



Offshore Water Vessels

Large Passenger Vessels

Includes:

- Ferries / Cruise ships
- Chartered fishing boats
- Air Boats
- Pontoons
- Whale watching / Tour boats

Council Approval: [Required](#)

Activity Permitted For: D B J C S A

About Water Vessels

Large passenger water vessels include ferries, cruise ships, tour boats, sport-fishing boats, airboats, whale-watching boats, air boats, pontoons and yachts over 30 feet long. They can be either commercial or recreational vessels.

Amphibious boats known as duck boats are not recommended due to the hybrid (land to sea) nature of these vehicles, the notable lack of regulation around safety and evacuation protocols and the severity of loss with recent duck boat accidents.

Know where to go on a voyage. Look for ports with access to oceans, lakes, rivers, and coastal waterways.

Note: Small craft, such as canoes, kayaks, rowboats, and small sailboats are not considered offshore large passenger water vessels. If you plan to use these types of small craft, see specific chapters about them in *Safety Activity Checkpoints 2020*.

Learn More:

- Find life jackets to borrow in all 50 states: [Boat U.S. Foundation](#)
- Resources, regulations, and statistics: [U.S. Coast Guard*](#)
- Federal requirements for recreational boats: [U.S. Coast Guard Boater's Guide](#)
- Free basic boating safety courses for each state: [Boat U.S. Foundation](#)

*The United States Coast Guard app (IOS and Android) provides state boating information, a checklist of required safety equipment, and a way to report hazards, pollution, or suspicious situations.

Include Girls with Disabilities

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers, and ask about needs and accommodations. Connect with the ship or boat operator to determine any access or safety steps that need to be arranged in advance. Additionally, the [United States Access Board](#) has relevant resources and information for people with disabilities.

Safety Gear

The gear you'll need will depend on the type of vessel, length of your trip, location, and weather.

Choose life jackets or Coast-Guard approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) carefully. Must be Coast Guard–approved. Find approval on the label located on the inside back of the jacket.

Ensure life jackets fit snugly. Check the “user weight” on the label to make sure a jacket is the right size for a child. If the label isn't readable, don't use the jacket—and don't use inflatable life jackets for youth or adults. Once you've found the right fit, fasten all clips, zippers, and straps, then pull up on the shoulder straps. The jacket should be snug enough that the chin and earlobes cannot slip through. Tighten straps as necessary.

Be vigilant. Check to see that all life jackets are in serviceable condition: no broken clips, straps, or zippers. Make sure the life jackets aren't waterlogged or torn.

Ensure each child and adult wears a life jacket at all times while on a recreational vessel, unless in an enclosed cabin. They must also wear one whenever a commercial vessel operator instructs them to do so.

Follow your state's laws about the use of life jackets. Laws may differ depending on a child's age, the type of boat, and the type of boating operation.

Use safety gear as required by the U.S. Coast Guard or by your state's boating and waterways regulations. Reputable ship operators will be in compliance with these laws. Specific gear varies by ship size and use. Ask for an orientation on how to use safety gear, if appropriate. Take care when engaging ship operators outside the United States.

Additional gear/supplies:

- Layered clothing to protect from wind, sea spray, and other weather
- Non-slip, closed-toed shoes
- Seasickness remedies (see below), if needed
- Bottled water and healthy snacks
- Binoculars
- Hat or visor

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Teach girls these general safety rules:

- Do not run at any time while on the vessel, dock, or near the water.
- Listen to the orientation and follow the rules noted.
- Use the buddy system.
- Follow instructions in an emergency.
- Find out what to do if someone falls overboard or if other accidents occur.

Select a qualified operator. Commercial vessel operators are licensed through the U.S. Coast Guard. In foreign waters, the “flag of the ship” (the country under which it is registered) dictates the training and licensing required. These standards can vary widely. In the United States, passenger vessels (ferries, cruise ships, and whale-watching boats) that carry more than six passengers are licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast

Guard examines operator training and certification, vessel condition, and safety equipment. Federal laws and regulations are supplemented by state laws and international navigation standards.

