



Social Interaction Matters (SIM) Project Report Phase Two – Executive Summary

Social interaction at sea: working practices and the impact on seafarers' mental health and wellbeing

A report on live trials on board 21 vessels trading worldwide



Executive summary

This research was funded by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and the Red Ensign Group (REG), who sponsored the project with the help of Trinity House and funding from the UK Government. The report details the findings from phase two of the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network's (ISWAN) Social Interaction Matters (SIM) Project and builds on the findings from phase one, including unprecedented research into the social side of life at sea.

The research obtained and examined first-hand accounts from seafarers to explore the impacts, drivers and barriers of social interaction whilst living and working on board. The recommendations, conclusions and guidance are underpinned from substantial research conducted with the participation of 21 vessels, from 10 different shipping companies operating worldwide.

Phase two of the SIM Project was conducted from November 2020 to January 2022, a period which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic's influence was pervasive and impacted both how the research was carried out and the findings themselves. Whilst many of the issues discussed in this research existed prior to the pandemic, they were exacerbated by the circumstances and pressures experienced during this time and further help to emphasise the value of the data findings.

Reflecting the project's diversity, various data collection methods were employed, including four pilot trials, a weekly crew wellbeing assessment survey, daily and activity logs, Ambassador's exit interviews, and an 'Ambassador's Round Table' discussion. The research recognises and reinforces the importance of seafarers socially interacting and getting to know one another better.

The project findings show that social interaction facilitates a mental reset and rest from work. It promotes the development of stronger relationships between crewmates, nurturing familiarity and trust, which in turn facilitates improved team cohesion, motivation, mental health and safety outcomes.

Headline findings:

- **Social interaction is important for seafarer mental health and encourages positive relationships between crew, which form an intrinsic part of a strong on board safety culture.**
- **Engaged and visible leadership, which displays empathetic people skills, is vital to support and provide 'permission' for crew to participate in social activities.**
- **Crew mood on board is highly susceptible to external influences.**
 - **Positive changes to mood on board** are linked to supportive leadership, social activities, competitions, sufficient rest time, reliable and adequate access to Wi-Fi, good food, celebration of special occasions, and a diverse and inclusive environment on board.
 - **Negative changes to mood on board** are linked to frequent port calls, fatigue, bad weather, poor or no Wi-Fi access, and not having enough time to socialise with crew mates.
- **Separation of work and rest time on board is important** and these boundaries should be clearly established and maintained because of the detrimental impact to seafarer wellbeing if they are not.
- **Favourite activities on board** include barbeques, table tennis, basketball, gaming (e.g. Play Station 4), and celebrating occasions such as birthdays and religious holidays.

The project recommends the appointment of a voluntary Social Ambassador on board every vessel to help convene social activities and promote crew engagement. The Ambassador should:

- Reflect and respond to the crew's preferences for their recreation time.
- Encourage a variety of social activities to provide a healthy balance of mental and physical stimulation.
- Plan social events proactively in response to varying workloads and, where possible, advertise them in advance.
- Initiate ice-breaker activities for newly joined crew.
- Consider the safety of activities and the ongoing maintenance of associated facilities and equipment.

More generally the project recommends that:

- Shipping companies, charterers and crew managers should actively and visibly support their seafarers to relax and interact with each other during their rest time.
- Leadership on board and from the shore management team should be actively and empathetically engaged in the promotion of social interaction. Ongoing leadership training should be provided to facilitate this where necessary.
- Free Wi-Fi services should be made available to all crew to stay in touch with family and friends, and to provide access to online entertainment and social media.
- Recreation facilities and equipment available on board should be frequently reviewed by the company to ensure their compatibility with the crew's preferences.
- Further research into the effects of fatigue and tiredness, and their impact on seafarer mental health, should be conducted.

The research concludes that encouraging crew to get to know each other through social interaction will help to build stronger relationships, promote mental health, improve performance and contribute to a strong safety culture where crew care about what happens to each other. Leadership support ashore and on board is vital to realising these benefits.

A set of actionable guidance and recommendations were developed from the phase one and two research findings and an 'Activities Focus Group' hosted by ISWAN following the phase two trials. These can be used by shipping companies and seafarers to help promote a varied programme of social events, tailored to different crew needs and diversities, and different voyage plans and vessel specifications.

The SIM Project has provided a unique and privileged insight into seafaring on board a range of commercial merchant ships and has demonstrated the importance of social interaction and the value of crew getting to know one another. The project has shown that crew should be encouraged to interact daily, and that even small amounts of social time make a significant difference to overall wellbeing. Greater emphasis on separating the boundaries between work and rest time is needed, along with promotion of social activities which help crew to relax together, have fun and take some respite from their working day. Vessels that supported their crew in this were able to mitigate the effects of long hours, numerous port calls and other factors that otherwise lowered mood. The SIM Project phase two therefore confirms emphatically that *Social Interaction Matters*.

