

SIMTC launches in Shenzhen with focus on next-generation seafarer skills

Shenzhen International Maritime Training Centre (SIMTC) has officially opened in Qianhai, Shenzhen, with a focus on simulator-based practical training, competency assessment and skills development for seafarers working on increasingly digitalised and alternative-fuelled vessels.



The opening brought together more than 130 representatives from shipowners, ship managers, cruise operators, seafarers' unions, maritime education and training institutions, technology companies and government authorities from China and overseas. At the same time, around 110 seafarers were taking part in senior officer management, ratings and other specialised training programmes at the centre.



Terence Zhao, Chairman of Singhai Marine Services Group and SIMTC, said the centre was established against a backdrop of rapid changes in vessel technology and growing pressure on the maritime industry to ensure that training keeps pace with real onboard competency requirements.

“Digitalisation, artificial intelligence and alternative fuels are changing the way ships are operated, but safe shipping will continue to depend on competent seafarers with professionalism, resilience, teamwork and leadership,” Terence said.

Training built around operational competence

SIMTC is designed as an independent third-party training platform serving shipowners and ship managers across the industry. Its programmes can be customised to vessel type, trading pattern, equipment configuration, safety management procedures, inspection findings and accident case studies, with the aim of bringing training closer to the conditions seafarers encounter onboard.



The centre is equipped with Wärtsilä full-mission bridge and engine-room simulation systems, ECDIS and cargo-handling training capabilities, as well as simulation facilities for LNG, methanol and other dual-fuel operations. The facilities support training in areas including navigation in restricted and congested waters, engine-room fault diagnosis, emergency response and alternative-fuel operations.



“Equipment is important, but the real value has to come from demand-driven courses, experienced trainers, realistic scenarios and effective competency assessment,” Terence

said. "The objective is not simply to complete a course, but to translate training into safer and more effective performance onboard."

Shenzhen as a link to regional maritime talent

SIMTC is located in Qianhai, close to Hong Kong and within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, where shipping, ship management, logistics and technology businesses form a substantial maritime services cluster. The centre intends to serve both Chinese seafarers and maritime professionals from Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Vietnam.



Zhou Yaorong, Director of the Key Area Management Division of the Qianhai Administration Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality, said at the opening that Qianhai would support the centre's development and its role in connecting maritime training with industry needs.

Skills for alternative fuels, digitalisation and AI

The opening was held alongside the SIMTC International Maritime Training Seminar under the theme "Embracing Changes of the Era, Cultivating Maritime Talent". Discussions focused

on competency requirements for next-generation vessels, alternative-fuel training, the use of digital learning and simulators, artificial intelligence, leadership development and competency verification.

The issues are becoming increasingly relevant as the International Maritime Organization carries out a comprehensive review of the STCW Convention and Code. IMO has moved into the revision phase of the review, with the overall work targeted for completion around 2029–2030, subject to progress at the organisation. Separate IMO work is also developing training provisions for seafarers serving on ships using alternative fuels and new technologies.

Two industry panels brought together executives and training specialists from shipowners, ship managers and maritime training organisations across Asia. Topics included training and certification for LNG, methanol, ammonia and other alternative-fuel systems; the balance between digital learning and simulator-based practical assessment; human-machine collaboration in the AI era; leadership in multinational crewing environments; competency verification beyond certification; and clearer career-development pathways for seafarers.

Linking training with recruitment and career development

At the seminar, Simona Toma, Chief Maritime HR of Columbia Shipmanagement, addressed future demand for maritime talent and the changing competency profile of seafarers as the industry moves through the green and digital transitions.

Eason Sun, Deputy General Manager of AiSailings, discussed the role of digital platforms in connecting recruitment, training, competency assessment, career development and continuous learning.

The broader message from the seminar was that maritime training is increasingly moving beyond statutory certification towards continuous competency development linked to actual operational and crewing requirements.

International outlook

Representatives from seafarers' unions and maritime training organisations in Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Myanmar also took part in the programme, reflecting SIMTC's intention to develop links with training and manpower networks beyond China.



At the opening, Kam Soon Huat , Chairman of the Singapore Organisation of Seamen (SOS) highlighted the need for continuous reskilling as AI, automation, big data, digital platforms and remote monitoring become more deeply embedded in vessel operations.

Annual maritime education and training forum planned from 2027

SIMTC also plans to develop the seminar into an annual International Maritime Education and Training Forum in Shenzhen from 2027, bringing together shipowners, ship managers, maritime academies, seafarers' unions, training providers and technology companies.

The initiative is intended to create a regular industry platform for discussing changes in vessel technology, training standards, competency assessment and maritime talent development.

Industry feedback on SIMTC's next phase

During an interactive closing session, four senior industry representatives (Murat, Chief Operating Officer of V.Ships Shanghai; Capt. Ooi, Head of Crew Management at MISC Marine; Harvard, Senior Vice President, Maritime of StarDream Cruises; and Demetris, Deputy Chief Executive Officer & Chief Executive Officer Asia of Columbia Group) were

invited to comment on the competencies seafarers will need over the next five to ten years, gaps between industry demand and current training systems, differences between cruise and merchant-shipping training, and priorities for SIMTC's future development.

“We have invested in simulators, classrooms, facilities and technical platforms. While all these are important, advanced equipment alone cannot make an outstanding maritime training centre,” Terence said. “What truly determines SIMTC's success is whether trainees leaving here are better equipped to perform their duties onboard — safer, more competent, more confident and better adapted to the changes taking place across the industry.”



About SIMTC

Shenzhen International Maritime Training Centre is located in Qianhai, Shenzhen. It provides company-specific maritime training, simulator-based practical training, pre-sea training, competency assessment and specialised training related to new vessel technologies for shipping companies and seafarers in China and overseas.

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