury and falling overboard).

The Coast Guard has an agreement with state and local authorities to cooperate with enforcement of boating while intoxicated laws. If a Coast Guard vessel intercepts someone boating under the influence, they have the authority to detain and redirect the vessel in question.

Redirecting means that if a vessel is "pulled over" by the Coast Guard, the vessel can be taken to mooring by someone considered competent to operate the vessel. This can be one of the passengers, but more likely is a Coast Guard member being ordered to take charge of the vessel.

California boating under the influence laws dictates that the Coast Guard detains the operator in most cases until law enforcement can pick up the offender. This can take many hours depending on caseload for local law enforcement! The inconvenience, penalties, and embarrassment connected with being found boating under the influence is simply not worth the risk.

After reading all of the above, the whole objective is to have fun. Bring a smile, a sense of humor, and some sparkling conversation. Being outdoors and sailing with good people is a great way to spend a day. Enjoy it and help others enjoy it.

Remember: "If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right". You are out there to have fun, but also to be safe.