Key research findings

Executive summary continued...

The findings from the SIM Project largely come from the lived experience of the participating seafarers and the information reported by them in the weekly wellbeing surveys and the Ambassadors' daily logs.

Social interaction is important for good mental health. Regular engagement with colleagues through shared activities and socialising together encourages crew to get to know one another and to feel valued as individuals. It provides an outlet to life on board besides work.

Leadership, and empathetic people skills, are vital to support and encourage crew to engage in social activities together. On-going training to develop these skills should be provided for managers on shore and at sea, and for those moving into those positions.

Crew mood is highly susceptible to external influences such as weather, number of port calls, good and bad news, Wi-Fi and connectivity, quality and availability of food, and medical emergencies (amongst others).

- **Positive changes to the mood on board have significant links to:** supportive leadership, planned activities, competitions, sufficient rest time, reliable and adequate access to Wi-Fi (allowing regular conversations with family and friends), good food, celebration of special occasions, and a diverse and inclusive environment on board. These drivers of social interaction should be developed and instigated wherever possible to support positive seafarer mental health and wellbeing.
- **Negative changes to the mood on board have significant links to:** frequent port calls or port calls in quick succession (including drifting whilst waiting for berth and numerous berth moves in one port), fatigue, bad weather, poor or no Wi-Fi access, and not having enough time to socialise with one another. These barriers to social interaction should be considered carefully and, where possible, improved; or where this is not feasible, mitigated to avoid negative impacts on seafarer mental health and wellbeing.

On board, there is a blurring of work and rest-time which has been accentuated as a result of restrictions due to COVID-19. Conversations during off-duty hours often revert to the topic of work, and sometimes the demands of the job mean that crew are left too tired to interact with each other following their shifts. The SIM trials showed a direct correlation between crew who were able to engage with each other recreationally – e.g. through a basketball game, party, or karaoke – and increased good mood and wellbeing.

Getting to know one another is important for protecting mental health and promoting safer working practices on board, so that crewmates get to know one another outside of a purely working relationship. As well as improving team-working and helping to identify individual strengths and weaknesses; it helps to build familiarity and respect for each other and increases the likelihood of noticing when someone is struggling. Social interaction facilitates and strengthens this ability to connect.

Favourite activities on board included barbeques, table tennis, basketball, gaming (e.g. PS4), and celebrating occasions such as birthdays and religious holidays. Competitions encouraged more crew to engage in activities, and also provided the opportunity for different vessels to compete against each other and feel part of a wider social community. These activities helped to generate greater camaraderie on board and a sense of belonging and being valued. These attributes improve crew mental health and motivation on board.

Project conclusions

Executive summary continued...

Social interaction

The Social Interaction Matters (SIM) Project phase two research emphasises the importance of crew getting to know each other on board through social interaction. This is particularly valuable wherever there is a regular turnover of crew, who may be strangers when they join the vessel. The SIM Project research has confirmed that social interaction aids the building of relationships, promotes good mental health and performance, and thus develops safety culture on board. The project concludes that appointing the role of a Social Ambassador encourages greater crew engagement with one another, both formally and informally, and provides the opportunity to reflect on what helps to facilitate social interaction and what changes in mood occur following certain activities. This information can be used to develop a social programme on board accordingly. Even the most minimal of efforts invested in this role were shown to be effective. Positive leadership, which supports and approves social interaction, is therefore vital for encouraging crew to participate and engage with activities.

There were many informal daily activities taking place on board which proved to be important for building stronger relationships, as with those which were formally arranged. It was clear that activities did not always have to be planned or cost money to provide a benefit to wellbeing, and in some cases, they did not require facilities or equipment. Impromptu get-togethers, although ad hoc by nature, worked well and when time was limited, just ensuring that people came together to talk proved valuable. Mealtimes and coffee breaks acted as focal points for this because they provided opportunities for crew to naturally convene. Making the most of these communal times to instigate discussions therefore has a positive impact and can help those on board to learn more about each other. They should be promoted and supported, particularly by the Social Ambassador and senior officers.

The SIM Project demonstrated that allowing crew to communicate frequently with their families and friends at home is another form of essential interaction. During the COVID-19 pandemic the importance of this was amplified, and opportunities to connect often helped to raise crew spirits and alleviate anxieties. This connection with the outside world could result in the opposite effect if bad news was received, but nevertheless seafarers intrinsically need to communicate with loved ones and should be supported in this by the provision of free company internet access.

