

A CRUISE SHIP JOB GUIDE
BY MACKENZIE THOMAS



What To Expect When You Work On A Cruise Ship



Hello & Welcome

Congratulations on your new career at sea! This is such an exciting time in your life, and it is also a very different environment that you are about to enter into.

Next Level You Coaching provides crew members with the coaching that you need to handle the pressures of life onboard, to be successful during your probation and to make the most out of your time!

Coach Mackenzie

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Essentials for Packing

You will most likely be wearing a uniform, unless you are an Entertainer, Brand Ambassador, Musician and some other exceptions. You should be certain before you leave, that your company or recruitment agent has advised you if you will be provided with a uniform.

You will likely need a pair of safety shoes to go with your uniform, some positions require a pair of white shoes (officers) and black. Please check on this as well.

You will have very small closets and limited space in your cabin so don't pack heavy. You will want:

- a pair of headphones or airpods, Ideally noise canceling as you will likely have an average of 3 other roommates
- pajamas
- one or two outfits for the itinerary that you are on
- a light or heavy jacket depending on your itinerary
- one or two smart or dressy shirts for crew parties and crewbar
- a workout outfit for the Crew gym
- running shoes
- flip flops depending on your itinerary
- plenty of undergarments and black socks
- mobile phone and international sim card or calling cards
- charger
- Kindle or app for reading
- alarm clock (it's actually better to have one as a back.up to your phone as there is low tolerance for being late).
- sunscreen depending on the itinerary
- photos of friends and family
- MAGNETS: for posting your photos and schedule and training docs on your wall
- downloads of your favorite shows on your laptop or phone
- WhatsApp app on your phone so you can communicate (most ships provide this app without paying for internet which is costly on most cruise lines. Very few offer free internet).
- makeup
- a watch as technically you are not supposed to have your phone in your pocket
- swimsuit
- don't forget your sign on documents and passport!
- toiletries although there is a crew shop onboard



Preparing For Your First Day

Your first day onboard is unlike any other job you've had. Upon arrival, you'll go through customs and immigration, then be met by HR or Crew Personnel to hand over your passport—this is a legal requirement for immigration purposes and a measure to prevent crew from seeking asylum in foreign ports. From there, you'll be shown to your cabin (which may or may not be clean, as housekeeping is often busy preparing guest rooms), rushed to mandatory safety training, fitted for your uniform, and finally taken to your department for on-the-job training. While your trainer might have some scheduled time to go over the basics, it's not uncommon to be thrown straight into the action. Your ability to adapt quickly and stay alert will be essential.



Safety Training and Scheduling

During your first two months onboard, you'll undergo several safety and security trainings. You'll also participate in a weekly muster station or fire drill, in addition to the guest muster drill—now typically conducted via announcements on most cruise lines. You'll be scheduled to work seven days a week, as days off are rare. Exceptions exist for certain roles, such as Dancers and Entertainers. Some cruise lines offer incentives like occasional days off if you receive outstanding passenger feedback through comment cards or surveys.

Expect split shifts and rotating overnight duties. Some departments, like the Casino and Gift Shop, do not operate while the ship is in port, as they are only permitted to open once the ship is a certain distance from land.

The workload is demanding, both mentally and physically, and it requires resilience, stamina, and a strong work ethic to thrive in this environment.



Friends and Avoiding Isolation

The friendships you form onboard can often last a lifetime. Working, living, and celebrating holidays together—and sharing mutual hardships like onboard pressures and the emotional toll of missing family and friends—naturally fosters strong, fast connections. You may meet people from your own country or expand your social network through the ship's highly diverse crew roster.

Romantic relationships also tend to progress much faster at sea than on land. It's not uncommon for crew members to move in together almost immediately, especially if one of them has a single cabin. However, it's also common for crew to have spouses or partners back home—some are upfront about this, while others are not, which can lead to heartbreak. Polyamorous dynamics or multiple relationships across ships are not unusual and can lead to complications, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies if precautions aren't taken.

