



VMHF Twenty Most Frequently Asked Questions

What does a program aboard the schooner *Virginia* cost?

Voyage costs vary depending on the type of program, the educational content and where the ship will be sailing. Programs typically cost \$150-200 per day. A complete listing for the costs of specific voyages can be found on our webpage, www.schoonervirginia.org. Youth organizations, church groups, civic groups and other non-profit organizations can contact our program manager to arrange special programs and group prices.

Are there any discounts that are offered?

Yes. VMHF offers specific discounts for both our adult and students programs.

- A 10% discount is offered for any active duty military personal and/or their family.
- A 10% discount is offered for any trainee who pays for the entire cost of the program three months or more prior to the trip.
- A 10% discount is offered for anyone who books more than one program in a calendar year.
- Bring a friend and save! Get 10% off the cost of one person's program when two people sign up and sail together.
- More friends, more savings! For a group of six or more people who book together, each person receives 10% off the cost of the voyage.
- You may receive only one discount per person, per trip. No one may receive more than 10% off for any trip.

Are there scholarships for the student programs?

VMHF works with a number of partner organizations to provide scholarships to deserving youth from across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Fundraising and grant writing efforts within our organization and donations from private corporations and individuals help provide for these scholarships. These scholarships are given to specific organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs, JROTC units, Boy and Girl Scouts, and select public school systems. Individual students seeking scholarships must seek them through one of these partners.

What do I need to do to reserve my bunk for a trip?

To reserve your bunk, you need to place a deposit of half the cost for your trip and submit a completed Trainee Information form (page 1 of our registration packet, found on our website). Within thirty days of the program, the full cost of the trip and the completed registration packet (in its entirety) is required to reserve a bunk.

What do I need to do to complete the registration process?

Once we receive your deposit and trainee information page, we will hold your bunk. Thirty days prior to the trip, you will need to submit the remainder of the registration forms and pay the balance of the trip's cost. Please remember that a physical is required for all youth programs and many of the adult programs (those sailing off-shore). The schedule found on the webpage should highlight when these forms are needed. *A valid passport is required during programs boarding or sailing to foreign ports (including Canada).* When passports are required, VMHF will need a copy of passport in order to fill out customs information in advance of the trip.

Why are a medical history form and/or physical required for a program?

Please remember that sailing a traditional ship can be a challenging and strenuous activity. The captain and professional crew will instruct you in all safety procedures and help ensure you remain safe during the program. However, in the event of an accident or medical emergency, it is important that the crew and First Responders have all of the relevant information concerning your health and any medications you may be taking. For this reason, please be extremely forthcoming in filling out your medical information and let the medical officer know of any changes prior to the ship's departure during the program. We want to keep you safe, and knowing your current physical abilities and limitations will help. Please help us in this task!

What is your refund policy?

Your deposit or fully paid passage is refundable until thirty days prior to the trip. Within thirty days, the trip is non-refundable. If, however, you are unable to participate in the program for any reason, your money may be applied to another passage within the same calendar year. If the VMHF has to cancel the voyage, for any reason, the VMHF will first try to re-book you on another voyage, if that is not possible you will receive a full refund.

May I stay on the ship for an extra night or between programs?

No trainee may stay aboard the ship prior to or beyond the stated program period. Because of USCG requirements, any time a paying trainee is aboard the ship, the vessel must maintain a regulated number of officers and crew who must maintain certain watches that are not otherwise required when out of program. Additionally, there is very limited time between programs for shipboard maintenance and crew time off. For these reasons, we ask that all trainees board and depart at the designated times. Trainees choosing to participate in consecutive programs should find shore-side accommodations between trips.

May I depart prior to the designated conclusion of the program?

If you desire, you may depart prior to the end of the trip. There is no refund granted for leaving early and transportation and accommodation costs are your responsibility.

May I drop my bags off before the stated time?

We are happy to take and stow your bags aboard the ship prior to the designated boarding time. Because of maintenance and crew schedules, we ask that you not plan on touring the ship prior to the designated boarding time. We will be happy to allow a few minutes at boarding to show family members and friends around the ship prior to the beginning of the program.

What is the level of participation expected of me while on board the ship?

For all of VMHF's youth programs, races, and off-shore adult passages trainees are expected to participate fully in the operation of the ship. This includes all safety instruction and emergency drills, standing night watches, steering, and handling sails. Dependent on weather conditions and the number of participants, this can require a great deal of physical excursion and energy. The work is part of the adventure! We find that trainees who choose to participate fully in the operation of the ship gain the greatest benefit from the experience. For shorter adult passages aboard the *Virginia*, mainly in the Chesapeake Bay, trainees can expect a more relaxed setting. Trainees are still given the opportunity to participate as much as they like, but the requirements for them to be involved with all shipboard activities is eased. Safety briefings and drills are still required of everyone aboard the ship.

Can I bring alcohol on board the ship?

As a general rule, no alcohol is allowed aboard the ship during any VMHF program. For select adult programs, the captain and Program Manager may arrange for alcoholic beverages to be provided for the trainees while at anchor or dockside. Absolutely no alcoholic beverages are permitted to be consumed while the vessel is underway during programs. Failure to comply with this regulation is grounds for immediate removal from the ship. Use of alcohol during a youth program, on or off the ship, is grounds for immediate expulsion from the program.

Should I bring/take seasickness medicine?

Each person is different and will react to weather conditions in unique ways. Most people get their "sea legs" within a day or two of being on board. However, if you know you are prone to seasickness, you are welcome to bring your medications with you. The ship also keeps a variety of over-the-counter seasickness medication on board, and the medical officer can assist you if you decide you need medication. We strongly recommend that you discuss any medication options with your physician before the trip, as he/she will be able to advise you of side effects and interactions with other drugs you may be taking. ***If you do choose to take medicine, it is very important that you follow the drug's directions and that the ship's medical officer is notified of all medicines you may be taking.*** This is vital information for us to possess in an emergency.