Leadership

The visible engagement of leadership with the rest of the crew was shown to help enforce and support social interaction, and to develop a safer, more inclusive culture on board. Leadership engagement with arranged activities indicated approval for the crew to relax and enjoy themselves during their rest time. The Ambassadors' logs indicated that when interest from the office was shown, and praise given, it demonstrated to the crew that the company cared about their wellbeing. This in turn motivated the crew and increased happiness on board. It is in the interests of employers to implement policies and practices which promote good mental health and mitigate the effects of work-related stressors wherever possible. On board leadership that re-enforces this is vital, and support from the shore office also works in the same way. A leadership team, both at sea and on shore, that works well together provides the best all-round support for the crew.

A change of leader on board can be a high-risk time for crew mental health as they adjust to the new style of leadership and expectations. When a master changes, it is important that they are sensitive to the needs of the crew, that their communications are clear, and that their expectations are clearly expressed. Alongside this, the crew should always be made aware of the

support available to them and trained to look for warning signs that someone might be struggling. Notices which detail internal company support networks, company policies and Employee Assistance Programmes should be on permanent display in communal areas of the vessel.¹

Recreation facilities

Every vessel in the SIM trials had at least some recreation facilities available on board. However, the trials showed that not all of these were used, and activities often took place which did not require the facilities provided, either because they used different facilities or none at all. This indicates the need for review of recreation provisions, which should take into account the crew's cultural preferences and consider the recreation items they actually want. The company can then make appropriate investments in such facilities, rather than assuming or taking a standardised approach.

Fatigue

Fatigue had a notably negative impact on social interaction during the trials, with many crew preferring to go straight to their cabins when tired instead of getting together socially. Ensuring that fatigue does not become a health and safety hazard is ultimately the responsibility of the master, so this issue is often managed very carefully on board. Making sure that crew have time to interact with each other during meal and break times when they are too tired for planned social activities, is very important in these situations and will help them to feel supported and cared for.

COVID-19 pandemic

The negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on crew was evidenced throughout the logs of every SIM Project Ambassador. Increased anxiety about family and friends at home, health concerns for themselves and loved ones, confusion around conflicting regulations in different countries, lack of access to vaccinations, the appearance of new variants, and sharply rising case numbers all increased seafarer stress and anxiety. Additionally, the humanitarian crisis attributed to the lack of crew changes and indefinitely extended contracts, uncertainty about returning to work after leaving the ship, and little to no shore leave, has made seafaring during COVID-19 a challenge to say the very least.

Bringing crew together to discuss their concerns with each other and any COVID-19 news that they may have had from home, helped to alleviate some of these tensions. Planning social events on board and participating in competitions also helped to divert stressful thoughts for a while and put the focus on something fun for a change. These interactions, however small, helped the crew to feel more united, supported, and valued by their company.

Work and rest boundaries

Increasingly there is a blurring of work and rest time on board. Many factors contribute to this such as heavy work schedules and the accompanying paperwork, reduced crew numbers, requests from the shoreside office, COVID-19, inspections, audits, and numerous port calls. Seafarers, like anyone working on shore, still require a healthy work/life balance to be well, but unfortunately this is often harder to achieve at sea where crew are on call 24 hours a day.

Mental and physical health must be maintained at all times to ensure both seafarer personal safety and that of the vessel. Ensuring that rest time is spent focusing on enjoyment, relaxation and recuperation should result in seafarers experiencing an improved ability to operate well and safely on their next period of duty. Being provided with adequate time and connectivity to enjoy socialising with peers, as well as family and friends at home, encourages a much-needed shift in focus away from work and plays a vital part in promoting mental wellbeing.

Greater attention needs to be placed on improving the 'rest' side of being at sea. The SIM Project phase two concludes that social interaction for seafarers is more critical now than ever before, and that problem areas, where the boundaries between work and rest are compromised, need urgent attention, before mental health issues become a significant occupational hazard.

1. External sources of support for seafarers [such as ISWAN's free, confidential, 24-hour helplines SeafarerHelp and Yacht Crew Help] can also be signposted to. The contact channels are at the end of section 4.0.

4.0 Guidance and recommendations for crews and shipping companies

During the Social Interaction Matters (SIM) Project trials (phase two), many activities were identified from the Ambassadors' logs that helped to engage the crew and bring people together. These activities were sometimes formalised and planned as events, requiring time to prepare and execute. Other activities were spontaneous and ad hoc, requiring no planning. Certain activities needed recreation facilities to take place but there were also many that required none.

The use of technology and Wi-Fi on board remains a contentious issue. Some feel that they cannot interact without it, whereas others believe that it is causing crews to become more isolated from each other. The report discusses the importance of providing good connectivity on board but, ultimately it is important that a balance is struck between engaging with technology and engaging with other seafarers. Additionally, technology can also be used for, or as part of, social interaction, as some of the activities proposed in this guidance show. Technology can provide different opportunities to interact, away from traditional board games for example.

