

become a ship's doctor

Questions and answers about working as a ship's doctor

1. How do I become a ship's doctor on a cruise ship?

Becoming a ship's doctor is not complicated. Here we outline a four-point plan on how you can become a ship's doctor. We definitely recommend attending a ship's doctor course to prepare yourself as well as possible for working as a ship's doctor.

2. Where can I apply to become a ship's doctor on a cruise ship?

You can apply directly to the shipping companies. However, this approach is often unsuccessful, as you will frequently receive no response. We recommend that you register in our ship's doctor directory. You will then receive regular offers for ship's doctor positions.

3. What are the qualifications required to work as a ship's doctor?

The requirements vary greatly from shipping company to shipping company, type of cruise ship, duration and area of deployment, and individual factors on board. Ideally, you are a general practitioner or emergency physician. However, as a surgeon or anesthetist, you also have a good chance of working as a ship's doctor. You should have the following qualifications:

- Completed medical degree and license to practice medicine (national).
- Specialization or relevant experience in emergency/general medicine or maritime medicine (optional, but advantageous).

Maritime-specific qualifications

- MFAS certificate (Medical First Aid and Safety at Sea) or equivalent training in medical care on board.
- STCW basic qualifications (Basic Safety Training): e.g., personal safety, firefighting, rescue measures, first aid.
- Maritime medical fitness examination/seafarer's medical certificate (required depending on the flag state).

Additional skills that are often in demand

- Language skills (e.g., English at a medical level).
- Experience on board or in emergency medical care (cutter/boolean, offshore, cruise, merchant shipping).
- Knowledge of medical documentation, telemedicine, medication management at sea.

Typical career path

- 1) Complete medical school and obtain a license to practice medicine.
- 2) Gain relevant clinical experience (general, emergency, intensive care medicine).
- 3) Complete MFAS/MFAS-like maritime medicine training.
- 4) Obtain STCW basic certificates.

- 5) Depending on the flag: Apply for a seafarer's medical certificate.
- 6) Register in the ship's doctor directory

4. What do I earn as a ship's doctor?

The remuneration for ship's doctors generally depends on these four factors:

1. Type and duration of assignment
2. Whether you are employed as a senior or junior doctor
3. Type of employment, e.g., permanent position, locum, etc.
4. Your experience as a ship's doctor and your negotiating skills

Generally speaking, junior doctors earn from €7,500 per month. Senior doctors should not earn less than €9,000 per month. However, it is not unusual for them to earn €10,000 or more per month.

In addition, travel expenses are usually paid. Furthermore, the ship's doctor can usually take an accompanying person with them in their cabin free of charge or at a greatly reduced price.

5. How am I insured as a ship's doctor?

This is a very complicated question, which we cover in a separate lecture during our ship's doctor courses. As a general rule, you are insured through the shipping company. However, there are a few important criteria that you need to take into account, such as which flag the cruise ship sails under and what your position as ship's doctor is.

Professional liability insurance for medical professionals, or medical malpractice insurance, is mandatory. It is important that you check before taking up a position as a ship's doctor whether this activity is covered and how high the liability sum is.

6. What is the rank of the ship's doctor on a cruise ship?

The ship's doctor has the rank of an officer and wears three to three and a half stripes on his shoulders. This rank is comparable to that of the first officer or staff captain. The ship's doctor usually reports directly to the captain and works very closely with him.

7. Will I work alone as a ship's doctor on a cruise ship?

That depends primarily on the size of the cruise ship and the area of operation. On small ships, especially expedition ships, you may be the only ship's doctor. However, this is not the norm. On medium to large ships, you will work in a team with at least one other doctor and 1-4 highly experienced nurses.

8. Where can I find international literature on maritime medicine?

Below, we have compiled a short list* of international literature on maritime medicine for you:

1. Zhang Z, Ye Q, Song H et al. The structure of customer satisfaction with cruise-line services: an empirical investigation based on online word of mouth. *Current Issues in Tourism* 2015;18(5):450-464
2. Castillo-Manzano JI, Lopez-Valpuesta L, Alanis FJ. Tourism managers' view of the economic impact of cruise traffic. *Current Issues in Tourism* 2015; 18(7):701-705
3. Papathanassis A. (Ed.) *Cruise Sector Growth. Managing Emerging Markets, Human Resources, Processes and Systems*. Gabler GWV Fachverlage GmbH, Wiesbaden 2013
4. Dahl E. Medical Practice During a World Cruise: a Descriptive Epidemiological Study of Injury and Illness Among Passengers and Crew. *Internat Marit Health* 2005; 56:1-4
5. Dahl E. Cruise Doctors Qualifications - The Luck Factor. *IMHA Newsletter* 2015 (04):16/28
6. Peake DE, Gray CL, Ludwig MR. Descriptive Epidemi Among Cruise Ship Passengers. *Ann Emergency Med* 1999; 33(1):67–72
7. Prina DL, Orazi UN, Weber RE. Evaluation of Emergency Air Evacuation of Critically Ill Patients from Cruise Ships. *Journal of Travel Medicine* 2001; 8:285–292
8. Dahl E. Acute chest pain on cruise ships. *International maritime health*, 2015;66(1):4-5
9. Antonio J, Neri MD, Elaine H et al. Passenger Behaviors During Norovirus Outbreaks on Cruise Ships. *Journal of Travel Medicine* 2008(3);172-176
10. Millman AJ, Kornyllo DK, Lafond K et al. Influenza Outbreaks Among Passengers and Crew on Two Cruise Ships: A Recent Account of Preparedness and Response to an Ever-Present Challenge. *Journal of Travel Medicine* 2015
11. Liu B, Pennington-Gray L. Understanding the Cruise Industry's Responses to Health-Related Crises: A Case Study Approach. 2015: scholarworks.umass.edu
12. Dahl E. Cruise ship doctor: demands and challenges versus qualifications and training. *International maritime health* 2009;60(1-2):33-35
13. Bansal V, Fortlage D, Lee JG, et al. (2007) Significant Injury in Cruise Ships. *Am J Prevent Med* 33: 219–2

* This list is not exhaustive, but is intended to serve as a small selection from the extensive literature available.