

Sailing Local

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The adventure starts when Captain Frank pipes you aboard.

By Beth D'Addono

An old sailing tradition that predates the U.S. Navy, the blowing of the bosun's pipe is the start of an overnight adventure between Baltimore and the historic town of Rock Hall on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The trip is the brainchild of Frank McKee, a certified master captain who wanted to share his passion for all things nautical with a limited number of would be mariners.

"I wanted to give people the opportunity to try sailing—test out their sea legs," said McKee, who lives in York, PA, but has spent summers at the Jersey shore since he was a kid. A sailor since the age of 10, McKee will take the low key Eastern Shore to the crowded Jersey shore any day, and he thinks others will agree. His trip is the perfect add on to a visit to Baltimore, rounding out a city experience with some quality time on the water.



Sailing with McKee is like spending the day with a friend, if your friend owns a boat, tells great stories and offers sailing instruction and a crash course on navigation. McKee is a patient teacher, an even-handed captain who makes even a novice sailor feel safe and right at home. "Sailing is like life—every day is different," said the philosophical captain. "You're always adjusting your course."

Take a stab at chart reading, learn the principles of celestial navigation and try your hand at the helm to get a feel for how the wind's ebb and flow affects your course. Or, just sit back, sip champagne, munch on crab cakes and enjoy the view during the four-hour sail.

At Rock Hall, a room at the luxe Inn at Osprey Point awaits. Owned by Villanova residents Jerry and Shirley Messina, who have summered in Rock Hall since their three adult children were little, the antique and art-filled Inn is the perfect setting for a relaxing getaway. Ratchet up your nautical experience by staying at the new rooms overlooking the marina next door, with its busy working boatyard. There's even a renovated three-bedroom farmhouse perfect for family and group stays. It's such a lovely spot—easy to see why there's a wedding at the Inn most weekends throughout the year.

After you settle in, tool around town on bikes, enjoy the Inn's fine dining seafood-centric restaurant, and relax at the pool. Rock Hall, once a major fishing and crabbing center, is a sleepy little town, dotted with shops, galleries and seafood-centric eateries. About 12 miles from Chestertown, Rock Hall is a virtual metropolis in comparison—the kind of place where time seems to slow down and folks are genuinely friendly. Most town dining is pretty casual—Dockside Café, Bay Wolf and Waterman's Crabhouse are a few local faves. Although night life isn't a huge priority in these parts, if you're lucky they'll be a Southern rock band at Bay Wolf or even a dance going on at the local fire hall.

But the real reason you come to Rock Hall isn't the action. This part of the Eastern Chesapeake is stunningly beautiful, a haven for wildlife and a paradise for fishermen. Bird lovers won't want to miss a stroll through East Neck Island, a federal wildlife refuge and habitat for Great blue and green-backed herons, Bald Eagles, woodcock, great horned owls and more. It's an easy bike ride from town. Don't forget your mosquito spray.

The next day by noon, you'll be heading back to Baltimore, hopefully with the wind at your sails.

McKee Nautical offers sailing getaways between Baltimore and the Eastern Shore by reservation only, from mid April through October. From \$697 for two, including parking, sailing, 1 night accommodations at Inn at Osprey Point or Great Oak Manor, two lunches and breakfast. For more information, visit www.McKeeNautical.com or call (717) 848-5818.

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