The benefits of appointing a social Ambassador on board for the initiation of and engagement with social activities was emphasised by the research. During the SIM trials, this role was always voluntary and tended to be given to an enthusiastic individual who enjoyed convening people. Most of the SIM Ambassadors were senior officers, although this does not need to be the case. However, it is important that they always have the support of the senior officers, who should also aim to engage in activities with the rest of the crew as much as possible. Even minimum effort from the Sea Ambassador was shown to be effective in bringing people together and improving the mood on board.

The following actionable guidance and recommendations present a range of activities that can help to bring crew together and can be used in different situations on board. These have been developed from the SIM Project phase two trials, and further endorsed and expanded through the findings from the 'Social Activities On Board' focus group held by ISWAN in February 2022. As well as considering space restrictions on board, the activities take into account different scenarios that a vessel and crew might be undergoing, such as poor or good weather conditions, port calls, long navigation times, and hot or cold climates. Rather than produce guidance based on vessel type, the proposed activities are instead recommended by a crew's access to communal spaces and facilities required, which makes them more adaptable to any seagoing vessel. Each activity specifies what type of space and facility is required to undertake it.

These guidance and recommendations can form a stand-alone document. If you are reading this section independently, please note that the main report can be found via [this link](#) and provides further context and academic justification for the following.

Guidance to support or enhance crew experience of living and working together on board:

- 1 Social Ambassador** – The shore-based leadership teams and/or senior officers on board should assign a Social Ambassador to help manage activities. All leadership should encourage crew to engage with this Ambassador and help them to recognise the advantages of creating this role on board. Ideally, the Ambassador should volunteer for the role or be voted as suitable by their peers.
- 2 Nationality** – Consider the crew's cultural mix which can determine the types of activities they like to engage with. When a Social Ambassador is nominated, the shore based management teams should help to equip them with the necessary skills for this role and encourage them to ask for suggestions and ideas to understand what the crew enjoy doing in their rest time.
- 3 Engaged leadership** – Senior officers should be supportive of developing an on board culture that encourages social interaction. All leadership teams, both on board and ashore, should be encouraged to regularly discuss the wellbeing of the crew and recognise its importance in the overall performance of the vessel – particularly in relation to crew harmony, cohesion and ultimately safety.
- 4 When to initiate activities** – Activities must take the vessel's voyage plan into account and be organised when they can have the most impact to lift the mood on board, for example, following an inspection or port call. Plan accordingly and invite the rest of the crew to comment on the suggestions. Having a work planner is considered essential for crew who are well used to thinking ahead. A social planner will be a natural extension of this and will help to generate motivation for events and avoid crew missing opportunities to connect.
- 5 Compliance with company policies** – Whilst selecting any of the activities suggested below, always ensure that they comply with your company policies beforehand. Not all of the activities maybe suitable for your vessel but many can certainly be adapted to suit most circumstances.

Social Activities

There are many positives to seafarers interacting together. Often when crews join a new vessel, they will not know each other, although exceptions can be seen in smaller fleets or where stable crewing is implemented.

The benefits of social interaction and getting to know everyone on board include:

- Improved mental and physical health.
- Getting to know the people you work with.
- Building trust and good relationships.
- Building strong teams.
- Encouraging familiarity.
- Helping to integrate new joiners quickly.
- Improved mood and morale on board.
- Development towards an improved safety culture.
- Increased likelihood of crewmates noticing if someone is struggling or not behaving like themselves.

Recommended social activities are discussed in the following section and are structured into the following categories:

- 1 Sporting**
- 2 Food and drink**
- 3 Other entertainment**
- 4 Technology**
- 5 Relaxing and calming**

Facilitating a variety of different activities will provide the best mental and physical stimulation. Depending on the weather and time available, activities can be selected from the suggestions below to provide entertaining, enjoyable, relaxing, and sometimes challenging, ways to unwind and enjoy leisure time on board. The activities suggested are designed to provide ideas and can be selected to suit the current vessel schedule and crew mood. They are presented in alphabetical order.

Sporting activities

Exercise and keeping fit plays an important role in maintaining physical as well as mental health. Sports games are particularly good for initiating competitions and providing a great way of staying fit. The SIM Project phase one findings showed that

outside activities are generally preferred over inside ones, helping to refresh body and mind. The following sporting activities will help both to increase fitness but provide entertainment with others.

