

Sailing Vision Week - Blind Week

'What's it all About?'

Skippers and Sighted Crew

Introduction

Sailing Vision Week has been running for around 40 years and is the longest running sailing event of its type for visually impaired sailors in the UK and possibly Europe.

Sailing Vision Week is co-ordinated and run entirely by volunteers under the auspices of Sailing Vision Trust, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (Charity No 1197634).

What is Sailing Vision Week

Sailing Vision Week is an opportunity for those who are aged 18 or older with visual impairment to experience a week of sailing aboard yachts as fully participating 'visually impaired crew' under the supervision of the skipper and his/her sighted crew.

When is Sailing Vision Week

Sailing Vision Week is usually held in June or July each year and alternates between The Solent and the South West, with a local yacht club acting as 'host' for the start and finish of the week. Currently this is the Royal Lymington Yacht Club for the Solent and the Royal Cornwall Yacht Club for the South West.

Who takes part

Many of those who participate in Sailing Vision Week are private yacht owners who generously offer their yacht and their time to participate in this worthwhile event.

The event also attracts the support of other charities and organisations who bring their own or charter yachts to the event, including Coutts Bank, Gwennili Trust, EAST, VISA and UKSA.

Each year we attract between 20 and 25 yachts to take part and are able to offer between 50-60 crew places to visually impaired sailors, depending upon the number and size of yachts participating.

How is it organised

The organisation of Sailing Vision Week is currently led by Will Bridge, Co-ordinator and Rosie Shorman provides administration support to Will.

Each year an email invitation is sent out to skippers, sighted and VI crew inviting them to participate in Sailing Vision Week. This is usually sent out around New Year with an application deadline set in the spring.

Once the spring deadline has been reached, and the number and size of available yachts is known we are then able to work out how many VI crew places are available.

We receive applications from VI crew who are regular participants/sailors as well as 'newbie' VI crew who have never sailed on Sailing Vision Week or elsewhere before. After the spring deadline we offer appropriate VI applicants a confirmed place. Once VI crew have accepted a place we then start the process of allocating them to yachts, attempting to ensure the best experience for both the VI crew as well as the skipper and his/her sighted crew. For example, where a skipper is new to Sailing Vision Week we always suggest they have a sighted crew member who has sailed with VI crew before and we have a list of willing volunteer crew who can assist with this.

The event's 20+ yachts are grouped into smaller 5 or 6 boat 'fleets', each of which has a different sailing itinerary. Fleet Leaders are appointed around April and offer particular support to any new skippers in their fleet.

Once all the VI crew have been allocated to yachts, provisional 'Fleet Lists' are issued to all skippers, providing details of the yachts and their crews – at this point it may contain some gaps and we ask skippers to let us have any missing information. Skippers are then then asked to make contact by phone with their allocated VI crew to introduce themselves, tell their VI crew a bit about their yacht and other crew, check with the VI crew about any dietary requirements, and to answer any questions that they might have.

What if I want to do Sailing Vision Week but I'd need sighted crew?

If you want to bring your yacht to Sailing Vision Week but do not have sufficient sighted crew, we can assist as we have a list of willing sighted volunteers with all levels of experience from Skipper/First Mate to competent crew. Many of these are also experienced in sailing with VI crew.

VI technology

For many years Tacktick audio-compasses have been used by VI sailors during Sailing Vision Week – the compass is set to a course and the VI helm will hear a high bleep or a low bleep depending on whether they go off course to port or starboard. The further off course the helm steers the quicker the bleep becomes. As these compasses are beginning to show their age and technology has progressed, VISCompass, which is a free App that turns a smartphone into an audio-compass, is starting to take over. Whilst this technology can be a useful aid to some VI sailors when learning to sail, many VI sailors are excellent helms without the use of this technology. VI sailors have heightened senses and many can keep a yacht on the wind from feeling the heel of the yacht, the sound of the sails and the wind on their face with occasional instruction from their skipper. The event also has access to '3D talking charts' which, quite literally, give VI crew a feel for their cruising ground.

VI crew wetgear and boots

Whilst some VI crew will come to Sailing Vision Week with their own wet gear if they are regular sailors, many don't. It is often the case that yachts will have spares on board, but the Charity is able to supply sailing wet gear and boots for those VI sailors who don't have their own and they will be asked to request this prior to attending. Skippers are required to provide in date life-jackets for all their crew.

Sighted crew to VI crew ratio

The number of crew on a yacht will vary depending on the size and type of the vessel. A small family yacht, such as a Beneteau 323 would have a skipper, two sighted crew and two VI crew, whilst larger yachts may have a skipper, three sighted crew and three VI crew. The rule is that there should always be a sighted crew member for every VI crew member in addition to the skipper.

Fleets

A Fleet Leader who is experienced in Sailing Vision Week and the sailing area is appointed from each fleet. The Fleet Leader will liaise with the other skippers in his fleet prior to Sailing Vision Week and devise a sailing itinerary for the week and will book moorings, etc for his/her fleet. Fleet Leaders will liaise with one another to ensure that no two fleets are in the same harbour or venue on the same night, so as to avoid overcrowding of smaller harbours.

Fleet Leaders lead their fleet, liaise with their fleet, and keep them briefed on a daily basis to ensure that everyone is happy with the proposed sailing plan. Fleet Leaders are the first point of contact should a skipper encounter a problem or need help. From 2023 onwards the SVT charity will be covering directly the mooring costs for both the opening and closing phases of the event.

Briefings and VI awareness training

On the first day of Sailing Vision Week a Skippers' Briefing is held where itineraries, weather, risk awareness, yacht inductions and safety briefings are covered as well as any other matters of interest or concern are discussed. This usually lasts about an hour.

