



Offshore Water Vessels

Activity Permitted for: D B J C S A

Large Passenger Vessels, includes:

- Ferries – Council/Vendor Approval – **No**
- Cruise ships – Council Approval – **Yes** | Vendor approval – **No** (See Travel/Trips SAC for details)
- Chartered fishing boats – Council/Vendor approval – **Yes**
- Air Boats – Council/Vendor approval – **Yes**
- Pontoons – Council/Vendor approval – **Yes**
- Whale watching / Tour boats – For vessels not US Coastguard certified– Council/Vendor approval – **Yes**

Council Approval: Required as specified above. When required per Council Policy P1; submit [Activity/Trip Permission \(2129\)](#). *Council approval is **not** required for commercial transportation such as ferries.*

Vendor Approval: Required as specified above.

Required Training: 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights (gsLearn)

About Offshore/Large Passenger Water Vessels

Note: *Small craft, such as canoes, kayaks, rowboats, small sailboats, waterski or wakeboard boats are not considered offshore / large passenger water vessels. If you plan to use these types of small craft, see the individual activity's safety activity checkpoints for the type of small craft you will be using. When traveling via Cruise Ships, this requires submission of Intent to Travel (#2279) and 281 GS 203 International Trip training. See Travel/Trips Safety Activity Checkpoints for specifics.*

Large passenger water vessels include ferries, cruise ships, tour boats, sport-fishing boats, airboats, whale-watching boats, air boats, pontoons and privately owned boats and yachts. They can be either commercial or recreational vessels.

Amphibious boats known as duck boats are not recommended due to the hybrid (land to sea) nature of these vehicles, the notable lack of regulation around safety and evacuation protocols and the severity of loss with recent duck boat accidents.

Learn More

- Free basic boating safety courses for each state and where to borrow life jackets in all 50 states: [Boat U.S. Foundation](#)
- Resources, regulations, and statistics: [U.S. Coast Guard*](#)
- Federal requirements for recreational boats: [U.S. Coast Guard Boater's Guide](#)

*The United States Coast Guard app (IOS and Android) provides state boating information, a checklist of required safety equipment, and a way to report hazards, pollution, or suspicious situations.

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities

Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Always be sure to contact the ship or boat operator to determine any access or safety steps that need to be arranged in advance. For more information visit the [United States Access Board](#) for information on ADA Passenger Vessels Accessibility Guidelines.

Equity. In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Infectious Disease Guidelines. Girl Scouts use a commonsense approach to health and safety. Before participating in Girl Scouting activities, members are to undergo health checks at home for any symptoms such as fever of 100.4 (or need for fever-reducing medications) chills, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, stomach aches, nausea, or vomiting. Members with any of these symptoms or in need of fever-reducing medication **MUST** stay home until fully recovered.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before taking girls out for any activity and review it with the girls so they too are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies.

Offshore Water Vehicles / Large Passenger Vessels Checkpoints

Vendor Approval Required for chartered or rented vessels, as well as tour boats or privately owned vessels not U.S. Coast guard certified. Review Vendor Approval section under the *Standard Safety Guidelines for vendor approval timelines*. Connect with your Girl Scout council for approved vendor suggestions to ensure they are properly insured. If it is not, allow enough time to have the vendor approved. The owner operator should be able to confirm one million dollars General Liability insurance upon request. The council will request a certificate of insurance to document evidence of the insurance coverage and name the council as additional insured. Most facilities will accommodate this request if they are able to administratively. [See High Adventure Approved Vendors List \(#2127\)](#).

Required Training: Troop/Group Program leaders must complete GSUSA's online leadership courses and GSVSC's 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights course in gsLearn. Adult volunteer chaperones must complete GSVSC's 281 GS 104 Orientation for Support Volunteers online course in gsLearn. Travel via cruise ships requires *submission of Intent to Travel (#2279) and 281 GS 203 International Trip training*. See *Travel/Trips Safety Activity Checkpoints for specifics*.

Teach Girl Scout members these general safety rules:

- Do not run at any time while on the vessel, dock, or near the water.
- Listen to the orientation and follow the rules noted.
- Use the buddy system.
- Follow instructions in an emergency.
- Find out what to do if someone falls overboard or if other accidents occur.

Select a qualified operator. Commercial vessel operators are licensed through the U.S. Coast Guard. In foreign waters, the "flag of the ship" (the country under which it is registered) dictates the training and licensing required. These standards can vary widely. In the United States, passenger vessels (ferries,

cruise ships, and whale-watching boats) that carry more than six passengers are licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast Guard examines operator training and certification, vessel condition, and safety equipment. Federal laws and regulations are supplemented by state laws and international navigation standards.

All Vessels: Carbon Monoxide Warning. Never allow "teak surfing," swim platform dragging, or bodysurfing behind any vessel. Do not operate a motor or generator while anyone is on or holding onto a swim platform, swim deck, swim step, or swim ladder, except for a very brief amount of time when docking, or entering/exiting the vessel. Carbon monoxide emitted at the stern (back) of the boat can cause death in these situations.

Passenger Vessel with a Commercial License. In the United States, you can expect a passenger vessel with a commercial license to:

- Give a basic safety orientation, possibly through a loudspeaker. The orientation should cover the location of life jackets and other critical information. On cruise ships, an evacuation drill will be held.
- Have a professional, licensed crew that has training and experience in handling emergency situations.
- Possess current liability insurance.
- Be a well-maintained vessel being used as it was designed to be used.
- Know about state and federal regulations for life jackets. If you are instructed to use a life jacket, you must do so.

