

Sailing Vision Week

What's It All About?

Guidance Notes for and by Visually Impaired Sailors and Would-be Sailors

Sailing Vision Week is an enjoyable and sociable week of cruising around the coastline in sailing yachts and is open to applicants aged 18 years and above. As VI crew you are welcome, whether you have sailed before or are a complete beginner.

1. What is Sailing Vision Week?

Over 20 yachts take part in the week and they are divided into 4 smaller groups or 'fleets' each of which sail to different destinations each day. Sailing Vision Week starts on a Saturday afternoon, when you are greeted by your skipper and fellow crew followed by dinner at the host venue. Sailing starts on the Sunday and continues until Friday afternoon. Sailing Vision Week ends with another dinner back at the host venue on the Friday evening, before participants travel home on Saturday morning. Sailing is reliant on the weather and the coastline you are sailing. Depending on the plan for your fleet and weather conditions, sailing days can be long or short, but generally you will be out on the water all day. Your skipper will talk through the plan for each day and your first day will be a careful introduction to sailing safely and the feel of the boat and will usually involve only a short sail.

2. Who Will I Be Sailing With?

Sailing Vision Week is run by volunteers. Yachts are offered or chartered for the week and the skippers and sighted crew are all volunteers who give their time to sail with us. The money that you pay is not to cover the cost of hiring a boat or for the time of the skipper – both are freely given for the event. Rather it is your contribution to the cost of your share of the food, mooring fees and fuel, etc for the week.

Sighted volunteers are all from different sailing backgrounds, from local club sailors to those who race and those who cruise around the world. Some of the skippers and other crew have volunteered for many years, so have a great deal of sailing experience and experience of sailing with visually impaired people. All receive pre-event VI awareness training. On each boat there is a skipper, who is in charge of the boat and the safety of all crew on board. The number of sighted crew on board is at least the same as the number of VI crew. A couple of weeks before the event your skipper will be in direct contact with you to provide any information that you may need and to find out about any special needs or concerns you may have.

3. What Is The Accommodation Like On Board?

No two yachts have identical layouts. The yachts participating range in length from around 30ft to 50ft and vary in design, from motor sailors to racing yachts. Being a yacht, your accommodation will be compact to say the least. You may be asked to share a cabin with someone of the same gender and the accommodation may be either in bunk beds or next to someone in a cabin designed for two people. Whether you feel this is 'nice and cosy' or 'cooped up in a wardrobe', it is not an environment for anyone with serious claustrophobia! There will not be much space to spread your belongings around so it's best to live out of your bag for the week. A soft bag is key to stowing your kit – definitely not a suitcase! All yachts have a toilet and sink in a small compartment for use during the day and night.

In the evenings you will be tied up on a pontoon, mooring buoy or maybe at anchor. Where possible you will be able to go ashore to use toilet and shower facilities. However, any nights where this is not possible you will be able to use the toilet and have a wash (but not shower) on board. Most evenings you will have the opportunity to socialise with crew from other yachts in your fleet.

4. Do I Need To Be Very Fit And Active To Come On Sailing Vision Week?

You should note that the sailing yachts used are not specially equipped or adapted to cater for physical disabilities. Whilst you don't need to be extra fit to come on Sailing Vision Week, and you can do as much as you feel comfortable with, the event does require a good general level of fitness and agility by all VI participants. If you have had an operation in the last six months, suffer from osteoarthritis/joint pain or back problems, suffer from neuropathy, have mobility/balance issues then you may not be suitable to participate. If you are unsure whether you are fit enough then it is best to consult us.

As a guideline you need to be able to do the following things:

You will need to be able to climb up and down from the dock to the boat, be able to climb over the guard rails on the side of the yacht, and from the deck down a short, steep set of steps to the accommodation inside the yacht, as well as be able to manage in a fairly confined living space.

In some locations it may not be possible to tie up to a pontoon and you may also need to climb into and out of an inflatable dinghy to go ashore or up a metal ladder on the side of a dock.

A reasonable yardstick would be if you are able to do the following things:

- a) climb up to stand on a chair
- b) climb over a five-bar gate
- c) climb up and down a stepladder
- d) get up from the floor unaided
- e) walk at a moderate speed for 20 minutes/a distance of about a mile

This is the amount of agility we ask you to confirm you have when you apply to take part. We ask all applicants to confirm that they meet this requirement.

Please note that all participants also need to be able to manage their own personal care needs (washing, showering, dressing) and medications.

5. What Is Sailing On A Yacht Like?

All of the yachts are different; hence they sail, feel and handle differently, but all are safe. You can do as much or as little on the boat as you want. This will always be under the supervision and subject to the consent of the skipper with safety considerations in mind. If you want to learn more about sailing or particular skills during the week, you are encouraged to discuss this with your skipper, who will try to facilitate this. As part of the yacht's crew, you can help with the sail trim, hoisting and winching, helming/steering and any other aspect of handling the yacht - your skipper and sighted crew will support you where needed. There are audio compasses (in standalone and smartphone App form) and 3D talking charts to help you participate to the maximum!

The weather conditions and sailing area can be different each day and they can change quickly. All boats will heel (lean) to a certain point whilst sailing. This can feel strange at first but it is perfectly normal and should not be a cause for concern. By the end of the week you will have tried something new, been challenged in a supportive way and experienced the camaraderie of sailing with the rest of your crew and with people on other yachts.

6. What Should I Bring With Me?

Your luggage should be packed in a soft bag, not a suitcase or trunk, to make it easy to stow on board. Note that it is usually cooler sailing out on the water than on land, so it is a good idea to bring plenty of layers of clothing and to be prepared for all weather and a range of temperatures – we're sailing in England rather than the Mediterranean after all!

Here are some suggestions of items that you should think about bringing in addition to the items that you would pack for any other trip:

- sleeping bag and small pillow or soft clothing that you can use as a pillow
- waterproof jacket and trousers (let your skipper and the Sailing Vision Week Co-ordinator know in advance if you don't have waterproofs as we can arrange for you to borrow a set)
- boots or non-slip footwear (many people prefer to wear footwear that protects your toes to avoid stubbing them or hurting your feet; footwear with a good grip helps to avoid slipping on a wet deck surface). Open toed sandals and flip flops are not suitable when sailing
- layers of clothing to keep you warm (synthetic fleeces, etc are best for keeping dry and warm)
- swimwear (in case of an opportunity to go swimming!)
- a small or quick-dry towel
- sun cream, sunglasses and a hat (as you are more likely to get burnt when sailing)

- if you want to start recording your sailing miles you can get hold of and bring a logbook produced by the Royal Yachting Association
- some spending money – the fee you pay for the week covers all your food and drink whilst on board and you will not be expected to pay any more for this – however, any drinks ashore (eg at a bar or pub when socialising) will be extra and this is something that is discussed and agreed with your skipper early on in the week
- obviously guide dogs have to be left behind, but do bring walking canes, other aids and any medication you normally use

Celebrating 50 years of events for visually impaired sailors