

BOATING ETIQUETTE

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Boating, as a recreational sport, has been around for over 300 years. During this time many customs and traditions have been developed in order to help relieve the natural stress that comes with dealing with the elements. No matter how long you have been boating there is always that tense feeling when you are out there on your own. If this feeling ever goes away, you should probably take up golf. Whether underway, anchoring, mooring, docking at a marina or cruising with friends, don't add to the stress of your boating neighbor by ignoring custom and tradition.



Underway

Obviously, the rules of the road are going to dictate how you operate your vessel underway in order to prevent collision. But what if no risk of collision exists, are you then free to do whatever you want when operating in the vicinity of other vessels? Above all, remember that you are responsible for you own wake and any damage done by it.

When overtaking a slower vessel in open water, do so with as much room as depth conditions allow and slow your speed, if necessary, to avoid rocking the other vessel. There is nothing worse than being below in a slow trawler or sailboat, cooking breakfast, and being suddenly overtaken in close quarters by a loud, wake-throwing, go-fast boater. Especially if the wake causes the hot bacon grease and coffee to be thrown around the galley.

It should be remembered that sometimes the boat being overtaken may need to slow its speed to accommodate the overtaking vessel. If you are proceeding at 8 knots, the passing boat can only slow to about 10 knots to still have enough speed difference to pass successfully. However, at that speed the overtaking vessel still throws an uncomfortable wake. You may need to slow to 4 knots to allow the overtaking vessel to pass at 6 knots which allows for a much smaller wake.

If you are overtaking a vessel under sail, if possible, overtake them well to leeward or pass astern in a crossing situation, so as not to block their wind.

Anchoring and Mooring

Be sure to enter an anchorage or mooring area at a slow speed. This is like moving into a new neighborhood. You want your neighbors to like you. Again, you don't want to create a wake that would upset someone's dinner or drink.

Remember that the first person in the anchorage has the right to determine the swing radius. Don't get too close to other anchored boats. The wind can change and in a matter of minutes you can have fouled and tangled anchor lines, and hulls and dinghies banging against each other. I'll never forget the commotion caused one night off the Bitter End in the BVI when a late-arriving boat anchored too close to another. The shifting wind at 0300 caused them to tangle with one another and soon there were two angry and burly boaters on deck, sans clothing, but armed with spotlights, shouting and cursing while blinding each other with the lights. Not a pretty sight! Speaking of spotlights, if you need to use one, make sure you don't inadvertently blind your neighbor.

Before anchoring evaluate your intended behavior; the more music, people on board, children, pets and smoke from your barbecue that you intend to create, the further downwind you should be from your neighbors. Sound carries exceptionally well over water and many boaters retire early for an early departure. Respect their right to sleep in peace. Also, remember that any comment you make may be heard.

If you are using your dinghy at night to go to shore or visit others in the anchorage, do so using oars and not your outboard. How far could the shore be if you're anchored in ten feet of water? Some boaters are friendly and like to socialize, while others are reflective and just want to be left alone. If you are rowing around the anchorage and see people on deck, you should be friendly but not intrusive unless, of course, encouraged. Tradition dictates that if you approach another vessel you should do so on the starboard side six to ten feet away. If you strike up a conversation and you recognize by the tenor of the strangers that they really aren't interested, just move on out of their space.

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Make sure you get permission before picking up a guest mooring. It may be reserved for another boater arriving later on or it may be unsuitable for your vessel.

Marina Manners

When you stop for fuel, keep in mind that other boats may be waiting to get to the fuel dock. Do not leave your boat to pick up groceries or hang out in the bait shop. Tie up securely, follow proper fueling procedures, pay the bill and move away to another docking area or guest slip if you need to do other business ashore.



If you are already safely docked in the marina and there is no dockmaster or helper around to assist boaters as they dock and undock, it is courteous to assist others in your vicinity with their lines. This may sound like an oxymoron, but boating is like a fraternity of individuals. Everyone has a right to their space but everyone provides assistance whenever necessary.

Make sure to keep the area around your slip clear. Roll up and stow hoses, place power cords in such a manner as to not trip a passerby who is looking up at your new radar reflector. Keep buckets, mops, tackle, docking lines and other items stowed in their proper place, not strewn around on the dock. When finished with

carts or other equipment at the marina intended for common use, be sure to put it back where it belongs so others have access.

Tips For On Board Guests

Whenever you invite guests aboard for the day, a weekend or an extended cruise, you should explain to them in advance what is expected of them, especially if they are not experienced boaters. If they are expected to perform duties onboard make sure they know this (and how to do it) before you give the order to swab the deck or handle lines. If you have special “rules” regarding behavior on your boat (smoking, drinking, etc.), let them know before they arrive.

Instruct your guests to bring a minimum of clothing appropriate for the climate in which you will be operating as well as your final destination. Make sure each guest has a good pair of non-skid deck shoes. If your plans are to go ashore for activities other than lying on the beach, make sure they bring something more appropriate than a swimsuit and thongs. Explain the problem of limited space on your boat and ask them to pack their gear in a duffel bag or other soft-sided and collapsible luggage.

If you are planning to visit foreign ports, be sure to let your guests know in advance what documents and ID they need to bring and make them aware of any local customs they should know about.



When guests arrive, assign a locker to each where they may stow their gear and make clear that everything should be kept in its assigned place. It could be dangerous or impair the operation of your boat to have clothing and other gear floating around loose.

Make sure your guests know that your times of departure are based on tide, current, weather conditions and time to make the next destination. You should explain that they should be onboard, have gear stowed and be ready to leave well before the departure time you have set.

Explain also that the time to rise and shine is based on the convenience of everyone aboard and the cruising plans for the day. You, as skipper, should be the first to rise and the others should follow shortly after. Make guests aware of the limited washing and toilet facilities on the boat and instruct them to be time considerate to others. Also instruct them thoroughly on the use of the marine head and the importance of water conservation when cruising between destinations. Make clear, also, when you announce in the evenings that it is time to retire everyone should do so.

Familiarize your guests with safety and emergency procedures before leaving the dock. Explain fueling procedures, docking and undocking plans, etc. Make sure someone onboard is able to take over for you and operate the VHF radio to ask for help should you become disabled.

By being up front, honest and direct with your guests everyone onboard will have a safe and more pleasurable trip.