1. Sporting activities

Activity	Conditions	Space required	Facilities	Preparation time
Basketball	Good weather, calm seas	Deck space	Basketball & hoop (& netting if available)	None or up to an hour if part of the league game
	Basketball is a popular team sport with seafarers, which lends itself well to being played as a competition. It promotes strenuous physical activity, and it can be played successfully on deck with the use of netting to stop the ball going over the side.			
Boxing	Good weather, calm seas	On deck	Boxing gloves	None
	Boxing provides good cardiovascular exercises and increases strength. It can take place on deck with boxing gloves and a sparring partner.			
Cricket	Good weather, calm seas	Clean, empty hold	Cricket bats ball and wicket	10 minutes
	Cricket games are possible on board bulk carriers that have been discharged and have a clean, empty cargo hold. This is more convenient than playing on deck where the ball is likely to disappear!			
Dancing	Good weather, calm seas	Communal area such as mess or game room	Music and speakers	Minimal
	Dancing is great for the mind and body, and good music often gets people up onto their feet. The SIM trial logs recorded some impromptu dancing on board and at some of the planned parties. Dancing can be encouraged by getting crew to select some of their favourite dance tracks for a playlist.			
Darts	Good weather, calm seas	Communal area such as mess or game room	Dart board and darts	None
	Darts was one of the most popular sports on board. The equipment takes up very little space and is suitable for crew at any level of fitness.			
Gym	Any, although calmer seas better	Dedicated gym room or a space for a few gym facilities	A range of gym equipment for strength & cardio	None
	All SIM trial vessels had a gym on board. These were frequently used and crew often worked out together when off duty.			
Table tennis	Good weather, calm seas	Communal area such as mess or game room	Table tennis table, nets, bats, and balls	5 minutes
	Table tennis is a popular indoor sport played on board and can easily be made into a tournament to encourage greater participation.			
Steps	Any, although calmer seas better	Stairs on the vessel	None	None
	Walking up and down steps is very good exercise and help to build up strength and cardiovascular fitness over time. Use of various equipment around the vessel can be an option for step exercising.			
Swimming/ dipping	Good weather, calm seas	Deck space	A fixed swimming pool, or giant free standing paddling pool	As required
	Swimming and splashing around in water are a great way to relax with crewmates in warmer weather. Pools can usually be filled using sea water from the fire mains, but the water does need to be changed after a few days to keep it clean. Cargo holds filled with ballast water can also be an option when deemed safe.			
Walking	Good weather, calm seas	Deck space	None	None
	Walking is gentle but good exercise to help keep the body mobile. Crew can take walks together around a large deck space.			

Additionally...

The use of league tables and creating prizes and trophies works well for competitions and tournaments. If you can, let the office team know about such events, and if your company has social media channels, post the results and images to encourage your colleagues to join in and promote your ship. Raising money for charity can also be a useful way to motivate others to join in and maintain continuity of effort.

Food and drink activities

As well as being a daily necessity, during busy schedules food can sometimes provide the only opportunity for people to come together. As a bare minimum, sitting down with others at

mealtimes and engaging in conversations (particularly when non-work related) can help crew to learn more about each other and provide a much-needed opportunity to relax.

2. Food and drink activities

Activity	Conditions	Space required	Facilities	Preparation time
Barbeques (if permitted on board)	Good weather, calm seas	Deck space	Barbeque and fuel	Preparation of barbeque foods
	Barbeques are very popular in good weather and gather many of the crew together. They provide a great way to socialise outside, with minimal cooking on the chef's part.			
Celebration cakes	Any, although calmer seas better	A mess room or other communal space to eat cake	The necessary ingredients	Recipe dependant
	Celebrating special occasions such as birthdays, promotions or a job well-done are a great opportunity to make individuals feel valued and their achievements recognised. Our research showed a direct correlation between receiving praise and improved crew mood. And for the rest of the crew – who doesn't like eating cake?!			
Celebration meals	Any, although calmer seas better	A mess room or other communal space to eat together	The necessary ingredients	Recipe dependant
	Recognising different cultural occasions helps a mixed nationality crew to feel valued and more at home. Celebration meals can be planned for cultural events like Christmas dinner, Diwali, Italian Republic Day feast, Day of the Seafarer, and many more.			
Coffee/tea break times	Any	Communal space to drink and talk	Kettle, tea, coffee and biscuits	5 minutes
	Drinking tea and coffee together is an easy way to interact on board and find out more about other crew, and requires no advance planning. Best practice suggests that when senior officers join the coffee breaks of different departments on a regular basis, it helps to build trust and co-operation between crew and on board leadership.			
Cooking different cultural dishes	Any, although calmer seas better	The galley	The necessary ingredients	Recipe dependant
	Adapting the menu on board to reflect crew nationalities provides the opportunity for different cultural dishes to be shared and enjoyed by all. It can help to generate conversations and can be advertised in advance as something to look forward to. Crew could help the cook to work out the meal plan for the cultural night in question.			
Eating meals together	Any	Mess room	The necessary ingredients	Menu dependant
	When time is short and crew are tired, eating together still provides the opportunity to interact together in any weather. More can be made of mealtimes generally, such as encouraging conversations or starting an impromptu game of cards at the table following the meal for example.			
Steak nights, pizza night, etc.	Any	Mess room	The necessary ingredients	Menu dependant
	Many of the SIM trial crews looked forward to a planned special meal together at least once a week. These included steak nights, pizza nights and 'Biryani Sundays' – but almost any favoured meal would work well for this. Planning is important to ensure that necessary ingredients can be purchased.			
Swap the cook for a senior officer/master for example	Any, although calmer seas better	A mess room or other communal space to eat together	The necessary ingredients	Recipe dependant
	A 'cook swap' provides the opportunity for other crew members to show off their culinary talents and introduce others to their favourite dish – perhaps with a particular meaning or memory attached to it – and can help to stimulate conversation about home life and traditions, and encourage closer bonds. This also allows the cook a break.			

