

On-board Etiquette

10 basic rules for yacht charter guests

Some may underestimate the importance of proper yachting etiquette, but following simple rules can be a matter of safety as well as respect.



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When chartering a yacht, you may feel luxuriously spoiled, as the crew's number one goal is to please you. Even though they are there to "serve" you, remember, they are not your "servants." Some of the following rules of etiquette may seem like common sense, but you would be surprised at how many guests forget to apply them. The crew and your fellow passengers will be truly appreciative if you keep these points in mind.

1. Ask permission to come aboard:

Stepping on board a yacht is much like entering someone's home. You would never enter without first ringing the bell or knocking and waiting for someone to invite you in. The same courtesy applies when boarding your chartered yacht. It is considered proper etiquette to ask the captain for permission to board. Of course, the request does not have to be formal or stuffy. Simply asking, "Permission to come aboard?" will be much appreciated, not to mention that you will start your vacation off on the right foot with your captain. After all, manners make all the difference!

2. Remove shoes when boarding:

When boarding the yacht you have chartered, it is a courtesy to take off your shoes. The yacht you have chartered is owned and maintained by someone who probably takes great pride in their investment. The deck surface is generally highly polished with varnish, and can be easily marred and damaged by the bottom of your Manolo heels or Testoni shoes. The captain will expect that you have brought along at least one of the following footwear: deck shoes or tennis, basketball or running sneakers. When you return to the boat from a sightseeing excursion or a trip to the beach, it is important to be aware that your feet or shoes do not have oil, grease, tar, or sand that can be tracked back onto the yacht. Take a moment to check your soles before re-boarding. In addition, the deck is often wet when under way, so it would be in your best interest to not roam around barefoot once the boat has set sail.

3. Bring soft luggage:

Unlike The Plaza or The Ritz-Carlton, most yachts do not have lavish, full-size closets to store your clothes. As a result, it would not be realistic to bring three large steamer trunks. As a courtesy to the other guests, the crew, and the lack of space, pack lightly in soft luggage that can be easily stowed aboard the yacht.

4. Don't overindulge during Happy Hour:

One of the perks of a charter vacation is that you may enjoy "Happy Hour" aboard the vessel or on the shores of an exotic island with the locals. You may meet someone from another chartered vessel or from the village where you have anchored whom you wish to invite on board. Whether it is for one cocktail or to show off the yacht you've chartered, etiquette and protocol dictate that you first ask the captain's permission. Don't forget to use moderation when enjoying cocktails. As you are on open water and safety comes first, over-imbibing may cause the captain to close the bar. Unruly guests, whether or not they paid for the charter, are still guests.

5. Keep the noise level down:

There is nothing as soothing as the sound of waves gently hitting the side of a boat as you relax on deck or drift off to sleep. To have that calm rudely interrupted by the sounds of loud voices and blasting music can cause anyone to lose their cool. When it comes to noise, remember to respect the other guests. Sound travels, oh so well, across the water and even normal conversations can be heard much farther than expected. Imagine if you will, that you are seeking advice from another guest on how to handle a difficult individual in the group. As sound can clearly travel from one end of the yacht to the other, there is a chance that your comments may reach the ears of others... this is a fatal faux pas that could cause tension for the rest of the voyage.

6. Don't enter the galley unless specifically invited:

It is exciting to inspect the yacht on which you are sailing. From bow to stern, cabin to galley, it is a given that you would want to take in the awesome beauty of your floating paradise. Perhaps we get curious and decide to see

where our splendid meals are being created. Don't barge in and expect to be greeted with open arms, especially when meals are being prepared. Just as we would not like to be disturbed when preparing a meal for an elaborate dinner party, the same holds true of those in the galley. Ask for permission and find out when would be a good time for you to take a tour.

7. Don't waste fresh water:

There is nothing like a cold, refreshing glass of ice water when you've been in the sun all day. On a yacht, there are a certain number of gallons of fresh water aboard. Running out of fresh water can be quite serious, not to mention potentially fatal. It is important that each guest aboard respect the regulations regarding the use of fresh water. Many charters have rules about washing your hair with fresh water and permission is sometimes granted only from your captain. Of course, there is no limit to the amount of salt water that may be used.

