

Captains Annie Mahle and Jon Finger with daughters Ella and Chloe aboard the *J. & E. Rigg*, on which they offer three- to six-day cruises.

smooth sailing

During a week at sea, time stops



and enchantment begins.

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY CARROLL STONER PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLLEEN DUFFLEY



Knowing it's a risky business, I travel with an eye

out for magic. Enchantment is elusive; we take our skeptical selves with us on vacation. But the minute you board the *J. & E. Riggins*, a Maine windjammer, you enter another world. This tall wooden ship, a 1927 oyster dredger, has been lovingly restored with space for 24 passengers and a crew of six.

The 120-foot-long, two-masted schooner cruises Penobscot Bay out of Rockland, Maine, from May through October. And less than a day into our week-long summer cruise, time seems as limitless as the deep blue horizon. A passenger from Texas asks a new friend from Canada: "Was it just yesterday we came on board? How can that be?"

I take that question to Captain Annie Mahle, who owns the *Riggins* with husband Jon Finger. "There's something about being on the ocean under a vast sky," she says. "You're with new people, smelling smoke from a wood-burning stove and fresh bread baking. Everything about the experience is brand-new! We love providing this adventure, because we understand how powerful it can be. Jon and I made this our life's work because it still takes our breath away."

Both Annie and Jon are licensed sea captains, and the *Riggins* is their boat (a National Historic Monument since 1991) and their career. For the last decade, it's also been the summer home for their family, which includes daughters Chloe, 9, and Ella, 6.

Rhae Stevens, from landlocked West Virginia, is a windjammer veteran who appreciates fellow passengers. "They have adventurous spirits or they wouldn't be on these boats, which are not luxurious in a traditional sense but are completely deluxe in other ways. At night you see millions of stars—and there's no disco music. The food and companionship are wonderful, and even though there's not a huge amount of space, everyone does their own thing. You can look at the passing scenery and rest your mind. If you want to pull sails, you can do that, too, and there's plenty of conversation and laughter."

Companionship is a big part of the *Riggins*'s routine, drawing together both extroverts and the not-so-social. Dotty Craig, for example, who is somewhat quiet, is married to the very convivial Jonathan. Dotty spends her time on deck, often in solitude, either reading a book or watching islands and shoreline drift by. Jonathan, on the other hand, is often at the center of a group that always sounds as if its members are having fun.

Left from top: A fellow windjammer sails the waters of Penobscot Bay.

■ A passenger enjoys the scenery from the ship's deck.

■ A crew member checks out the all-important rigging.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Sketching is a favorite pastime.

■ A passenger gets a workout. ■ Coiled ropes catch the sun. ■ Even

little Ella has tasks to do. ■ A sailor's cap is timeless jaunty.







Clockwise from left: A crew member drops a lobster into the pot. ■ Crew members prepare for the beachside feast. ■ Succulent lobsters, ready to cook. ■ The dinner bell announces meals.



"I love the family feeling. Everyone fits in quickly," says Jonathan. "I like going back to watch Annie and Jon's daughters growing up. [The Craigs, from Connecticut, have sailed on the *Riggin* six times.]

"There are so many kinds of beauty on board," he adds. "I get goose bumps seeing those ships sail. They bring a piece of the past into our contemporary lives." And, of course, both he and Dotty love the wonderful food.

Our 18 passengers (six singles and six couples) hail from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, plus Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Texas, West Virginia, and Quebec. We bond quickly. "The *Riggin* is food for the soul and the senses," says Dotty. "Jonathan and I both appreciate the hands-on quality of the trip, and we always enjoy the people."

Passengers are often struck by a profound sense of quiet. There is no engine on this twin-masted boat other than a small yawl to push the *Riggin* in or out of harbors when necessary. We live with the ship's sweet white noise—the creaking of the seasoned wood, the flapping and straining of sails and riggings, the whisper of wind and water. The only clamor is the bell for meals, which, passengers confess, makes them salivate "like Pavlov's dogs."

No wonder. Annie is a trained chef, newspaper food columnist, and cookbook author who makes frequent television appearances, including on the *Today* show. Everyone loves her creative, homey food—especially her New England Boiled Dinner and desserts like her Congo Bars—and passengers hang out in the galley, helping or just observing.

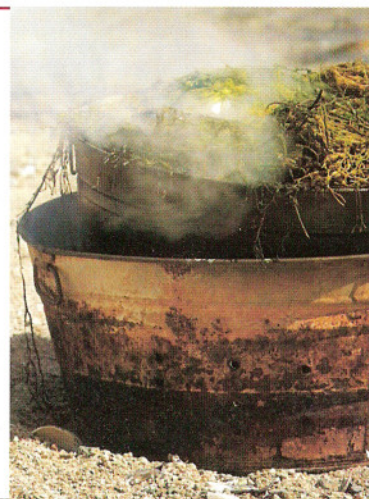


the lobster feast

A lobster feast, regularly scheduled as a part of the weeklong Maine windjammer cruises, starts when we drop anchor off the shore of an uninhabited island. Here's how the traditional Maine lobster boil works:

- A large galvanized-steel washtub is filled with firewood (brought from the boat to leave the island's ecosystem undisturbed). The wood is dropped off on the beach below the high-tide mark so that all signs of it will disappear after high tide.
- A fire is started and seaweed gathered.
- When the fire is hot, a smaller washtub is set inside the larger one.

