

## Pelagic Sailing Club Etiquette

Pelagic appeals to people who want to sail and socialize. A moment's reflection on those two activities evokes the basics about how you might "fit in" or become one of the popular kids.

- Many sailors are meticulous about how their boat and other things are organized. Having things "just so" makes a big difference in locating needed gear, their pleasure, boat performance and safety.
- People in social organizations socialize – meaning they talk about each other.

So as you enjoy Pelagic activities, consider being respectful of other people's toys, and behaving so that when people talk about you when you are not around, they praise you.

A few topics are highlighted, and some examples illustrate how things can go well ☺ or poorly ▼.

**Invitations** You may be invited to an event or sail through a group email or private communication. While the invitation may be informal, if you commit to a sail, be clear and certain about your participation. We often travel to locations distant from home, and if someone does not show up it is at a minimum frustrating and possibly dangerous. Departure times are often influenced by wind, tide and current conditions, so being late may mean much more than just being tardy. If a skipper invites you to crew, take it seriously and don't change your mind lightly. Similarly, if you are a skipper inviting crew, be at the meeting place as agreed. If something makes you a "maybe", be forthright as soon as possible. If something comes up and you need to exit a cruise, let the boat owner know as early as possible, so they can develop backup plans.

- ▼ An applicant got a "bad reputation" by accepting invitations to sail, and then not appearing at the dock. Each skipper waited for a while, then was left without crew for their day on the water.
- ▼ A solo crew abandoned a cruise at a distant port, leaving the skipper to navigate home alone.
- ▼ A crew person thought the cruise departed on Sunday, but the boat left the dock on Saturday.

**Expenses** Sailing is expensive. If there is likely to be uncertainty about paying for things, the captain and crew should discuss this before invitations are accepted. An agreement about who pays for what supports good feelings. The boat owner is expected to supply a properly equipped boat. The crew doesn't pay for the boat, but should be considerate. During a trip, expenses of food, drink, docking, mooring, and fuel might be shared in different ways. Sometimes one person purchases provisions and another the drinks. At other times expenses are pooled and accounted for during or after the trip. The crew person who wants to be invited again is well served to be confident the captain is happy about how expenses are shared.

☺ After dinner ashore, the crew picked up the check, the captain felt appreciated.

**Yacht Clubs** Guests at a yacht club should be attentive to rules that may not be obvious. Before going into the club or bar make sure it is appropriate. Usually guests should be accompanied by a member and the member is almost always responsible for the guest. Please be considerate and act appropriately. If your host isn't there when you arrive don't assume you can just enter and act like a member. It is better to call your host so you can learn the right way to proceed. At some yacht clubs a guest needs to wait outside or in a common area until their host arrives. Don't walk on the dock or get onto a boat until it is clear that you have authorization. The "permission to come aboard" question is suitable especially the first time you visit. Normally it isn't appropriate to walk on a finger pier that isn't associated with "your" boat.

- ▼ Pelagic guests entered a yacht club while the boat owner was working on his/her boat. Later, a flag officer reminded the skipper that guests do not have "Free range" within their yacht club.

**Bills and Tips** Remember that the bar tender or launch driver is working for very low wages and often only getting them on weekends for a few weeks in the summer. Unless a tip is included in the bill or if the protocol says not to tip, you should give a decent tip. At bars and restaurants 15% to 20% is normal. On launches it varies but a couple of dollars per person per ride or \$5 for a group is a good guideline. When figuring the tip consider any extra service provided such as refills of water/soda or separate bills.

- ☺ A captain routinely tipped the launch driver. During a storm when the captain was not around, the launch driver went beyond the call of duty to protect the captain's boat.
- ▼ A guest thought a yacht club bar tender did not do anything to deserve a tip. The server complained to his parent, an officer of the club, that un-invited people were using club facilities.

**Gear to Bring** Balance bringing all the gear you can think of with space and weight considerations. It is reasonable to expect weather to change, so it is good to have layers of clothing to handle rain, sun, cold, and heat. Soft-sided duffel bags or easily storable luggage are preferred.

- ☺ Crew brought provisions in cloth grocery bags that did not lose strength when they got wet in the dinghy, folded into a small space and were useful for organizing gear later in the trip.
- ▼ A crew person brought a large suitcase on a cruise that was continually in the way.
- ▼ A crew brought several large bags for a day trip, so loading and unloading the boat took some humor.

**Safety Briefing** The captain gives a safety briefing before departing. This includes use of life jackets, location of fire extinguishers, Lifesling, and use of the radio. The crew pays attention. We all hope there is not a need to use safety equipment.

**Provisions** The boat owner pays for purchasing, and maintaining the boat. Often the crew supplies most of the food and drinks. Consuming food and drink stowed on the boat is fine but the crew should replace it and perhaps leave a little more than was there at the start of the trip. The galley features vary significantly from boat to boat. You might ask how much space is available and whether a stove, grill, ice box, or refrigerator are on board. For longer cruises, consider meal planning and a detailed shopping list. There should be an understanding before any major voyage.

- ☺ Crew that brings memorable cuisine is usually remembered favorably.
- ☺ Let people know if you have allergies or food/drink preferences and plan accordingly.
- ▼ A skipper who invited crew to his boat for several group sails was disappointed to serve food and beverage that crew consumed but did not reciprocate.

**Supplies** A discussion of what other supplies are needed improves the cruise. It is frustrating to get to a nice anchorage and not have the gear you need to prepare, cook, serve or consume a meal. It helps to have a check list including pots, pans, plates, silverware, storage boxes/bags, spices, butter/oil, meals, snacks, and fuel.

