Take Responsibility for Your Adventure

One of the most important products of sail training is the development of a sense of judgment about what and whom you can rely on, and to what degree. This applies to the compass, the weather forecast, your shipmates, the depths on the chart, the strength of the anchor cable, the vigilance of the lookout on the other ship, and many other things. Sail training also builds a reasoned sense of self-reliance. All of this starts from the moment you begin to think about a voyage. Use the information in this Website to begin to evaluate and decide what will be the best sail training experience for you.

When you sign up for a sail training trip, you are dealing with the vessel owner or its representatives — Tall Ships America is not involved. You must evaluate whether the financial and business arrangements make sense for you. If there is connecting travel involved, for example, find out if you must make the arrangements, or if it is somehow tied into those you make with the vessel. What happens if you miss your ship because your plane is delayed, or vice versa? Do you need trip insurance? Have you confirmed with the vessel owner any possible customs or immigration issues? Will you need a passport, a visa, a pre-purchased return air ticket, or any special vaccinations? You must seek out the answers to these questions.

Make informed, responsible decisions about risk and safety, level of challenge, physical suitability and other important issues. One of the important reasons to embark on a sail training trip is to engage the world in a different, stimulating, and challenging way—if you want to stay warm and dry, you should stay at home by the fireplace. Much of the point is to come face-to-face with the ocean world as only a sailor can. At the very least, this probably means that you will find yourself wet, chilled, or tired at some point in a challenging voyage. Everyone’s threshold for this is different, and you need to understand what you are likely to be experiencing in order to decide if it is well matched for you.

Since the beginning of time, going to sea has been recognized as carrying an element of inherent risk. These days, we more commonly think about risk in connection with highway travel or aviation, but the idea is the same: you get a pre-flight safety brief on an airliner, you get a lifeboat drill on a cruise ship, and you will receive safety training as part of your sail training experience. Part of the value of sail training is addressing these issues head on, and in facing challenges and overcoming them. You need to decide whether you are comfortable with the combination of risks and safety measures connected with your proposed sail training trip.

For example, will you be able to go aloft? Will trips in smaller craft be involved? Will you be expected to stand watch at night? Do the demands of the ship match your physical fitness and health circumstances? Are you on medication that will (or may) become necessary during the voyage, or do you have a condition (for example, hemophilia or epilepsy) that may require special access to medical attention; if so, is the vessel operator aware of this? Will you be able to get up and down the ladders, in and out of your berth, and be able to move safely along a rolling deck? If there is an emergency, will you be needed to handle safety equipment or to help operate the vessel?

Remember that sail training is often organized like an expedition into the ocean wilderness, not a laid back vacation. Some programs, on the other hand, offer leisurely voyages, where very little will be asked of you. You should arrive at a clear understanding of these issues prior to setting sail. The difference is vast, and you need to know what you are signing up for.

In short, you must satisfy yourself that the trip you are looking into is the right thing for you to do, considering safety, risk, suitability, challenge, comfort, convenience, educational value, cost, and any other factors you consider important.

Does Tall Ships America have a hand in any of this? In a word—no! Tall Ships America is your “bulletin board” to introduce you to opportunities. However, Tall Ships America does not operate any vessels,
and has no ability or authority to inspect, approve, or even recommend vessels or programs because programs are constantly evolving and changing.

Tall Ships America is a nonprofit organization with a limited staff. It serves as a forum for the sail training community, but it has no authority over what programs are offered, or how vessels are operated. The vessel information in this Website is supplied by the vessel operators, and Tall Ships America can not possibly verify all the information, nor visit all the ships in order to evaluate programs. For these reasons, you must take the information in this Website as a starting point only, subject to change and correction, and proceed directly with the vessel operator. Tall Ships America is not an agent or business partner for the vessel operators, and is not a travel agent.

Tall Ships America believes in the value of sail training as a concept, but remember, from the moment you step beyond looking at this book, the decision and the resulting experiences rest with you.