

What I Wish I'd Known On My First Day At Sea

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Clyde Marine Training surveyed a number of our cadets, employees and serving merchant naval officers recently asking them the simple question, "What do you wish you'd known on your first day at sea?" This fit as a follow up to their recent article about the first day at college

(www.maritimeprofessional.com/News/358006.aspx). As before the answers were varied and helpful so we've compiled them and created our top ten in no particular order.

1. I wish I'd listened more and spoken less. This was a popular answer, after all on your first day on your first sea voyage as a merchant navy cadet you are a mixture of excitement, nerves and adrenalin and that's the perfect recipe for verbal diarrhea. It's difficult finding the balance between eagerness and annoying, so remember pretty much everyone else on the ship isn't as excited as you.
2. I wish I'd brushed up on my language skills, mixing with so many nationalities and languages. Having more than English would have helped. We're fortunate that so much of the world speaks English and at sea it is no different, however there are exceptions and you come across every race, nationality and language during a career at sea. A bit of French and Spanish can be very helpful.
3. I wish I'd thought a bit more about my hand luggage. We were told a great story about someone's luggage going missing in South America and finding herself on board with only the clothes she stood up in for two weeks. That's an extreme example but the lesson is be prepared, having a change of underwear and some toiletries with you just in case.
4. I wish I'd taken more of it in, when you are young you think you'll do this forever. It's accepted by all old timers that youth is wasted on the young and your first day at sea is no different. It passes in a blur so try and take it in. This really applies to your early career more than your first day. You'll visit countries, meet people and encounter work when you first start out that you might never come across again, so absorb it, don't assume you'll do it again, you might not.
5. I wish I'd realized just how big a merchant ship is. All first timers get lost on board, it's expected and accepted. However you need to acquaint yourself quickly, it won't be tolerated for long. Merchant ships are big, they are full of passageways, rooms and sections and you need to learn them all so make it a priority.

6. I wish I'd realized how much I still had to learn. Everyone said this. You've been in nautical college, you've listened, studied and taken it all in, however theory and reality are often different. Don't be cocky even if you are top of the class, on board a ship you are surrounded by experienced professionals who all know much more than you. Listen to them, take in what they tell you and you won't go far wrong. The truth is you never stop learning all through your career.
7. I wish I realized how much fun I was having. You're young, you've no ties, few, if any, responsibilities and you are embarking on an adventure, so enjoy it. Almost everyone looks back on that period in his or her life with affection. As you get older you take on more responsibilities both personally and professionally, that's part of life and often very fulfilling and rewarding, however that short period in your life when you've none do award you freedoms you won't have later so make the most of them.
8. I wish I'd kept a diary. This is a good piece of advice. You won't remember everything, you think you will but take it from us you won't. So keep a record, both of the people and places and adventures you have but also of the things you learn.
9. I wish I'd taken more pictures. Like the diary you'll see things you'll wish you can share, well why don't you? Take photos of the sunsets and sunrises, the tropics and the ice flows the engines and the cabins because one day you'll look back on them with affection and want to share them someone.
10. I wish I'd rested more. Life on board can be hard work, long hours requiring concentration, night shifts, early shifts and irregular watches can all take their toll. So when you get the chance to rest take it. You are on board to do a job, you'll have time to socialize and explore later so make sure you rest when you get the chance.