All sighted participants are also asked to attend the 'VI Awareness Training' sessions which are run by professional trainers and usually follow on from the Skippers' Briefing.

Itinerary

Below is a sample draft itinerary which one Fleet Leader emailed to the rest of the skippers in his fleet.

Further to discussions with all of you here is the proposed itinerary for the week. On Monday we will sail to Chichester harbour, Tuesday to Bembridge, Wednesday to Gills on the Beaulieu River, Thursday to the Folly on the Medina river and back to Lymington on Friday.

On Monday I have made arrangements with Chichester harbour master to moor on a pontoon on the channel towards Emsworth. We will need to eat onboard on Monday night but we can have a social gathering on the pontoon that evening.

On Tuesday we are booked into Bembridge for a barbecue and for Wednesday I am waiting to hear from the Gins Clubhouse on the Beaulieu to see what they can offer, and I will be back to you with further details.

On Thursday I have booked the five boat fleet on the Folly pontoon, the pub side of the Medina, and also booked for 26 to dine at the Folly. We will need to pre-order, and at the beginning of the week I will give you each a menu, looking for your food choices during the week when I will phone it through to the Folly.

Socialising

It is usual for the yachts in a fleet to have an informal get together each evening after arrival at their destination – this can be informal drinks aboard a particular yacht/yachts or a get together on the pontoon where drink (sometimes a ‘punch’ made in a bucket!) and a few nibbles are served. These usually last about an hour before everyone goes back to their boats or ashore to have dinner. These gatherings are a great opportunity for everyone to meet, chat and exchange stories of their day as well as getting to know one another.

Accommodating VI and sighted crew

You should discuss sleeping arrangements with your sighted and VI crew once they are all on board. VI crew coming on Sailing Vision Week are told that they may need to share a cabin with another crew member. Where it is necessary for two people to share a cabin then they should be of the same gender, and the crew allocations which we will make for your yacht are geared to this. In our experience VI crew sometimes prefer to sleep in the main saloon since it is less of an obstacle course to the heads at night. It is important that everyone is comfortable with their allotted berth.

Catering and Finance

A two-course meal is provided by the host yacht club on the opening night of Sailing Vision Week (Saturday) and on the closing night at the end of the week (Friday evening).

All yachts are expected to provide meals aboard boat during the week – breakfast, lunch and dinner (if the latter is not taken ashore), as well as tea, coffee and cold drinks as appropriate. Some Fleet Leaders will organise a ‘fleet meal’ ashore in a pub, restaurant or local sailing club as part of their itinerary – this is a great way to get their fleet mixing and socialising.

VI participants are required to make a contribution to the Sailing Vision Week organisation for their food and the boat’s running costs during the week. Part of this payment is forwarded directly to each skipper via bank transfer shortly before the commencement of Sailing Vision Week and this is to cover the cost of food, beverages, gas, fuel and berthing costs in respect of their VI crew. The amount per VI crew is currently £135.00. Sighted crew are expected to make a contribution for food, drink, gas, fuel and berthing whilst on Sailing Vision Week and skippers should discuss with their sighted crew their contribution towards costs.

Insurance

All yachts attending Sailing Vision Week, whether privately owned or chartered are required to notify their own yacht insurers that they will be participating in Sailing Vision Week with visually impaired persons on board the boat for seven days. The Equality Act is a bar to insurers refusing to cover or levying any additional premium. Nevertheless, it is important that insurers are pre-notified, and the organisers can help in the unlikely event that they raise difficulties.

What's it like

Skippers and yacht crews are not expected to be 'instructors' or 'coaches'. Sailing Vision Week is about sharing the experience of sailing with those with visual impairment, to encourage and enable maximum participation, independence, confidence and building of skills in a friendly, enjoyable and relaxed environment. The week is fun - yacht crews and fleets bond very quickly, new friends are made, and socialising is enjoyed by all. It is for this reason that many of our participants, both sighted and VI, come back to Sailing Vision Week year after year.

Is it for me?

Sailing Vision Week attracts people of all ages from diverse backgrounds, and we are always very pleased to welcome and provide a range of support for new skippers, yachts and crew to Sailing Vision Week. If you think that Sailing Vision Week might be something you would like to participate in, then as a first step we would be happy to have a 'no commitment on either side' conversation with you as a first exploratory step.

The RYA's video of the event at the address below is also a useful introduction to Sailing Vision Week – 'Blind Week'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRcuegEsGdw&app=desktop>

Further information about Sailing Vision Week and the Sailing Vision Trust is also available at our website at www.sailingvision.org

We are now pleased to announce the dates for **Sailing Vision Week 2023 which are Saturday 08 July to Saturday 15 July 2023** and will be hosted by the **Royal Cornwall Yacht Club, Falmouth**.

If you are interested in participating in Sailing Vision Week or would like more information please email mail@blindweeksailing.co.uk

ANNEX 1

Documentary Support and Information Provided

All skippers are provided with support, not only prior to the event, but during the event as well. We want all our skippers to feel welcome and comfortable, but more importantly to enjoy the experience!

Prior to the event all skippers are provided with documentation as part of a 'Risk Pack' which consists of:

- Risk Awareness and Assessment Notes
- Risk Assessment Template
- Induction Guide
- Next of Kin Form
- Roles and Risks Form
- Major Incident Procedures
- Major Incident Flowchart

The above documents are all aimed at supporting skippers and you will find that much of the content is already considered 'normal practice' for skippers and crew.

A 'Help Pack' is also provided which consists of:

- Tacktick Guide
- VISCompass Guide
- 3D Chartuser Guide
- VI Awareness Training Information - Sailing Vision Week Guiding Notes