



The Ultimate Boat Show Attendees Guide



2017 Edition

For more than a half-century, boat shows have been a vital component of the marine industry. These shows provide a wide array of opportunities for marine industry companies, fisherman, boating enthusiasts, boat builders, yacht owners, captains, crews, event organizers, and others.

As an attendee, boat shows give you a behind the scenes look at the companies and brands you love and exclusive opportunities to meet with industry experts, attend seminars put on by boating and fishing legends, and enjoy a weekend with family and friends. With dozens of boat shows ranging from small rural shows in tiny towns to large international boat shows with over 100,000 attendees, there are different sights, sounds and benefits to look and prepare for when planning your trip to a show.

The Ultimate Boat Show Guide for Attendees

by Frigibar



Please let us know how we may be able to assist you in preparing to visit a show.

We are at your service and happy to help!

Shuly Oletzky, President

Frigibar Industries, Inc.

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With decades of experience attending and exhibiting at boat shows around the world, Frigibar Industries, Inc. is providing this comprehensive guide to share our passion for the marine industry and to make the most of your show adventures.

The Ultimate Boat Show Guide for Attendees is meant to give you everything you need to make the most out of attending a boat show, from finding the boat of your dreams to helping you make new connections and friends at a show. We'll start with why you should attend shows in the first place (if that's not already clear), and then navigate through the important aspects of planning for, attending, and following up after a boat show.

[Read more about our experience on our website](#)



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Boat Show Season

With a couple of outliers including the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show in early November, boat show season takes place beginning in early January and lasts until the end of April. There are over 50 boat shows in the U.S. alone during this season.

The season takes place when the majority of captains, crews and owners are gearing up for boating season, which is primarily April - September when the majority of lakes, oceans and seas are ripe for for swimming, sailing, boating, and fishing.

Types of Boat Shows

Here are the most common types of boat shows, each of which offer something different to attendees. You should be aware of the type of show that is the best fit for your needs prior to making plans.

- **Fishing Expo:** As the name implies, fishing expos, which are often grouped together with boat shows, are events that bring the best of the fishing world all together in one place. Fishing teams, experts, and companies attend and exhibit to share information about their trade with fans and amateur anglers. You can find a lot of the same boats and gear you would at any other boat show, but the core focus is using that equipment and vessels for fishing, both on a professional and amateur level.
- **International Boat Show:** The largest boat shows in the world bring the largest and most reputable companies, captains, crews, and tens if not hundreds of thousands of attendees from anywhere and everywhere. If “international” is attached to a show you’re considering attending, plan for large crowds and make sure to plan far in advance to meet with exhibitors and reserve parking and lodging if necessary months before the show.
- **Refit:** Shows like Professional BoatBuilder Magazine’s Refit International Exhibition and Conference in Fort Lauderdale are dedicated to boat refits. Refitting includes “repairing, fixing, restoring, renewing, mending, and renovating an old vessel.” This show is a great opportunity to learn about restoring a boat or yacht and seeing what is available to you in this process. If you are interested in a new construction or purchasing a completely refurbished vessel that does not need any repairs or restoration, you may want to consider a different show.



- **Sportsman:** Sportsman shows are similar to fishing expos, but with a wider array of interests and trades. A sportsman’s boat show is geared towards outdoorsmen, anglers, hunters, and others. For boaters, sportsman’s shows will have aluminum boats and generally smaller vessels than at traditional boat shows. Expect to see plenty of guns, knives, hunting and fishing equipment.
- **Strictly Sail:** Put that engine away. A popular niche type of boat show is a “strictly sail” show. These are geared towards sail enthusiasts, America’s Cup World Series fans, paddleboarders and more. Although you will find some power boat related companies and items at these shows, they are primarily for adventurers that prefer to experience boating without an engine.
- **Boater’s Flea Market:** If you are looking for a bargain, this might just be the show for you. This style boat show is usually held over a weekend at venues such as local fairgrounds. They typically caters to smaller boats and offering the opportunity to purchase hardware and other equipment often both new and used.
- **Trade Show:** Marine industry companies work with suppliers around the world to find products to incorporate into their offerings and to find new products and services to sell. Events like [METSTRADE](#) in Amsterdam are trade shows that connect leisure marine equipment industry companies together to form partnerships, learn about each other and to buy and sell to each other.