Passenger Vessel with a Commercial License

In the United States, you can expect a passenger vessel with a commercial license to:

- Give a basic safety orientation, possibly through a loudspeaker. The orientation should cover the location of life jackets and other critical information. On cruise ships, an evacuation drill will be held.
- Have a professional, licensed crew that has training and experience in handling emergency situations.
- Possess current liability insurance.
- Be a well-maintained vessel being used as it was designed to be used.
- Know about state and federal regulations for life jackets. If you are instructed to use a life jacket, you must do so.

Privately-Owned Recreational Vessels (Yachts)

In the United States, privately-owned recreational vessels (yachts) are governed by Coast Guard requirements and by state training and licensing requirements, which vary by state. When in doubt, follow the guidelines that are the most strict. Check with the owner about these items:

- The operator must have sufficient training and be licensed to operate that type of vessel. Contact your council or the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary for guidance. Training includes safe operation, weather conditions, emergency response, navigation, and rules of the waterway.
- The vessel must have had a U.S. Coast Guard safety check within the last year.
- The vessel is currently registered by the state or is “documented” (a federal registration type) by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- Life jackets or Coast-Guard approved personal flotation devices are available for the number and size of all passengers on board.
- Adequate Marine or Boat Liability insurance (one million dollars or more) is in effect.
- The vessel is well-maintained and has all safety equipment required for its type and purpose.
- Passengers must wear a life jacket while the vessel is moving, unless in an enclosed cabin.
- A throwable floating device (i.e., a Type IV cushion, horseshoe buoy, or life ring) is available and placed where it is easily and quickly accessible. Ask about the procedures for if someone falls overboard.
- File a float plan to communicate your route.

Chartered or Rented Vessels

A chartered vessel is rented by the group for a specific length of time. Charters may or may not include a captain and/or crew.

If a boat is chartered with a crew, use the guidelines (above) for privately-owned recreational vessels.

If a vessel is chartered without crew, you'll need to provide your own captain and crew. All must meet training and licensing standards designated by the U.S. Coast Guard. The standards that apply will depend on the size and type of the vessel. Review this article and contact your council for additional guidance and approval.

Cruise Ships

Before you book, check the Vessel Sanitation Program ratings of the Centers for Disease Control, which routinely inspects ships for cleanliness, repair, food preparation, and storage.

Book cabins in a block either across the hall from or next to one another so that your group stays together. Teach and use the buddy system and have a plan for communicating if members of the group get separated. Be aware that cell phones may not work on board.

Also, be sure to secure valuables in the ship's safe.

Follow Girl Scout standards and the guidelines in *Safety Activity Checkpoints 2020* for use of swimming pools, climbing walls, snorkeling, and other higher-risk activities. Choose shore excursions carefully, keeping in mind that cruise ships and related vendors are not aware of Girl Scout standards. Be thorough in asking questions about safety.

Know, too, that often other countries don't maintain the same strict boating laws as the United States does. Research the standards of the country you're planning to visit; if standards seem poor, find out how to best ensure safety, or avoid unsafe situations completely. Contact your council for guidance.

Additionally, suggest that girls and adults who get motion sickness consider taking a remedy. Dramamine, Bonine, or a homeopathic remedy are all options. Let troop families decide whether to use these, and if they do, let them know that the remedies are more effective when taken in advance. Other tips:

- Bring mint, ginger candies, gingersnaps, or plain crackers to settle queasy stomachs.
- Have seasick persons stay on deck in the fresh air, if possible. Have them keep their eyes on the horizon. Going below deck can worsen symptoms. The stern (back) of most boats is usually calmer. But avoid this area if exhaust fumes are a problem.
- Respect the environment. Choose responsible operators who follow local environmental laws. Whale-watching boats should respect wildlife and should not aggressively chase or harass the whales.
- Check weather with ship operator. If lightning or high winds are expected, consider rescheduling.