Many new crew members are naive and believe everything they're told, often led by emotion. But after one or two contracts, logic kicks in, and most come to recognize these patterns as part of the onboard lifestyle. It's a widely accepted "norm" within the industry. Building friendships onboard is crucial to your well-being. The combination of long hours, high expectations, constant social shifts, multitasking, and the ready availability of alcohol can lead to elevated cortisol levels, disrupting your neural pathways and increasing stress. Loneliness, in particular, can significantly impact your mental health. If you're more introverted, pushing yourself to connect with others is essential. Start by showing up—whether it's in the crew mess, at parties, or in the crew bar. While it might feel awkward at first, making even one or two friends can completely transform your experience—and boost your overall health in the process.



Mental Wellness Onboard

1. Acknowledge the Unique Stressors of Ship Life

Working on a cruise ship can strain even the most resilient person. Factors like:

- Long work hours (often 10–14 hours/day with few days off)
- Shared cabins with little privacy
- Limited access to the internet or outside support
- Cultural and language barriers among crew members
- Being away from home and family for months

These can lead to stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression if not managed proactively.

2. Normalize Conversations Around Mental Health

Mental wellness must become part of the crew culture—not something hidden or stigmatized. You're not weak if you're feeling down, overwhelmed, or anxious. In fact, it's incredibly normal. Encouraging open, supportive conversations among peers can make a big difference.

Cruise lines are slowly beginning to provide access to:

- Mental health counselors (either on board or via telehealth)
- Crew welfare officers
- Peer support groups or wellness programs

Ask HR or your manager what mental health support is available to you. If they act like they've never heard of it before, ask again—politely but firmly.

3. Bullying: A Hidden but Harmful Culture

Bullying on board can show up in many forms, such as:

- Verbal abuse or humiliation in front of others
- Threats to your job if you don't comply with unreasonable demands
- Exclusion from group activities or information
- Targeting based on nationality, gender, or position

No one should have to endure bullying just to keep a job. If it's happening to you or someone you know, document everything—dates, times, witnesses, and what was said or done.

4. Sexual Harassment: Know Your Rights and Resources

Unfortunately, sexual harassment still exists in some shipboard environments. It can include:

- Inappropriate comments or jokes
- Unwanted touching or advances
- Pressure to engage in sexual activity, especially from someone in a higher position

If you've experienced sexual harassment, you are not to blame. You deserve safety and respect at work.

Most major cruise lines are required to have a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment, though enforcement can vary. If reporting internally doesn't feel safe, there are external options.

Crew Resources

5. Reporting Abuse or Harassment

You can report to your supervisor, HR, staff captain, or crew welfare officer.

Many cruise lines have anonymous hotlines.

You can also contact organizations like ISWAN

(www.seafarerswelfare.org) or

ITF (www.itfglobal.org).

[Lipcon, Argulies and Winkleman, P.A - Maritime Lawyers](#)

Social Media

- Subscribe or become a member at www.nextlevelyou.ca

- Join Thecrewbar on Facebook (private group)

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/officialcrewbar/?](https://www.facebook.com/groups/officialcrewbar/?ref=share&mibextid=NSMWBT)

[ref=share&mibextid=NSMWBT](#)

- Join www.crewscritics.com

- Follow @nextlevelcoach and @The.Crew.bar on IG

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Tools for Everyday Mental Wellness

Sleep when you can, move your body, eat well, talk to someone, limit alcohol, and practice grounding habits like journaling or meditation.

Helpful Mindsets:

"This is temporary": Contracts end, rough days pass.

"It's OK to not be OK": Emotions are normal; bottling them up makes things worse.

Progress, not perfection": You're doing your best—let that be enough.

Speak up if you're experiencing struggles, bullying, or harassment.

Your wellbeing matters-not just to you, but to your crew and passengers. Reach out. Speak up. Stay strong.

Closing Words

Taking care of yourself, respecting the rules, preparing yourself for an environment that operates differently and even controversially because of its flags of convenience and lack of governance are all keys to success.

For a more detailed overview of shiplife, we highly recommend that you set up some coaching sessions before you leave. It can make all of the difference in whether or not you endure your contract and it can groom you for faster promotions.

To get a coaching session set up email contact@nextlevelyou.ca
For a more cost effective option, complete our [Job Readiness Questionnaire](#)



LET'S WORK TOGETHER
AND CREATE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL



Ready To Book Your Engagement Photoshoot?

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