Benefits of Attending Boat Shows

Boat shows are not traditionally expensive events to attend, but the time, travel, tickets, and lodging if attending a show out of town, can make for a significant investment. As with any investment, you need to weigh the benefits against the costs of attending any given show to make the best decision possible. Here are several benefits you may enjoy from attending a boat show:

- Shows are a great overview of the industry and a very convenient way to get a lot done in a short amount of time.
- You have the opportunity to talk to multiple vendors in one place instead of making five different phone calls or trying to drive out to meet with them in person at their physical locations. While searching and shopping online is convenient, you don't get the opportunity to talk directly with the founders of the companies as well as other boaters and attendees to ask every and any question you have.
- Bargaining is not easy to do online, but can be a part of your purchasing process at an in-person event.
- One of the top questions we receive, whether talking to a potential customer in-person or on the phone, is if our freezer systems will fit on the deck of their boat. At large shows, we can show them first-hand by finding a vessel similar to theirs at the show and asking the owner if we can place one of our units on their boat. You can only do this in-person at a show.
- The environment is electric! There isn't anything that matches the fun environment of a boat show. Everyone is excited, learning and shopping for things they desire around a common interest. When you get a group of people together that are passionate about the same things, it's impossible not to feed off of their energy.
- Expand your network. The marine industry is full of some of the most well-connected people you could hope to meet. It's very likely that you will find new like-minded connections at a show if you're active and looking to meet new people.



Goal-Setting for Boat Shows

The only way you can accomplish your goals is to have goals to accomplish, and a lot can be said for laying out your goals clearly so you can then plan out how to achieve them. Even if your sole goal is to have an amazing weekend with your family while looking at boats for a weekend, setting goals is a great way to maximize your trip. If your goals include making a final decision on what marine refrigeration system to purchase for your yacht, you're going to want to outline what criteria will help you make your decision and how you can get this information during your trip to the show.

We recommend writing down at least your top three goals you'd like to accomplish during the show (ex: find a new freezer for my yacht, learn about advanced angling techniques from seminars at the show, and get diving gear quotes from vendors at the show).

[CLICK HERE to Download the Frigibar Boat Show Attendee Checklist](#)

At the Show

Getting the most out of a show is about more than just planning ahead to accomplish your goals. You have to take advantage of opportunities, show resources, exhibitors and other attendees.

Here's how:

- Read, print, and bring a copy of the show guide along with you. See who's advertising, what exhibitors are promoting, and where the exhibitors you want to visit will be located to make navigating the show as simple as possible. Here's an example of a show guide from the [2015 Providence Boat Show](#).
- Don't waste time getting lost or be too shy to ask for help. Most shows have information booths set up, event staff walking around, and exhibitors are more than willing to help direct attendees.
- Follow the event hashtags and social media pages of the boat show and exhibitors you want to stay connected with. You'll be able to see giveaways and updates immediately.
- Bring a camera and something to record notes with, along with a way to give out your contact information (business cards if you have them).
- Even if they aren't advertising a special, ask exhibitors if they are running a deal for the show.

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- Look beyond the boat or product itself, make sure to speak with the owners and staff. You're investing in the company you purchase from, so get a good feel for their customer service and how they do business.
 - Stick to your guns. If a product is more than you expected or if you find yourself in a pressured situation, sleep on a decision before making one you might regret. Consider attending the first day of the show or meeting with exhibitors the night before the show to give yourself additional time to consider.

Following Up After a Boat Show

Boat shows are community events, even if it's an international show. Making new friends and connections is worth investing in. Take time after each show to go through the materials you collected, send thank you notes to people you took time to meet with and want to continue talking to, and schedule follow-up meetings and phone calls if necessary.

Exhibitors may be extremely busy after a show, so give them some time to respond to your questions or emails after a show.

If you enjoyed the show, consider sharing your experience with the event staff and organizers. They are connected with all of the exhibitors and knowledgeable. They may even be able to help provide insight or connect you with a company or individual that could help you with your search.

Boat Show Lists

[NMMA Boat Show List on Boatshows.com](#)

[Marine Source Boat Show List](#)

[The Top 15 Boat Shows in the USA](#)

[6 Of the Best Boat Shows](#)

[The 17 Most Prestigious Boat Shows in the World](#)

Additional Boat Show Resources

The NMMA is the nation's leading trade association representing boat, marine engine, and accessory manufacturers. Collectively, NMMA members manufacture an estimated 80 percent of marine products used in North America. View their [resource list](#) for recommended partners and associations.

For additional resources and marine industry websites and company information, view the [Frigibar resources page](#).

In Closing

The thing we love most about boat shows is the people. Being around wonderful, fun, happy people sharing their experiences and doing what they love is what makes the shows for us. So whether you are a recreational boater, professional captain or crew, or an industry colleague, we hope you will come visit us and we look forward to seeing you at the show!

