



MAINE Sail

A cruise on a tall ship in Penobscot Bay is about scenery, serenity and a surprising dose of shared community.

By Theresa Gawlas Medoff

We set out from Camden, Maine, on the morning high tide, with Captain Dennis Gallant and his crew of six expertly motoring the *Angelique* out of our slip and turning her around in the small harbor, which is an impressive feat with a 130-foot sailboat. Once we were out of the harbor, it was all hands on deck—that included me, my cabin mate and longtime friend Mary, and many of the other 27 passengers on board—to hoist the sails. Lining up on both sides of the ship, grasping thick ropes attached to russet-colored sails, we began pulling in unison, hand over hand, as First Mate Kaylie and deckhands Jenn, Anne and Dinnie led the way while shouting instruction and encouragement: “Pull, pull. Harder! Pull, pull. Don’t let up. Pull!”

Up the sails went, catching the wind and sending us off into Penobscot Bay, where we would be sailing for the next five days, going wherever wind and the captain’s whimsy took us. The only “must” on our agenda was to be moored at Swan’s Island the next night to attend the Sweet Chariot Music Festival, a homegrown annual performance in the town’s community center filled with singalong sea chanties and other songs

both playful and poignant.

Sailing, Sailing

The *Angelique* is one of eight affiliated tall ships called the Maine Windjammer Association that sail the bay with passengers from May through October. Some of the ships, like the *Lewis R. French*, are historic; launched in 1871, she is the oldest commercial sailing vessel in the U.S. and a National Historic Landmark. Others are of more recent pedigree. The *Angelique*—the sole ketch among the schooners (a ketch has only two masts—the tower mast is forward, and the shorter mast, or mizzenmast, is aft)—was built in 1980 of steel and wood but is designed to look like a circa-1880 English fishing trawler.

For me, the romance of sailing on a tall ship was a big part of the attraction of this vacation. And, as I would soon learn, others booked passage for the same reason. Joe from West Virginia had seen a magazine ad for schooner cruises in Maine years before and had finally signed up for this bucket-list trip. Alex, a young law professor from Wisconsin, was aboard with his wife, Amanda, a graduate student. They’d experienced an overnight sail on their honeymoon in New Zealand a

few years prior and had been thrilled with the opportunity to indulge in a similar experience in New England.

Eager to squeeze every bit out of the experience, Alex leaped to the ready whenever volunteers were needed to help with the sails. Days in, I noticed that he was reading *Moby Dick*. “I thought it would heighten the experience of the cruise and also of the book. It is fun imagining Captain Ahab at the wheel as we cruise around the bay, or picturing that we are lowering after a whale every time we get in the little rowboats,” he explained.

Kaylie, the first mate, hailed from Boise, Idaho—not the place you’d think would spawn a love of sailing—but she went to college in Washington State, started sailing square riggers on the West Coast and got hooked. “I loved it so much that I decided to graduate early and do it full time, so I moved east because there are far more job opportunities for traditional sailing here,” she said. She eventually made her way to crewing windjammers in Maine. The job hits the sweet spot for her.

“Pretty much any tall ship that is not a windjammer has a schedule to keep, and they don’t have a bunch of fun vacationers on board. They have to motor a lot more and don’t actually get to use

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OPPOSITE PAGE:
DENNIS GALLANT,
CAPTAIN OF THE *ANGELIQUE*
PHOTO BY THERESA G. MEDOFF

The *ANGELIQUE* has distinctive
russet-colored sails.
PHOTO BY FRED LEBLANC



Passengers and crew make their own musical entertainment onboard.

PHOTO BY THERESA G. MEDOFF

Passengers can help the crew with raising and lowering the sails.

PHOTO BY THERESA G. MEDOFF

A passenger cabin on the *Angelique*. Full-size beds are also available.

PHOTO BY SARAH SWAJKOS



Camaraderie, as I found out, was a big benefit of sailing on the *Angelique*. Mary and I made friends easily with the Floridians, who were approximately our age. Likewise, the older couples tended to congregate together. Several of them were old hands at cruising on a tall ship. Nebraskans Sharon and Larry were marking their seventh time aboard the *Angelique*.

We connected across generations, too. Late one afternoon mid-cruise, we anchored off Pond Island Reserve, a 32-acre conservation property of the Maine Coast Heritage Trail, where we rowed ashore to feast on lobster bought that day directly off a lobster boat and steamed in a pot of water over an open fire. Settling in on comfortable spots on the boulders that anchored one end of a deserted sand beach, we listened as David, a retired district attorney from Maine, gave Amanda lessons in the proper way to eat a whole lobster. Around me, my shipmates engaged in easy conversation, laughing and posing for photos with others who just days before had been strangers.