Additionally...

- Adding food and drink treats to any activity will turn it into more of an occasion. For example, popcorn with a film night or pizza with a televised sporting event.
- Acknowledging special or cultural occasions with a cake or party food will help to make individuals feel special and valued and encourage others to gather for the celebration.
- Barbeques offer cooks the opportunity to join in with the event as they only need to prepare the food but do not necessarily have to cook it.

Other recreational activities

There are so many different activities that can take place on board. The ones suggested below need very little preparation time and would therefore work well for impromptu get togethers. Some of

the activities in this section, such as hair cutting and fussball, do not involve many people but they are still valuable sources of social interaction and can contribute to offering a boarder range of activities.

3. Other recreational activities

Activity	Conditions	Space required	Facilities	Preparation time
Bingo/lotto	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	bingo draw	Minimal
Bingo and lotto are easily understood, and therefore inclusive, games which can be played with many participants. During the SIM trials, some vessels introduced these as a weekly planned event complete with prizes.				
Board games	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	A table and chairs	None
Providing crew with a selection of popular board games is an easy way to facilitate social interaction between two or more players. Crew could be encouraged by shore-based management to recommend their favourites, to ensure preferences are met.				
Cards	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	A table and chairs	None
There are many different card games and the possibilities for entertainment are endless. Crew can take it in turns to select and teach different games of their choosing, with the additional option to play for small stakes.				
Film nights	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	TV or DVD player	Minimal
Crew can take in turns to choose the film they would like to watch.				
Fishing ²	At anchor	Various places on deck	Fishing rod, bait and bucket	Minimal
Fishing can be a relaxing pastime that is sometime rewarded with a fish or two. During the SIM trials, fishing often took place when the vessel was at anchor. When there was a catch, the cook could incorporate it into part of the meal.				
Fussball (table football)	Good weather, calm seas	Communal space	Fussball table	None
This game is for two to four players and can get quite intense and provide great entertainment. Fussball is easily turned into a competition.				
Hair cutting	Good weather, calm seas	Small areas	Chair, scissors and/or clippers, mirror and comb	Minimal
Haircutting was mentioned as a beneficial self-care activity in the SIM logs. After several months at sea, it is important to some seafarers that they have the opportunity to tidy themselves up with a haircut before returning home.				
Horse racing	Good weather, calm seas	Mess room or other communal space	A track (sometime made of cloth) and horses (often made with wooden pegs)	Minimal
Horse racing was mentioned many times in the SIM trial logs and helped to bring officers and ratings together. Horse racing is easy to set up and can provide a night's entertainment for all.				

2. Fish caught can make a tasty Barbeque or other meal prepared by the cook

Other recreational activities

Activity	Conditions	Space required	Facilities	Preparation time
Jamming sessions with musical instruments	Good weather, calm seas	Communal area big enough for at least four musicians (bigger if there is a drum kit)	Instruments that crew know how to play	Minimal
<p>There are often hidden talents on board and providing a few instruments (after consulting with crew to understand their abilities) can be a good way to bring out people's creativity and musical skills.</p>				
Karaoke	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	Karaoke machine	None
<p>Karaoke is a favourite on board and can be enjoyed as either a spontaneous get together or a planned event. Karaoke gives all the crew an opportunity to get involved and can make a good competition.</p>				
Led discussion groups	Any	Mess room or other communal space	No facilities but a willing group moderator or panellists are recommended	None
<p>During the SIM trials, examples of led discussion group topics included the COVID-19 situation and religious beliefs. Other suggestions are discussions based on a documentary watched together or article read. Crew can also be invited to make suggestions about topics they would like to discuss in future groups.</p>				
Sunbathing and relaxing	Good weather, calm seas	Deck space	Sun cream and towels	None
<p>Enjoying a sunny day with fellow crew presents a great opportunity to relax together, soak up some Vitamin D, and experience a shared sense of happiness.</p>				
Watching a box set or TV series together	Any	Mess room or other communal space	TV or DVD player	Minimal
<p>Great for escapism and generating conversation that isn't about work</p>				
Quizzes	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	Paper and pen for each team or participant	Quiz questions can be downloaded before sailing
<p>Quizzes are a great way to generate excitement and can give crew the chance to show off their general or specialist knowledge skills. Nominating different quiz masters each time will give the opportunity to design quizzes that appeal to a variety of interests and knowledge.</p>				