Privately-Owned Recreational Vessels. In the United States, privately-owned recreational vessels (yachts) are governed by Coast Guard requirements and by state training and licensing requirements, which vary by state. When in doubt, follow the guidelines that are most strict. Check with the owner about these items:

- The operator must have sufficient training and be licensed to operate that type of vessel. Contact your council or the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary for guidance. Training includes safe operation, weather conditions, emergency response, navigation, and rules of the waterway. The operator understands the responsibility for the well-being of the Girl Scouts and volunteers and agrees to follow the Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- The vessel is currently registered by the state or is "documented" (a federal registration type) by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- The vessel meets Coast Guard and/or local jurisdictional requirements.
- Maintains insurance as required by law in their jurisdiction.
- Life jackets or Coast Guard approved personal flotation devices are available for the number and size of all passengers on board. Passengers must wear a life jacket while the vessel is moving, unless in an enclosed cabin.
- The vessel is well-maintained and has all safety equipment required for its type and purpose.
- A throwable floating device (i.e., a Type IV cushion, horseshoe buoy, or life ring) is available and placed where it is easily and quickly accessible. Ask about the procedures for if someone falls overboard.
- A float plan is filed to communicate your route.

If over 30 feet, the vessel should also:

- Have had a U.S. Coast Guard safety check within the last year.
- Adequate Marine or Boat Liability insurance (one million dollars or more) is in effect.

Chartered or Rented Vessels. A chartered vessel is rented by the group for a specific length of time. Charters may or may not include a captain and/or crew. If a boat is chartered with a crew, use the Safety Activity Checkpoints

guidelines (above) for privately-owned recreational vessels. If a vessel is chartered without crew, you will need to provide your own captain and crew. All must meet training and licensing standards designated by the U.S. Coast Guard. The standards that apply will depend on the size and type of the vessel. Review this article and contact your council for additional guidance and approval.

Cruise Ships. See Travel/Trips Safety Activity Checkpoints for additional information regarding cruise ship/international travel. Before you book, check the Vessel Sanitation Program ratings of the Centers for Disease Control, which routinely inspects ships for cleanliness, repair, food preparation, and storage.

Book cabins in a block either across the hall from or next to one another so that your group stays together. Teach and use the buddy system and have a plan for communicating if members of the group get separated. Be aware that cell phones may not work on board. Also, be sure to secure valuables in the ship's safe.

Follow Girl Scout standards and guidelines in the individual activity's safety activity checkpoints for use of swimming pools, climbing walls, snorkeling, and other higher-risk activities. Choose shore excursions carefully, keeping in mind that cruise ships and related vendors are not aware of Girl Scout standards. Be thorough in asking questions about safety.

Know, too, that often other countries do not maintain the same strict boating laws as the United States does. Research the standards of the country you are planning to visit; if standards seem poor, find out how to best ensure safety, or avoid unsafe situations completely. Contact your council for guidance.

Additionally, suggest that girls and adults who get motion sickness consider taking a remedy. Dramamine, Bonine, or a homeopathic remedy are all options. Let troop families decide whether to use these, and if they do, let them know that the remedies are more effective when taken in advance. Other tips:

- Bring mint, ginger candies, gingersnaps, or plain crackers to settle queasy stomachs.
- Have seasick persons stay on deck in the fresh air, if possible. Have them keep their eyes on the horizon. Going below deck can worsen symptoms. The stern (back) of most boats is usually calmer. But avoid this area if exhaust fumes are a problem.
- Respect the environment. Choose responsible operators who follow local environmental laws. Whale-watching boats should respect wildlife and should not aggressively chase or harass the whales.
- Check weather with ship operator. If lightning or high winds are expected, consider rescheduling.

Know where to go on a voyage. Look for ports with access to oceans, lakes, rivers, and coastal waterways.

Safety Gear. The gear you will need will depend on the type of vessel, length of your trip, location, and weather.

- Choose life jackets or Coast Guard approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) carefully. Must be Coast Guard approved. Find approval on the label located on the inside back of the jacket.
- Ensure life jackets fit snugly. Check the "user weight" on the label to make sure a jacket is the right size for a child. If the label is not readable, do not use the jacket—and do not use inflatable life jackets for youth or adults. Once you have found the right fit, fasten all clips, zippers, and straps, then pull up on the shoulder straps. The jacket should be snug enough that the chin and earlobes cannot slip through. Continuously tighten the harness straps if they become loose, they should fit snug.

Be vigilant. Check to see that all life jackets are in serviceable condition: no broken clips, straps, or zippers. Make sure the life jackets are not waterlogged or torn.

Ensure each child and adult wears a life jacket, always, while on a recreational vessel. They must also wear one whenever a commercial vessel operator instructs them to do so, even on the dock.

Follow your state's laws about the use of life jackets. Laws may differ depending on a child's age, the type of boat, and the type of boating operation.

Use safety gear as required by the U.S. Coast Guard or by your state's boating and waterways regulations. Reputable ship operators will comply with these laws. Specific gear varies by ship size and use. Ask for an orientation on how to use safety gear, if appropriate. Take care when engaging ship operators outside the United States.

Additional Gear/ Supplies

- Layered clothing to protect from wind, sea spray, and other weather.
- Non-slip, closed-toed shoes.
- Seasickness remedies (see below), if needed.
- Bottled water and healthy snacks.
- Binoculars.
- Hat or visor.