

# Getting Started Sailing on San Francisco Bay by Being Race Crew

If you're interested in getting out on the water to go sailing, there are many ways to do it. One way is to volunteer as crew on a sailboat race. For the inexperienced, you can start by participating in a low-key race. Some people learn this way, and as they get more skills they sail all around the Bay, and even to Hawaii, as racing crew. Some will go on to buy their own boat to race and/or cruise.

Many yacht clubs run low-key "beercan" races on weekday evenings during the spring and summer. These races give skippers and crew a chance to get on the water, and learn or practice racing skills. Many racing skippers use beercan races as a way to try out and train prospective crew for more serious weekend races.

It is uncommon for an owner to race on their own; most boats need people to trim the sails, raise and lower sails, gybe a spinnaker, and so on while the owner steers the boat. Race boat owners are looking for friendly people with those skills, or who they can train in those skills. As prospective crew, you will need to find someone who owns a boat and will invite you to join their crew for the evening. Many yacht clubs have ways to connect prospective crew and owners. The following is a partial list.

- Berkeley YC, races on Friday evenings: <https://www.berkeleyyc.org/how-to-be-crew>.
- Oakland YC, on the Alameda side of the Estuary, races on Wednesday evenings: <https://www.oaklandyachtclub.net/Default.aspx?p=dynamicmodule&pageid=178&ssid=100211&vnf=1>.
- Richmond YC, races on Wednesday evenings: <https://www.facebook.com/richmond yachtclubcalifornia/posts/pfbid02g2wNhJXuUHecB9DT6uySQAhssVkDiAGuxJN9Bs3gFTxJSHETtAbSwtgx9koYTtrhI>.
- Stockton Sailing Club, races on Wednesday evenings: <https://stocktonsc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/55-2016-How-to-find-a-boat-to-race-on-for-Wednesday-Night-Races-pdf.pdf>.

Some clubs have low-key, informal programs to get new people on the water for acclimatization once or twice before going on the water as race crew:

- Island YC in Alameda runs a "Tuna Tuesdays" during the summer <https://www.iyc.org/sbp-179901.html>.

- Sequoia Yacht Club in Redwood City will connect up prospective crew with racing boats <https://www.sequoiayc.com/regattas-&-weekend-races>.
- South Lake Tahoe Windjammers YC has a small crew list at <https://sltwyc.com/faq/#dontknow>.

You can also reach out to clubs not on this list. Ask if they have a “beercan” series, describe your background and physical condition, and ask if they think you could find a crew position.

Different parts of San Francisco Bay have different summer conditions:

- San Francisco Marina District, South Beach, Berkeley: consistent wind, sporty conditions.
- Alameda Estuary, Richmond: moderate wind, flat water, warmer.

*Some additional thoughts:*

Each boat is different, and each boat owner is different. Some owners are more fun to be around; some less. Some are great teachers, some are not. Some really want to spend their race having a good time with friends new and old; some really want to win. It’s good to sail on several different boats with different owners to see what your own preferences are; maybe you’ll realize that winning is more important than you thought, or hanging out with a fun crew is what matters more than winning.

Small boats are a great place to start, because it takes less muscle to work the sails and a smaller crew means each person gets to do more jobs. Conversely, bigger boats need more crew, and there can be more experienced people to help train a new person.

If you want to race, keep an eye out for “Crew Parties” some clubs hold occasionally as social mixers for prospective crew and skippers looking for crew. Also, the San Francisco Bay Area’s local sailing magazine, Latitude 38, has a capability for crew and boats to connect up; see <https://www.latitude38.com/crew-list-home/>. This is a wonderful resource for new sailors who want to race.