8. Follow the head instructions:


Believe it or not, there is an etiquette regarding the marine toilet...also known as "the head." Clogging the head will not only cause you much embarrassment, but will inconvenience the crew and fellow guests as well. If you are unfamiliar with how to operate the head, take a minute and ask a crew member. If you do indeed clog the head, it may be necessary for a crew member to disassemble and unclog it. It has been said that you may put anything into a marine toilet as long as it has been ingested first; except for a miniscule amount of toilet paper.

9. Obey the captain:

The captain of your chartered yacht is responsible for the well-being and safety of each person aboard. Just like a scout leader or teacher, the captain has final say over almost everything on the boat. There is nothing you can do about it, but respect the rules.

10. Tip the crew:

It is considered proper etiquette to tip your crew from 10-15% of the charter fee based upon services rendered. It is customary for the charter party to leave the gratuity with the captain, with suggestions on how it should be distributed. Remember, during your stay aboard the yacht, the crew has been your navigation team, wait staff, bartender, gourmet chef, and housekeeper. Not to mention, dinghy driver, tour guide, diving instructor, backgammon opponent, etc. Take all of the above into account when determining your tip.

No matter where your destination takes you, be it Saint-Tropez or the Greek Islands, your voyage will no doubt be unforgettable. Those who are educated in the finer points of yachting etiquette and protocol can take comfort in knowing that they have been a first-class guest. 



Minding Your Manners in Popular Ports of Call

Respect the customs when in other countries. As they say, "When in Rome..." While chartering in other countries, it is important to be aware of certain gestures that may be deemed offensive or inappropriate. Here are just a few important do's and don'ts concerning gestures:

- Europe or Latin America: From the South Atlantic Coast of Spain to the beautiful waters of Cabo San Lucas, there is much to see and do when on land. When disembarking for a day of shopping and sightseeing, it is important to remember that the American good-bye wave may be interpreted as a signal for "no." Whistling is a form of jeering that may be misinterpreted by the locals. Another common mistake is stroking your chin. You may be sending the message that you are bored or implying this is taking an awfully long time, especially when trying to decide what you will eat or buy.
- Italy: Whether at the Bay of Naples or the Amalfi Coast, the shops and cuisine are a must. When on land, don't misinterpret the Italian "good-bye" motion as "come here." Another faux pas is tapping your hand to your forehead (similar to a salute). To those in Italy, this gesture means, "you're crazy."
- Greece: The classical and Hellenistic history of Greece is sure to be an incentive to check out the ruins. Some things to beware: putting your hand up in the stop position with fingers spread is considered an insulting gesture. A slight, upward nod of the head signals "no." The OK sign may be thought of as a crude gesture. To beckon someone in Greece, extend your arm, palm down, and make a scratching motion with your fingers.
- The Middle East: When on land along Turkey's Turquoise Coast, avoid showing the sole of your shoe. The soles of the shoes are considered the lowest and dirtiest part of the body. The left hand is primarily regarded as the "unclean" hand, therefore be careful when using it. Never photograph people without their permission. A gentleman should never touch an Arabic woman, unless she extends her hand first.
- Fiji: To show respect for another while speaking, stand with your arms folded behind your back. It is disrespectful to wear bathing suits in or near a village, unless you are walking along a beach that is considered a public place.
- Southeast Asia: The Andaman Sea Coast of Thailand provides a rare opportunity to experience a fascinating culture. Do not use your feet for pointing or moving an object. Standing with your hands on your hips is a sign of anger. Never use your index finger to beckon someone. Rather, extend your arm with palm down and make a scratching motion with your fingers.
- Australia: Sailing on the Great Barrier Reef is a magnificent and majestic experience. If you return to the East Coast of Queensland, here are some do's and don'ts. Winking at a woman is considered crass. A thumbs-up gesture is considered improper and rude, especially when accompanied by a small upward jerk.

When in doubt about local customs, check with your captain.