

Avid Ocean Adventuring Courtesy Of SailQuest Sailing School Thailand

You may well have gazed enviously at the sleek yachts gliding across Jomtien or Pattaya Bays and poignantly wished that you, too, had the chance to sail one. Alternatively, you may have become thoroughly jaded with the regular pastimes Pattaya has to offer, or perhaps the ladies aren't biting and then you remember the aphorism "All the nice girls love a sailor", especially if he possesses a bareboat captain's ticket. Whatever the reason, many of you are attracted to a life on the ocean wave, even if only briefly, but possess neither the experience nor the necessary skills to cope with the sea. Well, help is at hand in the form of the ultra-professional SailQuest Sailing School, sailing out of Ocean Marina, Pattaya, Thailand.

Recreational yachting isn't all plain sailing, though, far from it; the sea can be a harsh mistress that will brook no rank amateurism, or inadequate preparation. This fact is totally understood by the highly professional SailQuest Sailing School instructors. The owner and chief instructor of the sailing school, Captain Tim McMahon, is a dedicated all-weather sailor with over 150,000 nautical miles sailing experience under his belt, with a Merchant Marine Master's ticket, who's literally been sailing all his life. Born to a seafaring lobster-fishing family in Maine, probably the premier maritime state in the US, Capt. Tim has experienced all the ocean has to throw at the unwary sailor, which is why he lays so much emphasis on safety, responsibility, adequate preparation and wise resource management for his fledgling yachtsmen. Rest assured if you receive yacht training at Capt. Tim's capable hands and abide by his directives, you'll be adequately equipped to take the high seas with aplomb and panache. He'll also rapidly disabuse you of any overly romantic notions you might have, like the student who had visions of being able to build a 100-foot catamaran and circumnavigate the globe; both single-handedly!

The other school instructors have ranged the seas and oceans of Europe, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and Australia, giving them a wide depth and variety of experience, and a considerable range of maritime knowledge and practical insight. All of which they yearn to impart to their students.

The sailing curriculum on offer at SailQuest Sailing School consists of two 5 day stages, which can be taken individually or all in – a 10-day back-to-back course. The first is the IYT International Crew Course, an entry level foundation training programme for novices, with the emphasis on gaining essential, practical hands-on experience. In it you learn the basics of sailing, yacht design, electrical, mechanical and plumbing systems and the equipment required to take a boat to sea. Also covered are the fundamentals of navigation, sailing theory and terminology, knot tying, rope-work, sail handling, yacht safety etc. The course consists of knowledge of passage planning, charts and navigational aids, docking, anchoring, boat handling, collision regulations and first-aid at sea.

The culminating stage, the IYT Bareboat Captain Course, will entitle you to wear a captain's cap and command your crew; effectively graduation, signifying mastery of the essentials of seamanship. Attainment of this level of proficiency means the graduate is considered sufficiently competent and experienced to charter a yacht safely. The areas covered on this course include seamanship skills, tides and currents, wind and weather, waves and storms and assuming responsibility for a yacht and her crew. The course culminates in a final exam consisting of both a theoretical and a practical on-board evaluation, before which the student must have logged up 200 nautical miles and 10 days at sea.

Successful completion of all of these components will make the graduate the proud owner of an IYT Bareboat Captain Certificate. Incidentally, for those unfamiliar with the term, 'bareboat' means independence from having to hire an effectively supervisory crew and captain, because the course graduate is now the master and considered capable, experienced and confident enough to take a boat to sea, to assume the loneliness of command and command their crew, having tested themselves and discovered their strengths and weaknesses, (which obviously have to be remedied), but, most importantly, to have learnt to work in co-operation with the sea, respecting all her moods and copious demands.

Having interviewed Capt. Tim, I can safely say that he inspires one with total confidence in his prowess, vast maritime experience and love of sailing. Anyone who enters the preliminary Crew Course with the intention of being satisfied merely with that level of basic training will rapidly reconsider when they become infused with Capt. Tim's contagious enthusiasm and will yearn to master the full 3-part training programme. The SailQuest 10 Day Hands-On Bareboat Skippers course will enable students to familiarise themselves and gain valuable sailing experience on the Sailquest training yachts.

SailQuest Sailing School students are extremely fortunate in the prime location of its Ocean Marina base, with such an excellent training ground, adjacent to Laem Chabang Port with the chance to learn how to cope with the maritime navigational intricacies of its often hectic ship and tug-boat traffic, sea lane and traffic separation scheme and navigational aids, like buoys and lighthouses. In the same area, lie the islands of Larn, Rin and Phai, perfect for practicing traditional navigation methods, anchoring and beach landings aboard the dingy, while the return to Ocean Marina affords ample practice in docking and close-quarters boat handling techniques.

One shouldn't get the impression that the courses are all demanding, arduous work and no play. Capt. Tim assured *Pattaya Grapevine* that students have ample opportunities for partying ashore, and swimming or snorkelling off the islands. Indeed, such is the fascination and level of involvement in learning how to sail that students will revel in sharing their experiences and a firm sense of camaraderie is soon built up among the students and instructors, which often lasts a lifetime. So much so that students enrol on the further courses merely to continue the friendships fostered in the first course. This especially applies to the opportunities for

continuing education with SailQuest provided by the Mile-builders, Racing Regattas and Adventure Sailing Cruises all around the South East Asia region. Once bitten by the sailing bug, an almost guaranteed consequence of enjoying one or more of the courses, the newly badged sailor will avidly seek the further experiences and opportunities to hone their nautical skills that such events can provide, for it's true to say that one can never gain enough exposure to the sea in all its myriad temperaments.

Participating in these continuing education events will also give the enterprising yachtsman the chance to venture further afield all along the Gulf of Thailand, past Koh Chang, as far as Cambodian waters and those of the Andaman Islands, off Phuket. Ironically, in the unlikely event of another tsunami in that area, you'll be pleased to learn that its effects will be minuscule if you're out on the open seas, as its wrath only builds up close to shore. What you're more likely to experience off Koh Samui or Phuket is the Doldrums, with its propensity for cloud and unpredictable or very light winds. Being in the Monsoon Wind Belt, however, gives sailors out of Ocean Marina excellent sailing winds more than 300 days of the year, particularly from now until March, though if you really yearn to put your newly gained yachting experience to the test, you'll have to wait till the period of the SW Monsoon, from May till September, when occasional high winds and low visibility will truly test your mettle.

If you're of the same temperament as Capt. Tim, you'll no doubt share his sense of adventure and pioneering spirit. He can't wait to explore the relatively virginal seas and islands off Burma, when they eventually deregulate them. He sometimes gets the chance to deliver boats further afield than the normal sailing grounds and his next trip illustrates how a seasoned instructor can work admirably in tandem with a student. He soon has to deliver a 50-knot speed boat to Borneo; a trip which he tasked one of his students to plot his voyage. The really thrilling aspect of the journey is that it will take him right through active pirate territory – now that's a challenge and a half, but no doubt Tim will take it in his stride, as he has all the necessary skills to be a pirate himself if he so chose, so he will be really au fait with their mentality and well prepared to run their gauntlet.

By the way, the SailQuest 10Day Bareboat Shipper's Certificate course runs every month of the year. If you have even the slightest sailing inclination, can you afford not to enrol immediately? It's guaranteed to give you a whole new perspective and perhaps for the first time in your existence, make your life really worth living.

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