**Overnight Trips** Determine what is needed for bedding, pillow, towels and toiletries. It is best to communicate clearly what is on the boat and what you should bring. Discuss where your berth will be and where to store your gear. Inform others if you have any special needs such as medications, allergies, snoring, etc.

**Guys & Dolls** A Club whose activities involve men and women who have been briefly introduced spending a weekend alone together on a small boat inevitably has some incidents

euphemistically described as “he said; she said”. Each gender has a role in promoting pleasant interactions.

- ▼ She is upset because she thought he was “coming on to her” when he put his arm around her during happy hour. She has a vivid memory of the incident. He does not remember it.
- ▼ As captain, she thought she gave an order to do “X”. Somehow, he did not do “X”. She was upset, feeling that her authority was being ignored. He did not recall her asking him to do “X”.
- ▼ Two women discussing what to do felt interrupted by a guy who thought he was agreeing with them when he said great – let’s do that. The women were upset because they were just getting started with the fun of talking about the choices.
- ☺ She likes sailing. He has a nice boat. They are happy together.
- ☺ Two women tell the guy on board they want to do all the activities of sailing, so he should be less helpful. Later, a situation requiring some muscle came up and they were pleased he dealt with it.

**Alcohol/ Smoking** Consumption of alcohol should be discussed before the trip. Many boats have a standard of no alcohol until the boat is moored or docked. It is best to understand this prior to the trip. If you smoke find out ahead of time if smoking is permitted on the boat.

- ▼ A skipper who liked the sauce gained a reputation for being too tipsy.
- ▼ A person who showed personality changes after drinking found their personality was not admired.

**File for Life** Everyone is encouraged to use the “File For Life” that informs appropriate people for a better response in case of a medical issue, allergy or other safety matter. Many skippers request crew give them a File For Life before departing. It is available in printed form and from the Pelagic website. With the \*.PDF version, fields can be filled in by computer and saved for future trips. Typically a printed copy is placed in a sealed envelope with your name and File for Life in large, bold print on both sides of the envelope. This gives privacy and accessibility. Let the appropriate people know where your File for Life is located.

**Underway** Share the wheel. Others on the boat may want a chance to steer as well. At the helm, it is your responsibility to hold a course, keep the sails full, and avoid obstacles. Do not be so absorbed in conversation that you stray off course. If the boat owner or other crew correct your course multiple times, it suggests you are not adequately focused on helmsman duties. You should either pay more attention or relinquish the wheel.

Your cruise companions may have triggered interesting conversation, but do not be a conversation hog. Be aware that some people enjoy the tranquility of a vessel under sail. Respect their quiet time.

Respect the equipment to which you have access. Before using the dinghy, look carefully at a chart before “exploring”. Ask the boat owner about any rules regarding use before taking off. If you have been warned to stay in certain areas and away from certain hazards, respect the boat owner's wishes and concerns on the first warning. Do not wait for a second warning; or ignore the boat owner's concerns thinking they are just being over cautious. The boat owner usually knows a lot about their equipment and likely is familiar with the area. It is not up to crew to determine that a lobster pot line is not likely to hook the prop or the rudder. If there are problems, the boat owner will be left with the damaged prop or rudder or centerboard, extra expenses, and down time for repairs.

- ▼ The skipper pointed to a lobster buoy ahead. The helmsman said they saw it and then ran it over.
- ▼ A crew enthusiastically using the winch to trim the sails dropped the winch handle overboard.

**Head:** Some Pelagic boat owners require that men sit for the entire performance. Even if a guy has perfect aim, if he is standing, the airborne stream produces small urine droplets that float in the air and land on surfaces in the head. In a marine environment, these act as fertilizer to stimulate the growth of odor-producing bugs. Some Pelagic boat owners have a small waste basket near the head for toilet paper and other paper products so they are never flushed into the boat's holding tank.

☺ After sailing, very helpful crew can put on rubber gloves and spray the head, floor, walls and vanity with mold & mildew remover, then wipe the surfaces with paper towels to remove dirt and the remains of now-dead organisms. This is NOT a pleasant chore, but it helps reduce foul smells.

**Boat Work** A couple of days of volunteer work is expected of Pelagic crew each year. Typically a friendly helper later gets an invitation for a sail, not as any kind of payment but because after working together, people know each other better, and nice actions tend to be reciprocated. A boat owner should let the helpers know what sort of work will be done so they can bring appropriate gear. The boat owner should be prepared with supplies, but we all know that sometimes we need to get something during the working day. Some people are good at rigging, others at cleaning and others at painting. Balance the skills of the helper with the tasks that need to be completed.

▼ A volunteer said they would help put a winter cover on the boat, but then did not appear.

☺ While sailing, a crew offered to help the boat owner with next spring's commissioning.

**Guests** If a non-Pelagic member sails on a Pelagic boat, they should bring a "File For Life", and get a briefing about what is expected - following instructions, gear, safety, length of trip, etc. The skipper evaluates their skill level and plans accordingly.

**Attitude** The most important thing we have is a good attitude. A boat owner/skipper should appreciate the help they are getting. The crew should help out, be fun and bring or do something that makes them get invited back. When everyone is happy, Pelagic's goals are met.

The intent behind listing topics and examples is to increase everyone's enjoyment of Pelagic activities by describing typical expectations. The above are not "rules", but are suggestions to help us all have a good time together.