"Before I came on this cruise, one of my friends said, 'I wonder what the people will be like?'" Patricia recalled. "I said, 'They're going to be great. They're going to be down-to-earth and easygoing, and we'll have a lot in common because we have a love for the same thing.'"

I had come on the *Angelique* expecting it to be relaxing. I knew I'd enjoy the sailing and the unspoiled natural scenery. What came as a delightful surprise, though, was that despite our different ages, backgrounds and even political views, for five days we came together as a community.

Later that day, I chatted with Patricia, one of a contingent of four aboard from a Florida singles sailing club. Patricia had grown up sailing on Lake Erie. "I've been sailing since I was six days old. My parents were very serious sailors, so every weekend, every holiday, in the middle of the week—we were always out there. I developed a love of sailing and a love of the water, but because my parents were very strict and weren't very social... I really didn't appreciate the camaraderie associated with boating until I joined the sailing club in Florida," she said.

all the amazing sails and sail-based seamanship that is at their fingertips. I like doing everything the old-fashioned way, even if we do have engines. It's kind of the best of both worlds."

A Different Kind of Cruise

Besides the allure of sailing on a tall ship, I was looking forward to reconnecting with Mary. We'd been close when I lived in Massachusetts, but then I moved to Delaware, and distance, family and work responsibilities took their toll. As with most true friendships, though, we readily settled back into our past connection.

Given the—shall we say—cozy quarters, it was a good thing we got along well. Mary and I shared a tiny cabin with bunk beds (she graciously allowed me the lower bunk), a small sink and a shelf for toiletries. The ship has three shared guest bathrooms and two showers. The lodging felt sort of like cabin camping on the water.

A cruise on a tall ship is nothing like

that on a mega-ocean liner, where the focus is on nonstop activity on the ship and shopping and excursions in port. Nor is it like a river cruise, where the destinations and the dining are highlights. Instead of being surrounded by hundreds or thousands of passengers and crew, we totaled only 36—few enough that we could really get to know our fellow shipmates. And instead of hustle and bustle, we settled into relaxation with time to read, chat, gaze at the scenery, take a nap, maybe take the wheel under Captain Dennis' supervision, and look over the map with him to see where we'd been and where we were going.

While an accomplished sailor with 20 years of seamanship under his belt, the forty-something Captain Dennis was also the playful sort, pretending at times to have no idea where we were. He was as ready for a serious conversation about sailing and the area's rich history as he was to joke around. As he saw it, his role was as much playing the genial host as it was sailing the ship.

Day by Day

The breakfast bell rang at 8 a.m., and if you wanted to eat, you'd better be on deck within the half-hour. The same held true for lunch and dinner; there was one communal meal time, with the food served buffet style. Chef Sarah had previously cooked in restaurants and aboard a private yacht, and the food was tasty, plentiful and varied. We ate with plates on our laps, scattered about on deck and in a lounge area known as the "deckhouse salon."

The upright piano inside the salon graced us with music on numerous occasions when passengers or crew sat down to play. Deckhand Anne enjoyed strumming her guitar when she wasn't climbing the rigging, and grey-bearded, bandana-wearing Albert, a Vermont hippie, had brought along his accordion, perhaps the perfect accompaniment to a cruise on a ship that looked as if it had sailed in from the 19th century.

Penobscot Bay extends some 40 miles north to south and 15 miles

wide at its mouth, where it meets the Gulf of Maine. Dotted the bay waters are some 200 islands, some uninhabited, others a vacation refuge of the wealthy, and still others the site of small year-round communities.

We saw seals and shorebirds aplenty as we sailed past tiny rock-strewn islands, and we waved and blared our horn whenever we encountered another of the windjammers. With calm bay waters, not a single passenger experienced seasickness.

We sailed an average of six hours a day, stopping each day at some island or another. There was the occasional lighthouse to hike to, and on one rocky beach, Mary and I watched as a grandmother, her son and her grandson constructed rock cairns—a new sight to someone used to making sandcastles on the beaches of the Mid-Atlantic. In the coastal town of Castine, Mary and I strolled the campus of the Maine Maritime Academy and tucked into a folksy coffee shop for a cold drink. We wandered into the art gallery next door

and spent a good bit of time cooling down in its air conditioning.

Even Maine, it turns out, can get mighty warm in August—warm enough one day that about half of the boat, crew and passengers, decided to plunge into the bay for a swim. With Captain Dennis leading the way with a backflip, the braver ones followed suit and dove in from the ship's prow.

Connecting with Shipmates

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