



SHORE LEAVE SURVEY 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why this survey?

For seafarers, shore leave is much more than just free time. It offers relaxation, social interaction, contact with the outside world, and often the chance to run everyday errands, use free Wi-Fi, or play pool. At the same time, the experience the German Seafarers' Mission shows that shore leave is difficult or only partially possible in many places around the world. Against this backdrop, we conducted an international survey in March 2026 at 16 ports, involving over 1,300 seafarers.

Of these, 1,199 data sets from individuals covered by the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) were included in the analysis. The aim was to highlight the opportunities and limitations of shore leave from the seafarers' perspective. The results clearly show: While shore leave is generally possible in many cases, in practice it is often short, logistically difficult, or fraught with obstacles.

Key Findings

1. Shore leave is generally possible – but often only to a limited extent

Most seafarers surveyed stated that shore leave is generally possible at their current port.

At the same time, the results show that the actual use of shore leave is frequently limited by structural obstacles. Short layovers, safety regulations, heavy workloads, and a lack of transportation options makes it difficult for many seafarers to enjoy a relaxing shore leave.

2. Main reasons for denied shore leave

Problems with shore leave are rarely isolated incidents. Rather, they result from a combination of administrative, organizational, and operational factors. Modern port structures—with long distances within terminals—and strict security regulations make it difficult to access shore leave in many places.

3. Many sailors rarely have shore leave, or only for very short periods

The timing of their last shore leave also paints a troubling picture: It is particularly striking that a significant proportion of seafarers have not been ashore for several weeks or months.

At the same time, many seafarers reported that short stays often offer little opportunity for rest, as a large portion of the time is spent traveling, going through security checks, or running necessary errands.

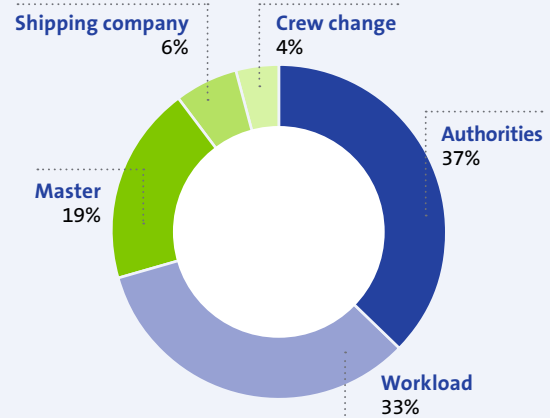
The survey also shows that shore leave is often only possible for a few hours. Most seafarers reported shore leave lasting between one and four hours. Longer periods of rest ashore remained the exception.

Shore leave is available to **89%** of seafarers!



REASONS FOR DENIAL OF SHORE LEAVE IN CURRENT PORT

(excluding N/A, yes; n = 67)



MEDIAN TIME OF LAST SHORE LEAVE

1x



MEDIAN DURATION OF SHORE LEAVE

4 hours



4. Shore leave is social participation and a sense of normalcy

The results clearly show that time ashore goes far beyond mere leisure. For many seafarers, it means contact with the outside world, a break from their daily work routine, and the opportunity to form social relationships outside their own crew.

The high importance placed on seafarers' clubs in particular underscores their vital social and supportive role in international ports.

5. Seafarers have clear suggestions for improvements

40% of the seafarers surveyed described very clearly what measures could improve shore leave. Better transportation options between port facilities and urban areas were mentioned particularly frequently. Many seafarers cited long distances, a lack of shuttle services, or high costs as major obstacles.

At the same time, the results show that many problems appear solvable. Improvements in transportation, time management, and social infrastructure could already have a noticeable impact on seafarers' rest and well-being.

Conclusion

Shore leave is an important component of decent working conditions in international shipping. Although shore leave generally appears to be frequently possible, practical and structural barriers in many places prevent actual rest.

Seafarers perceive their situation in very nuanced ways and have concrete ideas about how their shore leave could be improved. At the same time, they are often barely recognized in the public consciousness as the people who sustain global supply chains.

With this survey, the German Seafarers' Mission hopes to raise greater awareness of seafarers' perspectives and further promote dialogue on fair working conditions, rest, and social participation on the regional and international levels.

TOP
5

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

(excluding N/A, 'everything is fine/no suggestions', 'other'; n = 404)

33%

Transportation & shuttle



21%

Time management & port stay



19%

Seafarers' club & hospitality

Facilities & infrastructure

14%



Personal well-being

12%





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Note on gender-neutral language

English is the lingua franca of international shipping industry. In German translation, the masculine form is used for readability and includes all genders.

Use of AI

Parts of the report were generated with the support of artificial intelligence.

The project 'Fair übers Meer – For Fair Working Conditions at Sea' is funded by Brot für die Welt and Church Development Service of the North Church.

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