

Boat Inspection Checklist

What to check before buying a new or used boat

Exterior

- Hull checked for cracks, blisters, repairs, leaks, and impact damage
- Deck checked for soft or spongy spots
- Transom inspected for cracks, movement, or water intrusion
- Corrosion, fittings, and visible leaks checked

Engine and Mechanical Systems

- Cold start tested
- Smoke, unusual noises, and warning alarms checked
- Oil and cooling system inspected
- Engine hours reviewed
- Propeller inspected
- Steering tested
- Fuel hoses, leaks, and corrosion checked

Electrical and Safety

- Battery and connections checked
- Bilge pump tested
- Navigation lights and horn tested
- GPS, VHF, gauges, and switches tested
- Life jackets checked
- Fire extinguisher checked
- Anchor and emergency equipment reviewed

Documents and History

- HIN matches the boat and documents
- Title or ownership documents verified
- Registration checked
- Maintenance records reviewed

- Service and repair history reviewed

Trailer

- Tires and tire condition checked
- Wheel bearings inspected
- Brakes and lights tested
- Frame checked for corrosion
- Winch, bunks, chains, and coupler inspected

Sea Trial and Final Decision

- Acceleration and handling tested
- Steering response checked
- Vibration checked
- Engine temperature monitored
- Repair costs estimated
- Major red flags reviewed
- Marine survey considered where appropriate

Before you buy: This checklist helps identify visible issues. Consider a marine survey for expensive or older boats, structural concerns, or when financing or insurance requires professional documentation.