

## **Everything you always wanted to know about going to sea but were afraid to ask**

### **What do I need to do before I go?**

One of the best things you can do to prepare is to have a conversation with your advisor/boss/supervisor/chief scientist about the cruise and any questions you have. Be upfront about the fact that you have not sailed before. This is the normal procedure. From a supervisor's perspective, when you take someone out to sea with you (colleague, student, post-doc etc.) this person becomes your responsibility – it is always preferable to brief them prior to leaving and make sure they know what to expect, what clothes to bring, what conditions will be like, what will be expected of them, and so on.

Your advisor knows better than anyone else what weather/sea-state to expect and also what the work load will be etc. They can also answer specific questions about what types of communication will be available to you, etc. (See below).

### **Will I get seasick? What should I do about it?**

Most people feel at least some seasickness, but almost everyone is better after 2-3 days, unless you experience a storm further into the cruise.

Usually ships carry sea-sickness medications for people. Still, you may want to bring some just in case - there are many now won't make you drowsy. Most people take them the first few days and then they are good to go. You probably don't need the medication anymore when you can look at food without a faint queasiness.

It is also good to bring some dried crackers (e.g. saltines). These are great if you feel somewhat nauseous the first few days but not really sea-sick. Some people swear by ginger candies.

Some advice on medication:

- If you decide to take medication, take it before the cruise starts. Whenever possible, do not wait to take it until you feel ill. The medication does not work immediately and you may not be able to keep it down. (If you end up in this situation, take the medication and try to sleep for several hours.)
- If you take Dramamine II or Bonine (same thing), it will last 24 hours and you should take it the night before you are going on the cruise. You can sleep on it and it will be working before you get on board. Many people find that this medication makes them too sleepy.
- The following combination works well for many people: Get a prescription for Phenergan/Promethazine, 25 mg or 30 mg per pill, and you take one of those every 24 hours. At the same time, you take 1 or 2 Sudafed (pseudoephedrine) every 4 to 6 hours. The combination prevents seasickness and does not make you sleepy. I have asked 2 doctors and a pharmacist about this and they didn't think it would be bad to take this combination of pills for a few days.

## **What if I'm the only woman on board? Will this be awkward or uncomfortable?**

UNOLS ships tend to have lots of women crew and officers these days, so you should not be the only woman on board, even if you are the only woman on the science team.

On a smaller ship with only a couple (all male) officers and crew, you may be the only woman on board. The bonus is that you will likely get your own cabin!

However, ships are one place where women often feel more uncomfortable than usual. UNOLS recently put together a no harassment set of guidelines to try and prevent inappropriate behavior on ships – it should be on their website and taking a read before you go might be good for self-confidence.

In the event that you feel uncomfortable and need some support, make sure you have emails and other contact info for colleagues/friends/ and family off-ship and get in touch with people for advice and support.

With all of that said, most people have had positive experiences with male colleagues at sea and any uncomfortable situations have been rare exceptions, and in no way the norm.

One note – if you are going to sea on a foreign vessel, it is worth asking around beforehand about what will be different from US ships – both from a practical and cultural perspective. For example, British, French and Russian ships are all different than US vessels and from each other - including standards for safety training and drills, expected behavior in dining, how you address Captain and Crew, acceptable socializing (some have alcohol on board), etc. And cultural differences in acceptable male-female interactions may also arise.

## **Am I going to have time to work on my dissertation / manuscript / proposal (unrelated to the cruise research)?**

It can be hard to fit in, but some people get lots of work done during cruises.

How much spare time you have really depends on the cruise. If you are working a 12 hour shift, you will likely not have a ton of time. However if watches are 8 hours you may have more free time, and there may be time on long transits, or long periods of waiting while instruments are over the side, when you can't do science due to bad weather, etc. Your pre-trip conversation with your supervisor will help you set expectations.

You also may develop new colleague relationships and have useful brainstorming conversations about your science with your shipmates.

On the other hand, if you are the type of person that is exhausted at the end of a day of field work – or you want to fully engage in the cruise research and spend all your available time looking at the data as you collect it and learning about what everyone else on board is doing - don't plan on trying to do outside work. This could create unrealistic expectations.

## **Will I be able to email people back on land? Use the internet? Make phone calls?**

It depends on where you are. Near the shore, satellite connection often is available for reasonably fast internet and skype-type phone calls.

Further from shore, the ship sends communications 1-3 times in a 24 hour period, including emails to and from everyone on board. On any reasonably sized ship you will be assigned a ship-based email for this type of communication, so bring email addresses with you for people back on land. You will be limited in attachment size for these emails.

