

Climb Aboard for a One-of-a-Kind Tour

Story by Judy Colbert

Photographs Courtesy of Chesapeake Conservancy



History blankets Southern Maryland like an early morning mist, creeping into and out of every nook and cranny. Several local watermen are helping us understand that history as a project to help offset dwindling incomes. Today's pay is more the pleasure of a job well done than a means of supporting a business and a family. The watermen were becoming as endangered a species as some of the catch they used to bring in to sell.

Fortunately, the Chesapeake Conservancy, Coastal Heritage Alliance, Maryland Waterman's Association and Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum created the Watermen Heritage Tours program to help the watermen generate a new revenue stream. Established with some of the \$15 million available from Congress for the restoration of blue crabs and to support the watermen, the program provides insights and skills on how to conduct heritage tours. More than 200 watermen have taken the multi-day course. Marketing is provided through the watermenheritagetours.org website.

"Watermen and their families have played a crucial role in our treasured Chesapeake Bay. Their unique identities have influenced the history, culture and economy of the Bay for generations. What better way to experience the waters than accompanying a waterman for a day to learn his daily routine?" asks Carly Dean, project manager at the Chesapeake

A few tours offer seafood meals as part of the experience.



Conservancy. "The tours also offer a great opportunity to learn more about the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, the nation's first all-water National Historic Trail, as well as the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail."

The watermen of Calvert and St. Mary's counties share their joy and knowledge about our history so you can pass it on to your friends and family. From spring through fall, four heritage tour operations provide you with a way to see lighthouses, learn how to crab or oyster as the professionals do (then have your catch prepared for your dining pleasure), and more.

In Calvert, Capt. Rachel Dean and Capt. Dale "Simon" Dean of Solomons Island Heritage Tours demonstrate a variety of harvesting methods for blue crabs, finfish and oysters on a working



Several local Watermen Heritage Tours allow you to get out on the water and try your hand at making a catch.

fishing vessel. It is not nearly as easy as you may think, particularly the oystering part. They own and operate Patuxent River Seafood and take their catch on the Roughwater, a 40-foot working

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Chesapeake Baybuilt. The crabs, oysters, rockfish (striped bass), and soft and hard crabs you buy at local restaurants and markets may have come from the Deans. Both are active members of the Calvert County Watermen's Association, where she's the association's secretary and he's on the board of directors.

Capt. Charles and Mary Beth Brown offer crabbing demonstrations and scenic 90-minute kayak tours along St. Leonard's Creek to see War of 1812 battle sites. They include a private tour of an oyster seeding facility at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum on their

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OUTDOOR LIVING

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lower Patuxent River Heritage Tours. Lunch (not included in the tour price) is at a well-known restaurant on St. Leonard's Creek. Capt. Charlie is also a member of the Calvert County Watermen's Association. If you'd like your tour in French, just ask, for Mary Beth is a retired county French teacher.

Aboard the LochJaw, a Chesapeake Deadrise, Capt. Loch Weems and Capt. Dan Baker offer a variety of tours. Weems says, "We give about five or six tours a year. Mostly, people just don't have the time or opportunity to get out on the water. They're just happy to get out there." With generations of watermen in their past, they divulge a keen insight during their history-based tours of the Solomons Island area in their Tours by Capt. Loch. They can customize the tour according to your interest, whether you want to learn more about the War of 1812, the Weems Line Steamboats, the lighthouses or

something else, and your tour can be from two to three hours to a full-day or weekend excursion.

Capt. Phil Langley, who grew up in St. Mary's, runs Fish the Bay Charters in St. Mary's County. "I try to give an educational spiel," he says, "and I try to cover all the ground. People really have little knowledge about crab reproduction and that the female can only mate during the soft shell state." Climb aboard the Lisa S, a traditional 48-foot wooden charter boat, and maybe you'll learn about the trail of the English explorers, try to hand-tong a few oysters, or pull a few pots you hope will be filled with blue crabs. Or, you can explore some of the lighthouses that are only accessible by boat, including the Point No Point and Hooper Island lights. Langley has a pavilion where you can enjoy a picnic lunch after your history-laden cruise.

So mark a date on your calendar this summer to gather a few friends for a one-of-a-kind tour of our local waterways. The experience will be unforgettable. •



Watermen Heritage Tours in Southern Maryland

Solomons Island Heritage Tours/ Patuxent River Seafood

301-672-3509

solomonsislandheritagetours.com

Patuxent River Heritage Tours

Solomons, 410-326-2685

watermenheritagetours.org

Tours by Capt. Loch

455 Lore Rd., Solomons

410-474-0606 and 410-591-0361

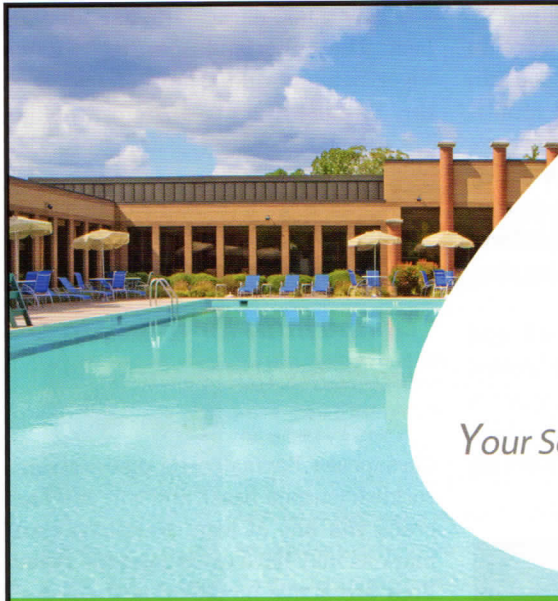
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Fish the Bay Charters

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