

Niagara Sail Training



An Overview for the Prospective Trainee

Perhaps you are here because you have a deep interest in history, because for you, the Age of Sail is a living thing, and you knew Niagara's name, and you sought her out. Perhaps, though, you are here for reasons you can only dimly explain: you turned a dockside corner on a moonlit night, and there the ship was, ephemeral, a vision from another age. And you came closer to this creature of spectacle and majesty, her towering masts dancing slightly with the swell, as if in latent anticipation. And you spoke to some mariner there, who said he came here on this ship, and that he would soon go away upon it, that this was something that people did. That you could bag groceries, or peddle home insurance, you could take the cross-town bus every day, and provide adequate customer service by telephone or instant messenger. Or you could cut a wide blue swath across the wave-trammeled seas. You could practice an ageless craft in an unforgiving element.



"In any pre-industrial society, from the upper Paleolithic to the nineteenth century A.D., a boat or (later) a ship was the largest and most complex machine produced" -- Keith Muckleroy, Maritime Archaeology

Niagara is a singularly complex machine. It represents one of the last and most refined expressions of a technology millennia in its evolution. Yet beneath this complexity lies a willful simplicity. A sailing ship is a fugue of simple ideas and simple machines, repeated in subtle and complex variation. And as magnificent as it is, the ship is simply a tool. The purpose of a ship is the practice of seamanship, the craft and the science of making a home and a living in a hostile element. While it is no longer necessary for us to take to the sea in wooden sailing ships for the practice of war or trade or exploration, it remains necessary for us to, from time to time, take the measure of ourselves against the wilderness.

What do we do?

While underway, the U.S. Brig *Niagara* operates as a Sailing School Vessel. This means that we accept paying trainees, who are, both legally and practically, considered part of the crew. Trainees eat and live with the crew, onboard the ship. While sailing on *Niagara* can have a classroom component, most of our training is hands-on. By becoming an active part of the crew, trainees learn the skills of traditional square-rig seamanship, through sailing, maintaining, and living on the ship. The nineteenth-century maritime environment is far enough removed from our own lives that simply living on board the ship, and helping her make her way from place to place, is an education in and of itself.



We prefer that trainees stay on board for a minimum of two weeks. This is because it takes time to learn the fundamentals of square-rig seamanship: terminology, physical skills, familiarity with the vessel, and the social structure of shipboard life. By the end of two weeks, most trainees are comfortable operating in this new world, and can recognize that they have become a valued part of a close knit community.

Trainees participate fully in all aspects of the life and work of the crew. This work includes both the romantic and the commonplace: setting and taking in sail, washing dishes, painting and varnishing,

giving deck tours, steering by compass in the gathering dawn, and charging along under a quartering breeze. *Niagara* does not take passengers – she makes mariners.

A trainee berth includes room and board, whether the ship is underway or in port. Trainees sleep in hammocks and stow all their gear in one seabag each. The galley provides three meals a day, all cooked on a wood-burning stove.

Niagara's seamanship program is intended for healthy adults, ages 14 and up. Passports are required on international voyages, and anyone who does not legally reside in the USA or Canada must present to the Captain upon arrival a valid Passport and B-2 Tourist Visa to participate in live-aboard sailing programs.



What is *Niagara's* schedule?

Niagara's year consists of four unequal seasons, varying in length from year to year. In the summer, *Niagara* sails throughout the Great Lakes. In the fall, crewmembers and volunteers remove the majority of *Niagara's* rig using methods and technology largely unchanged in the last two centuries. The ship is then covered with a canvas superstructure to protect her against harsh Lake Erie winters. In the spring, the ship is reassembled, or up-rigged, once again using traditional methods and technology.

Throughout the 2017 season, *Niagara* will participate in races and parades of sail on the Great Lakes. Our anticipated schedule is as follows:

Provisional 2017 Trainee Schedule. Subject to change.

April 2017: Rigging Practicum:

Apprentice-level program for professionals and aspiring professionals in the traditional sailing vessel field. Help Up-rig Niagara while learning and practicing traditional marlinspike seamanship skills, and participate in pre-season training sails. Application process is competitive. Apply by resume and cover letter.

May 10 – 31: History Under Sail

College-level program focusing on the fundamentals of square-rig seamanship and comparative public history. Program begins and ends in Erie, PA, and will include sailing voyages to the major maritime museums and monuments of Lake Erie. College credit is available through partnering institutions, but participants are not required to be actively enrolled college students.

June 7—20: Exploring the Great Lakes Session I

A program for ages 14 to 18, beginning and ending in Erie, PA, and including a voyage to Put-In-Bay, OH for the island's Maritime Heritage Festival. Curriculum will focus on the fundamentals of square-rig seamanship and developing the skills and personal qualities to meet the challenges of life onboard a ship.

June 22 – July 6: Exploring the Great Lakes, Session II

A program for ages 14 to 18, beginning in Erie, PA, ending in Kingston, Ontario and including Tall Ships festivities in Toronto region and a transit through the Welland Canal. Curriculum will focus on the fundamentals of square-rig seamanship and developing the skills and personal qualities to meet the challenges of life onboard a ship. Passport required.

