

HOW TO GET ON THE CAPTAIN'S TABLE

According to Andrea M Rotondo, *Luxury Cruise Bible*

Some cruisers couldn't care less about snagging a seat at the Captain's table, while others covet the honour. Ships' captains – and all senior officers, for that matter – are generally very engaging people with fascinating adventures to share. That's one of the reasons travellers feel compelled to wish for that special invitation to appear at their stateroom door. It probably feels like you need to know some secret handshake, and it's true that cruise lines do keep their criteria hush-hush. That being said, here are a few things that may count in your favour.

Firstly, cruise often. Loyal guests are often selected for pre-dinner drinks and dinner with the Captain. However, don't despair, newbies: some cruise lines also randomly select first-time cruisers. Secondly, book a posh (and expensive) suite. VIPs who've booked – and paid for – uppermost suite categories definitely rank. Sorry, category bumps from the upgrade fairy won't count! Celebrate a milestone: honeymooners and those toasting big anniversaries or retirements often break bread with the Captain.

Do you have something in common with the skipper? Maybe you work in the maritime industry, serve in the navy, captain your own boat, or hail from the same hometown. Tell the cruise director or send the captain a note. He may be thrilled to sit down with someone who shares his occupation or hobbies.

Lastly, be witty, charming or just downright nice. Striking up an interesting conversation with the right person – say the cruise director or social hostess – can be all it takes to get in on the Captain's-table action.



HOW TO MEET PEOPLE ONBOARD

According to Jennie Bond

1 Don't be shy – start up the conversation at the first dinner by asking questions. Everyone loves talking about themselves and, hopefully, you'll soon find something in common with the rest of the table.

2 Don't be tempted to stay in your cabin all day. Sit in public areas, even if you just want to read a book. You'll find that people passing by will often stop for a chat, or you'll meet other bookworms who'll want to talk literature with you.

3 Jump in that Jacuzzi! I defy anyone to sit in a tub of bubbling, steaming water and ignore the people you're sharing it with. I've had many an enjoyable natter in Jacuzzis, and stayed so long I looked like a prune when I got out.

4 Join in some of the activities, especially the dance classes. You can get up close and tango or have a laugh at a line-dance.

5 Leave your inhibitions behind. When you hear those karaoke chords strike up in the bar, get yourself down there and sign on to sing loud. Your fellow passengers will love you for having a go, no matter how bad you are. Believe me – I've been there, done it and got the T-shirt!