- The smaller pot is filled with 2 to 3 inches of seawater.
- The pot is layered with lobsters, clams or mussels, if available, then with partially shucked corn, which is topped with fresh seaweed pulled from rocks just offshore. The pot is periodically rotated for even cooking.
- Guests snack on vegetables, cheese, and crackers while they await the entrée.
- A buffet is set out on the rocks.
- Diners, replete with their alfresco feast, pick up any trash, encouraged by Captains Jon and Annie to leave the island cleaner than we found it.





getting there

Fly into Portland, Maine, and rent a car or take the shuttle for the two-hour trip to Rockland. The season runs May 31–October 4, with three- to six-day cruises priced from \$525 to \$926 per person. Accommodations are nine double and two triple cabins (small, clean, and cozy) with cold running water. Two communal toilets and a freshwater shower are on deck. For more information, call 800/869-0604 or visit maineaventuresails.com.

Getting under sail is a daily ritual. Every morning, Captain Jon charts that day's course. There is never a set itinerary because each day's sailing depends on tides and weather. It is the captain's call, and this week, because of the exceptionally fine wind and calm seas, we venture far from the mainland.

Although the six-member crew can handle the work on its own, many guests bring sailing or work gloves so they can pitch in with ropes, sails, and anchors. For them, running the boat and keeping it shipshape is part of the fun of the cruise. Favorite experiences are catching the wind and speeding through the water. Each day the flag, called the "Colors," is hoisted and lowered with fanfare—and who doesn't like to see our Stars and Stripes lovingly handled in such breathtaking surroundings?

Along the way, we see porpoises and seals. We gather. We disperse. We talk. And then we are silent, sometimes for hours on end. Some passengers stay up late. Others retire early. From our below-deck cabin, snuggled under Annie's hand-made quilt and with my porthole open, I eavesdrop on conversations and am lulled to sleep by my husband's comforting baritone as he and a like-minded Canadian discuss politics.

Throughout the days and evenings, the captains' daughters Chloe and Ella play in the ➤

Top left: Diving into the cool water is for the intrepid only. **Top middle:** Raising and lowering the "Colors" is a ceremonial event. **Top right:** Smooth sailing in peaceful waters. **Inset:** Annie in her galley kitchen.

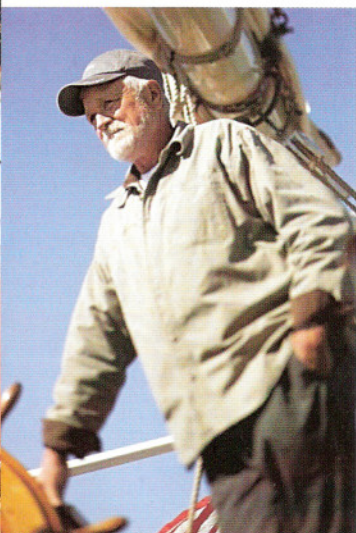
a jammer's cooking school

The *Riggin's* captains recognize the pull of the galley and have created occasional cooking-school cruises. They'll welcome passengers below deck for optional cooking classes, which will appeal to those like the Fortune 500 CEO who loved both cooking and doing dishes when he sailed on the *Riggin*. He helped out at every meal. "It's simple, easy work that gives instant results. And it's relaxing," he told Annie.

During the cruises, Captain Annie demonstrates how to cook on a wood-burning stove and ways to make the most of a small kitchen: "There's nothing smaller than a sailboat kitchen!" she says cheerily.

She also shares her menus, techniques, and some of passengers' favorite *Riggin* recipes, like Butterscotch-Topped Gingerbread with Sautéed Apples. For these and other recipes, as well as Midcoast Maine tourist information, go to traditionalhome.com.





riggings or on the deck, which are their swing set and backyard. At night, Annie and Jon lead us in song. Twice daily Annie sings to accompany the anchor's raising and lowering. Perennial passenger Jonathan explains: "Sea chanteys go with strenuous work. There's rhythm to the work, and when you get the music in your head, it helps." Ship protocol, like the singing of chanteys, is as old as the sea, and it's all reassuring. The captain calls out a command; first mate Andy Seestedt, often at the other end of the ship, repeats the instruction to avoid miscommunication. Then he completes or oversees the task. Sails are hoisted and taken down. Ropes are coiled and stored. Decks are swabbed. The 500-pound anchors, with chains as thick as a man's wrist, are raised and lowered by a team of men and women working in close concert.

Except for the weather, every day is much the same. Routine is the lifeline of ships, contributing to our feelings of security and to the indolence of seagoing days. It takes only a short time aboard before "passengers' shoulders drop at least an inch," says Annie. "Sailing relaxes everyone—*everyone*."

It has been nearly a year since we boarded our Maine windjammer. And yes, we have memories. Are they idealized? You bet. It is when we suspend reality and give our whole hearts to a person, place, or experience that we fall in love.

Every week from spring into autumn, the schooners and clippers of Maine depart for cruises. Those aboard soon discover the gentle rocking that cradles body and spirit as spectacular scenery drifts by like an apparition. Wind, weather, and food, all cozily wrapped in a sense of camaraderie, create what some call an adventure vacation. I call it magic. ■



Top left: Captain Jon leads the singing of sea chanteys—a part of the windjammer experience.

Top right: A *Riggin* passenger takes a turn at the wheel.

Above: Guests help put up the awning.