Activities using technology

There is an argument to say that technology isolates crew and prevents social interaction. However, many seafarers view technology as an essential part of modern seafaring life, and so it is in the best interests of a company to work with this

attitude rather than against it. With the right input, technology can be used imaginatively to promote interaction in certain situations and bring people together in a positive way. There is always a balance that can be struck to achieve this healthily.

4. Activities using technology

Activity	Conditions	Space required	Facilities	Preparation time
Computer games	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	Games console (e.g. PS4), choice of games, and controllers	None
	Although most computer games do not encourage physical activity, they can still provide good social interaction opportunities and therefore improve seafarer wellbeing. Many computer games can be setup to allow for multiple players and make for a fun and distracting respite from work.			
Multiplayer mobile games	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	Mobile device (e.g. phone or tablet) and relevant apps/ games	Minimal
	Many games can be downloaded onto an Android or iOS smartphone or tablet for free, e.g. Scrabble GO or Words With Friends, Kahoot (make your own quizzes), Heads Up! (within the House-party app), Ball Pool. Encouraging crew to select multi-player functions helps to facilitate social interaction and connection with others when playing.			
Participating in viral trends	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	Mobile device (optional: internet access for keeping up with trends and posting videos)	Minimal
	The rise in popularity of content-sharing apps like TikTok provides a great opportunity for crew to join in entertaining trends from across the globe. Such apps are popular amongst seafarers and are a great way for them to have some easy fun. Crew can get together to film a trending dance routine or challenge and share to social media if appropriate within company policy.			
Sea and ship photos to share/ send home	Any	Any	Mobile phone	None
	Being at sea provides the opportunity to photograph some unique, and often beautiful, scenery and wildlife. Seafarer photography can be made into a competition or developed into a shared-interest group – where the crew could tackle different subjects or photographic skills, such as night photography, portraits and seascapes.			
Vlogging	Any	Any depending on the video focus	Mobile phone	None
	Vlogging is an increasingly popular activity, especially amongst the digital generations. Encouraging crew to think of themes that capture their collective interests, or promoting company-wide ideas, can provide a good opportunity for competitions and inter-ship events.			
WhatsApp groups on board, with other vessels in the fleet	Any	Any	Mobile phone	Minimal
	WhatsApp groups can be used to stay in touch with different groups of people at home as well as on board. They can be set up to share event details and notifications about who is leading in a competition for example. They also provide a good way to share photos and video clips.			
Wii	Any, except very rough seas	Mess room or other communal space	Wii console	Minimal
	The Wii can be a multi-player computer game that can also include various sports where some activity is necessary. These can entertain as well as be competitive.			

Additionally...

- Activities and photos can be captured on phones and sent via WhatsApp groups to keep family and friends updated.
- Notably, the activities in this section can be carried out in most sea or weather states and with very little preparation, making these 'go to' activities when conditions deteriorate, or time is short.
- Technology can also be used to engage crew members in social activity planning, e.g. voting for favourite activities using polling apps or signing up to events via mobile.
- Posting on company-approved social media can provide a source of easy fun and interaction between crew members, families and different ships.

Relaxing and calming activities (for times of low energy or stress)

These activities will help to counter fatigue and refresh crew before or after stressful or tiring situations.

