

Pushing the boat out

13 de diciembre de 2023



Will you be 'pushing the boat out' this Christmas - eating a lot of food, drinking a lot of wine or buying things you don't need?

Like many English idioms 'pushing the boat out' has nautical origins dating back to around the 1750's. Students of English and Spanish history will know that our two countries were not exactly friendly during the 17th Century, and many men would have been part of the Royal Navy or worked at sea.

There are two main origin theories. The first suggests that 'pushing the boat out' means sailing into new, and potentially dangerous territory. The second theory suggests that the saying originates from the hard-drinking lifestyle of British sailors. Before setting out for a long journey at sea (pushing the boat out) they would enjoy a lot of drinking. Today it can be used to express excess in a range of contexts -

- 'David and Pedro's wedding was spectacular... They really pushed the boat out with that wonderful buffet.'
- 'It is half price cocktails at the bar! Let's really push the boat out... we're on holiday after all!'
- 'My Uncle took me shopping for my birthday... he really pushed the boat out and bought me a Berkin handbag'.

If you 'push the boat out' with too much wine or beer you might also find yourself 'sailing three sheets to the wind' - another nautical term that we can explore in a future post!

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