July 7 – 21: Individual Trainee Program I

This two-week program is available to any interested individual, age 14 or older, with no upper age limit. Begins in Kingston, Ontario and proceeds to Montreal region and Quebec City, with a passage through the scenic Thousand Islands region. With three Tall Ships festivals in two weeks, this program is perfect for the person who wants to see it all. May be combined with the program immediately after. Passport required.

July 21 – August 1: Individual Trainee Program II

This two-week program is available to any interested individual, age 14 or older, with no upper age limit. Begins in Quebec City, proceeds up the St. Lawrence River, across Lake Ontario, through the Welland Canal to Port Colborne, ON, and on to Erie, PA. May be combined with the preceding program. Passport required.

August 9 – 22: Maritime Academy Program

A program for cadets age 14 to 18 at maritime academies, and maritime-based high schools, focusing on developing seamanship skills and providing experiences that are directly relevant to careers in the maritime trades. The program begins and ends in Erie, PA, with visits to Lake Erie ports.

September 2017: Williams-Mystic Program:

Reserved for the Williams-Mystic Maritime Studies program.

In some cases, transportation between Erie and away ports can be provided, and, in all cases, we are happy to assist with planning and logistics for your arrival and departure. Dates and destinations are subject to change.

How much does it cost?

Tuition for the *Niagara's* live-aboard sailing programs is \$1,500.00 for two to four weeks, per individual student. Tuition for students enrolled in group programs organized by partner institutions (such as colleges and universities) may vary. Room and board is covered; travel to and from the vessel is not.

Trainees who wish to remain onboard after the end of their scheduled sail may do so only with the captain's approval, and only when space is available. An additional fee of \$300 per week will be charged for any time on board beyond the first four weeks. Returning trainees will receive a 15% discount on tuition during their second season, and a 25% discount if they return as a trainee during any summer sailing season thereafter. Enquire by phone or email for early registration discounts, for returning trainees who apply by December 31, 2016.

The Flagship Niagara League strives to make our sailing programs as affordable as possible, and scholarships may be available. Call for details.

How do I apply?

Go to www.flagshipniagara.org and click on "Sail Training Program" and download the "Preliminary Information for Trainees" form for more information and instructions on how to apply. You can also email the Director of Marine Operations, Joseph Lengieza, at marineops@flagshipniagara.org to request a hard copy of all necessary forms, or call (814) 452-2744, Ext. 214 if you have any questions.



Who are we?

The U.S. Brig *Niagara*, homeported in Erie, Pennsylvania, is the reconstructed relief flagship of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry. On September 10, 1813, nine small ships -- six of them, including *Niagara*, constructed at Erie -- defeated a British squadron of six vessels in the Battle of Lake Erie. A pivotal event in the War of 1812, it led to the regaining of Detroit, lost at the war's outset, and lifted the nation's morale.

The U.S. Brig *Niagara* is a two-masted, square-rigged sailing vessel. In 1813, she had a crew of 155 men and boys who manned her sails, 18 carronades and two long guns. The crew was organized into two watch sections (port and starboard) for routine duties while underway. More experienced sailors were stationed aloft, while others under the direction of petty officers manned the rigging which controlled the sails from deck. In battle, men also manned the guns and carronades. Boys carried the black powder charges from the magazine to the guns. Marines and soldiers were assigned to the fighting tops on the masts where they could fire their muskets on the enemy ships. Officers directed setting sails, firing cannon, and maneuvering the brig in response to orders from the captain.

On September 10th, 1813, the British under Commodore Robert Heriot Barclay and the Americans under Perry met in battle near Put-in-Bay, Ohio. Perry's flagship, *Lawrence*, engaged the British ships *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte*, while the *Niagara*, for unknown reasons, did not close the enemy.

After the *Lawrence* was completely disabled, with most of her crew wounded or killed, Perry transferred by boat to the undamaged *Niagara*, hoisted his battle flag -- "DONT GIVE UP THE SHIP" -- sailed her into

close action, broke the British battle line, and forced Barclay to surrender. In the aftermath, Commodore Perry wrote his famous report to General William Henry Harrison, "We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop."

The current *Niagara*, the third reconstruction of the original vessel, was launched in Erie in 1988, the 175th anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie. *Niagara* sails the Great Lakes, preserving and interpreting the story of the Battle of Lake Erie, and acting as an ambassador in her capacity as the flagship of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As a Sailing School Vessel, her crew of professionals and trainees actively preserve the skills of square-rig seamanship.

The stated goals of the Flagship Niagara League and the Erie Maritime Museum include preserving and presenting Erie's maritime history, and one of the ways this is accomplished is by sailing *Niagara* to various ports. By doing this, we broadcast our message to thousands of people every year. At our port stops, as many as five thousand visitors a day can board the ship and get a glimpse of a world two centuries passed. Our Sailing School Program helps foster a deeper understanding of the same world. Preserving the ship as an artifact is important, but it is just as important to preserve the skills and technical understanding which make it work. At the end of the day, the ship is just a tool. The knowledge and practice of seamanship are the works for which it was built, and are the greater human accomplishment.