

CHASING THE WIND

From the California coast to the Swiss Alps, these six learn-to-sail programs pair expert instruction with spectacular experiences by sea, river, and lake.

by GINA DECAPRIO VERCESI

THE INN AT PERRY CABIN

The nautical legacy of Maryland's Eastern Shore is artfully preserved at the Inn at Perry Cabin. Set along the shores of the Miles River—a quiet tributary of Chesapeake Bay—the resort is one of the loveliest places in the country to learn to sail. Helmed by Captain Jason Pinter, Perry Cabin's boutique sailing school offers tailored, small-group instruction in the American Sailing Association's Basic Keelboat and Coastal Cruising courses. Morning and afternoon classroom sessions are followed by time on the water aboard one of the inn's two elegant Alerion sloops, the 33-foot *Starlight* and 38-foot *Starbright* (pictured: the skipjack *Stanley Norman*). Private lessons are also available, and the inn's exclusive Sailmate Experience is a fun adventure in teamwork for couples and small groups.





THE BITTER END YACHT CLUB

Sailors have been “messaging about in boats” at the Bitter End Yacht Club since it first opened in 1969 on Virgin Gorda’s North Sound—the last protected harbor before the Caribbean meets the open ocean. It’s also the liveliest anchorage in the British Virgin Islands, a place widely regarded as one of the world’s finest sailing grounds. The Hokin family purchased the property in 1973, beginning their long stewardship of the iconic outpost. After a thoughtful post-hurricane rebuild in 2021, the resort has a better-than-ever water-sports program, with a sparkling new fleet that includes 13- and 17-foot Hobie Cats and 12-foot RS Zest sailboats good for beginners and high-performance sailors alike. One-on-one lessons in sailing, windsurfing, and wing foiling are complemented by the easygoing expertise of the water-sports team, who are always nearby to offer tips and advice.



The Bitter End
Yacht Club

ROSEWOOD BERMUDA

As the birthplace of the Bermuda Sloop and the host of legendary events like the Newport Bermuda Race and the SailGP series, Bermuda is a storied place to learn the ropes. Set against the turquoise waters of Castle Harbour, the water-sports center at Rosewood Bermuda is operated by the nonprofit sailing school U Sail. The school’s Royal Yachting Association—certified instructors guide everyone from first-timers to seasoned hands in sailing, windsurfing, winging, and foiling. Sheltered on all three sides by land, the harbor offers calm, clear seas that inspire confidence and make learning a breeze. Get your feet wet with two-hour “taster” sessions designed to help you discover your interests, or dive into a two-day RYA Dinghy course, which will leave you salty, certified, and steady at the helm.

EL ENCANTO

Framed by the Santa Ynez Mountains in a picture-perfect neighborhood above downtown Santa Barbara, El Encanto has long served as a retreat for the Hollywood crowd. Thanks to an exclusive new partnership with the Santa Barbara Sailing Center—one of the largest American Sailing Association—accredited schools in the country—the hotel’s guests can now learn to sail in the nearby Santa Barbara Channel. Private parent-child or one-on-one lessons aboard a 22-foot Capri keelboat are entirely hands-on, covering proper sail trim, navigation, safety maneuvers, docking, and more. Keep an eye out for dolphins, seals, and sea lions—and maybe a celebrity or two.



Hotel Eden Roc Ascona is an idyllic base for freshwater adventures on Lake Maggiore (left). Below: Nautilus Sailing.

HOTEL EDEN ROC ASCONA

For a freshwater adventure that blends Alpine grandeur with Mediterranean flair, glittering Lake Maggiore is the answer, with Hotel Eden Roc Ascona serving as an idyllic base. Billed as Switzerland’s only true beach resort, the regal property holds a prime lakefront location in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino. The hotel’s marina is home to Asconautica, a family-owned water-sports school that has been training budding sailors since 1974. Here, guests can learn all the basics—trimming and reefing sails, tacking and jibing, docking and mooring—aboard a 25-foot Archambault Surprise. What’s more, the region’s mild climate and reliable thermal winds—the Tramontana, which comes down from the mountains in the morning, and the Inverna, which blows in from the plains in the afternoon—deliver consistently favorable conditions.



NAUTILUS SAILING

Few learn-to-sail experiences can top a week spent at sea. Enter Nautilus Sailing, an American Sailing Association school that gives aspiring captains the chance to hone their skills aboard 42- to 46-foot high-performance Excess catamarans while earning four ASA certifications, from Basic Keelboat to Cruising Catamaran. With a maximum of four students per trip, instruction is highly personalized, blending theory with hands-on practice in sail trimming, coastal navigation, engine checks, anchoring and mooring, weather, and safety. Courses take place in premier destinations like Mexico’s Sea of Cortez, Tahiti, the Abacos in the Bahamas, the Balearic Islands in Spain, and Croatia’s Dalmatian Coast. Students arrive prepared thanks to Nautilus’s video class and spend their days balancing serious seamanship with snorkeling, paddleboarding, sunset swims, and rum punches. For those ready to take it to the next level, advanced flotillas let sailors cruise independently alongside a lead Nautilus vessel. ☸

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