Again, ask about this one in your pre-cruise conversation.

## **What if I'm worried about gaining weight sitting around on a long cruise? Will I be able to exercise?**

Some people find the ship's motion and long work hours keep them active and they come back lighter than when they left! For most people, it can be hard to limit food and be active, but lots of people try to exercise regularly - especially the crew who are stuck on the boat for a long period of time.

- There is usually a work out room, feel free to ask about this before you go so you know what to pack. Often there are exercise machines (ergs, stationary bikes - you'll get to where you don't even notice the strange sensation of biking up and down 11 second swells. An mp3 player is good for this, since they are often close to the engine room)
- Skipping rope is great.
- Doing steps on a not so used staircase is entirely normal.
- You could take along some kind of exercise DVDs to work out to in your cabin – if it works with the watch-schedule of your cabin-mate.
- One thing that doesn't work well is walking or jogging laps around the ship – usually there is too much gear in the way.

### **Food:**

- Food is usually plentiful at sea – and generally, it's surprisingly good. Food is very important for moral.
- If you're worried about gaining weight, it might help to bring healthy snacks. Especially if you have watch late at night (and miss one or two of the regular daytime meals because you are sleeping during the day).
- There are usually snacks available, but they may not be healthy or low-calorie.
- Also, if you are on night watch, and miss dinner, you should feel comfortable asking the cook to put aside a dinner in the fridge for you. There is also food that you can help yourself to at night - just ask the cook. This is totally normal and you shouldn't feel at all shy about this kind of request.

## **What should I bring?**

What you will want to bring depends on how long the cruise will be, but here are some ideas:

#### DEFINITELY:

- Foul-weather gear (serious raincoat and rain pants/overalls, and rubber boots – you may be able to borrow from your institution or get reimbursed)
- Steel-toed boots (required for working on deck on many ships, you may be able to borrow from your institution or get reimbursed. Slip-ons are great because they are easy to get on and off)
- Hard hat and safety vest (which is a life jacket to wear when deploying/recovering instruments). (Safety gear is required for working on deck on many ships, usually you should be able to borrow from your institution)
- Slip-on shoes (you will not wear your steel-toes indoors and may be taking your boots on and off MANY times a day)
- Warm, comfortable working clothes which you don't mind getting dirty (boats may get a bit cold sometimes. Don't bring any nice clothes, they will only get rust stains on them. Jeans, sweatpants, etc.)
- Warm, comfortable sleeping clothes (in case of middle of the night safety drills (or real emergencies) when you have to report to deck immediately, you won't have to worry about showing up in something inappropriate)
- Warm hat and work gloves

#### MAYBE

- Alarm clock with batteries (you will be sleeping odd hours and don't want to rely on others to wake you)
- Personal laptop (note: it can be difficult to find a horizontal space to work on a personal laptop, desk space is often at a premium in the science labs, you might want to talk with supervisor/chief scientist about whether he or she can make a small space for you to set up your laptop)
- Light reading material
- Exercise clothes and sneakers
- Travel mug for tea/coffee
- Water bottle
- Personal music (ipod, walkman, earplugs for your computer)
- Earplugs for sleeping (Make sure you could still hear a fire alarm!)
- Snacks – especially saltines or rice crackers for seasickness or healthy snacks, tea bags if you like herbal tea.
- Pillow and/or towel (they have them on board, but you may want your own if it's a long cruise)
- Bathrobe (makes showering easier on some ships that have bathrooms that are accessed through a hallway rather than directly through your room)

This sounds like a lot of stuff, but everyone will be getting on board with big bags.

#### **What will the ship be like?**

Noisy and smelly (diesel fumes), but often crewed by interesting folks with colorful life stories and people doing all kinds of interesting science.

Facilities on larger vessels include: a library, laundry machines (including laundry soap), movies at night, etc. You can usually find out more details on the ship's website.

**Any other advice?**

Address the captain as “Captain” rather than by name. Ask someone or watch carefully for seating at meals, officers often have ‘their’ seats that no one else uses.

Make sure you are comfortable with the safety equipment and drills – absolutely ask any questions you have, don’t be embarrassed.

Life continues 24 hours on board, and some people are sleeping at all times, so be courteous with noise levels, etc.

Have a great time, explore the boat, hang out on the bridge, and don't be shy about asking any questions you have when you get on board, there will almost certainly be other people who have not been to sea before, and in any case, everyone will want to make you as comfortable as possible, so don't feel like you should already know your way around.