5. Relaxing and calming activities

Activity	Conditions	Space required	Facilities	Preparation time
Audio recordings to aid a good night's sleep	Good weather, calm seas	To accommodate number of participants. Comfortable space free from interruptions.	Audio recordings (e.g sleep stories, sleep podcasts, sleep sounds) and speakers. Something comfortable to sit or lie on e.g., chairs, sofa, bean bags. Low lighting if possible	None
Audio recordings developed specifically for meditation or sleep can help to ease those who have difficulty falling asleep into a calm and relaxed state. Ensuring audio is downloaded before leaving shore and encouraging crew on similar shift patterns to listen together as a group, can help to improve collective sleep hygiene routines. Take advantage of any company-provided health and wellbeing apps for supporting good sleep and stress management.				
Led meditation	Good weather, calm seas	To accommodate number of participants on mats. Comfortable space free from interruptions.	Yoga mats (or soft flooring) and someone to lead meditation	Minimal
Meditation was developed by monks and has a longstanding tradition for centring the body and mind and inducing a calm state. It can be used to help reduce stress and anxious thoughts and promote mindfulness.				
Listening to calming music	Good weather, calm seas	To accommodate number of participants. Comfortable space free from interruptions.	Music playlist and speakers. Something comfortable to sit or lie on e.g., chairs, sofa, bean bags	None
Regularly listening to calming music can reduce stress levels and release tension, which in turn can promote a better night's sleep. Crew can be invited to contribute their relaxing music choices to a group playlist, which can in turn facilitate an environment of interaction and 'coming together'.				
Sundowners (watching the sunset with drinks)	Good weather, calm seas	Deck space	Galley or bar to prepare drinks. Non-alcoholic, or alcoholic if provided. Comfortable chairs	10 minutes to prepare drinks
Watching a beautiful sunset across the water from the deck can be a relaxing and social experience. Sundowners provide the opportunity to have a drink with fellow crew whilst enjoying the scenery. Being in nature is known to benefit mental wellbeing, aid concentration, and increase positive emotions such as serenity and joy.				
Yoga	Good weather, calm seas	To accommodate number of participants on mats. Comfortable space free from interruptions.	Yoga mats (or soft flooring) and someone to lead yoga positions safely. Calming yoga music and speakers can make this a more relaxing experience	Minimal
Yoga is an ancient discipline that combines physical, mental and spiritual practices. It helps support stress management, mental health, mindfulness, strength and flexibility, and aids good quality sleep.				

Recommendations

Social interaction

- Appoint a voluntary social Ambassador³ on board each vessel to help arrange social events, gather ideas and feedback on these from the crew, and encourage maximum engagement and participation. The Social Ambassador should respond to the crew's social activity preferences and reflect on the success of past events to effectively develop future ones.
- Encourage a balance and variety of activities, taking into account the crew nationality mix and the voyage patterns of the vessel. Planned activities should be varied to ensure that there is something to interest everyone and that they provide the best mental and physical stimulation. Selecting a range of activities from the five categories in the Guidance and Recommendation section 4.0, can help to achieve this balance.
- Provide advanced notification of events to allow seafarers to anticipate and discuss them with others. A calendar to advertise upcoming social events can be shared with all crew in communal areas and can also be populated with crew birthdays, religious festivals and special dates, for example Day of the Seafarer.
- Plan social events sensitively to help provide respite following, for example, heavy workloads, long hours and bad news. Planning ahead can help to counter these tiring or stressful situations and provide activities which help the crew to relax and reset.
- Initiate ice-breaker activities for newly joined crew to help them integrate with their fellow crew more quickly. Ensure that a small social event happens within the first week of a crew change, whether it is to welcome ten new seafarers or only one.
- Use competitions to generate interest for certain activities and help increase activity participation over time. These can be arranged between crew on board, inter-fleet, with the shoreside office and even with other fleets. Awarding prizes can help to raise the stakes and further increase interest for the activity but are not essential.

- Always consider the safety aspects of different activities before they are initiated, and all equipment and facilities need to be thoroughly and correctly maintained with a servicing schedule (e.g. for gym equipment) where applicable.

Leadership

- Leadership on board must be visible and engaged, helping to establish a culture that promotes social interaction. It is recommended that social interaction, including the facilities needed to support it, is made a standing agenda item for senior leadership meetings which include the shore management team. In addition, meetings should be convened to discuss ideas, and workshops or seminars should be held to explore the importance of social interaction for mental health and wellbeing.
- Promote and encourage the importance of supportive leadership and good communication, both on board and from the shore office.
- Establish a strong company ethos and provide consistent messaging that seafarers' wellbeing matters.

General recommendations

- Shipping companies and charterers need to support their seafarers and take measures to ensure that they can adequately relax and interact with each other during their rest-time.
- Provide free and best possible Wi-Fi services to ensure seafarers can stay connected with those at home and the outside world.
- Consider the lessons learned throughout COVID-19 and be aware of the impact of allowing visitors on vessels during port calls. Promote awareness about the correct safety precautions to take.
- The data limitations⁴ identified in the SIM Project point to further research in these areas and more focused examination of certain findings, such as fatigue and its impact on mental health.

3. The role of a social Ambassador is discussed on page one of these guidance and recommendations.

4. Refer to data limitations in the Project methodology section.

Helplines

ISWAN's helplines offer free, 24-7, multilingual support and guidance to seafarers and their families in need.



SeafarerHelp

Email: help@seafarerhelp.org
SMS text: +44 (0) 7860 018 538
Skype: [info-seafarerhelp.org](https://www.skype.com/invite/info-seafarerhelp.org)
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