What kind of clothes should I bring for the trip?

The weather you may experience while aboard *Virginia* may vary greatly depending on the season and the geographical area of the voyage. As a general rule, it is always cooler on the water than on land. There is no air conditioning or heating on the ship and you will be exposed to the elements while on deck. A rain jacket and rain pants should be considered a requirement. They do not have to be expensive, but should be durable and able to withstand general wear without ripping. Ponchos are not acceptable because they become trip hazards and make movement difficult. Rain boots are optional, but a good pair of comfortable shoes or boots is a must. Remember that space is limited on the ship, so plan on wearing the same clothes more than once. Depending on the season, two pairs of shorts, two pairs of pants and a few shirts will get you through a week on the ship. Numerous changes of underclothing and socks are important. A complete packing list can be found on the webpage in the information package for either Youth or Adult programs. It is important to layer properly with warm clothes. Many layers are better than one thick layer!

What kind of certifications does the captain/crew have for working on this type of ship?

All of our captains have a minimum of ten years experience in the maritime education industry. They hold a 500-ton (or greater) Oceans license for steam, diesel and auxiliary sail with all other required classes and certifications through the USCG. They are highly skilled mariners with extensive experience on the water and in educational programs. Our first and second mates hold a captain or mates license with the USCG. These officers typically have five or more years experience in the sailing/education community. The other officers and deckhands hold a lower level license or merchant mariner's document with the USCG. We typically hire one or two interns, which are introductory positions for people with limited experience.

Since they are working with teenagers, what kind of background checks do your crew members go through?

In order to obtain licensing with the USCG, professional mariners must undergo a background check by the federal government. Furthermore, starting in May, 2009; all VMHF crew members will undergo third party background checks for a criminal record and an examination of their driving record.

What kind of background/certification does the shipboard medical officer hold?

One of the ship's crew will be designated as the shipboard medical officer during your program. The minimum certification for this position is a Wilderness First Responder or Medical Care Provider. These certifications are the standard for our industry and training includes a week long high-intensity course in medical training for wilderness and/or shipboard environments. Many of our medical officers hold higher certifications as EMTs or Wilderness EMTs. Furthermore, the ship is equipped with a very complete medical chest and is part of the MedLink program. This program, designed for yachts and commercial vessels operating off shore, allows the ships to contact shore-based doctors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Through this program, doctors can analyze symptoms, prescribe medications, and direct the ship's medical officer in emergency procedures. They can also contact shore-side medical providers and help arrange for evacuation if needed.

What kind of safety inspections does *Virginia* undergo?

The schooner *Virginia* meets or exceeds all US Coast Guard certifications for vessels of her class/style. She is inspected by the USCG both as a small passenger vessel and a sailing school vessel. The USCG conducts scheduled and unscheduled inspections of the ship each year. She also must undergo regular inspections of her hull during her dry-docking. In addition, *Virginia* receives an annual inspection by the American Bureau of Shipping.

What kind of safety equipment is kept aboard the ship?

Although the *Virginia* is a reproduction of an early twentieth century schooner, she is equipped with the most recent safety and communications equipment. *Virginia* is required to carry life rafts, life jackets, cold weather survival suits, flares, and other safety equipment. All of her safety and communications equipment undergoes monthly inspections. Trainees are expected to participate in all safety instructions and emergency drills. They will be trained in the use of shipboard equipment by the professional crew. *Virginia's* lower decks are equipped with watertight compartments to prevent flooding, and her engineering equipment includes powerful de-watering pumps. Her communications systems include VHF (Very High Frequency) and SSB (Single Side Band) radios for short- and long-range communications. When sailing off-shore, the ship maintains daily communications through the use of a global email system called INMARSAT. The ship is also equipped with a satellite phone and internet system. All shipboard communications systems are for VMHF use only. In the event of a ship-board or shore-side emergency, VMHF office staff maintain a 24/7 watch system. By calling the office phone number, 757-627-7400, you will be placed in contact with the duty officer. They have the ability to contact the ship in the event of an **EMERGENCY** only. *Please use this number outside of normal business hours (8:30AM-5PM) only in an emergency.*

Can I bring my camera/cell phone/mp3 player/computer, etc?

Use of electronic devices during our youth programs is prohibited on board the *Virginia*. Students may use their electronic devices during their travel to and from the ship and cell phones may be used at designated times during shore excursions while in the program. Cell phones and electronic devices will be collected and stored in the ship's safe during all Youth Sail Training programs. For adult passages, we discourage the use of electronics. These devices can be intrusive to others and take away from the atmosphere of an early twentieth century sailing ship. We ask anyone who absolutely needs to use electronics to please be considerate of their shipmates and the activities going on at the time. Earphones/earplugs of any type are not permitted for safety reasons.

Can I tour *Virginia* without signing up for a sailing program?

In her role as an ambassador from the Commonwealth of Virginia, schooner *Virginia* participates in numerous festivals throughout the Atlantic region each year. These festivals often draw thousands of visitors and the ship opens her deck for public tours. A complete listing of the festivals the ship will participate in for the year can be found on our website.

Does *Virginia* offer receptions on board the ship?

VMHF offers limited opportunities for individuals and corporations to charter the vessel for dockside and underway receptions. These events are normally associated with her role as an ambassador during festivals. Please call our office for details and pricing.

Can I go on a day sail aboard the *Virginia*?

During festivals and special events, schooner *Virginia* will occasionally offer the opportunity for the general public to participate in day sails. These events will be advertised either through the host organization for the festival, or on the ship's website.