



FISHERIES & TOURISM

FACT SHEET SERIES

Overview

Tourism opportunities can provide fishermen and aquaculture farmers with a way to diversify and become financially stable while continuing to work on the water. Tours for lobstering, whale- and bird-watching, coastal fishing, and trips to shellfish farms are becoming more common, as fishermen and aquaculture farmers begin to use their knowledge, their vessels, and fisheries infrastructure as unique assets in the tourist trade.



Natalie Springuel

However, obstacles to diversification do exist, especially concerning licensing, liability and safety, business structure, and contracting with partners.

In 2011, Maine Sea Grant received funds from the National Sea Grant Law Center to research the legal barriers faced by fishermen and aquaculturists as they consider engaging in the tourism industry. The research was conducted by a Sea Grant fellow and law student in the Marine Affairs Institute at Roger Williams University, in partnership with Rhode Island Sea Grant. The final report, *Legal Barriers and Opportunities to Developing Business Partnerships between Fisheries and Tourism*, is available at the project website, seagrant.umaine.edu/fisheries-tourism.

The *Fisheries & Tourism Fact Sheet Series* provides

basic information to help fishermen and aquaculture farmers get started in tourism.

Topics in the series

- Partnerships**
- What makes a great tour?**
- Marketing 101**
- Aquaculture tours**
- Fishing licenses**
- Captain's licenses**
- Vessel requirements**
- Maritime law & liability**
- Business models**



Chris Bartlett

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Legal issues associated with aquaculture tours

Farm tourism has been around since the 1800s, when people in urban areas began coming to farms to visit relatives and escape city life. While in the U.S. most farm tourism has involved traditional land-based agriculture, opportunities are increasing for marine aquaculture farmers, too. The benefits of offering “aquatours” include additional income potential, increased brand and product visibility, and consumer education. As with any business, you should be prepared for potential legal issues.

Duty of reasonable care

Duty of reasonable care specifies an owner/operator’s responsibilities to limit injury to other persons while on the farm property. Be prepared to show that you are taking steps to ensure the safety of customers, employees, and others. Levels of responsibility vary, depending on whether the injured person is a *trespasser* (has not been invited onto the property), a *licensee* (part of the operation itself, such as an employee), or an *invitee* (a person allowed on the property as a guest, with or without payment made). In general, there is a higher duty of care for invitees than for licensees, and trespassers require the least duty of care. In practical terms, make sure that equipment, boats, wharves, ramps, etc. are in proper working order, signs are placed in appropriate areas, and that visitors are given an appropriate level of instruction or guidance about potential hazards on shoreside or marine installations. Overall, it is recommended you consult with a maritime lawyer to review the duty of care in your tourism operation.



Dana Morse



Cathy Billings

Vessels and licensing

Vessel operators transporting customers between the farm and the shore should have the appropriate licensing, such as an Operator of an Uninspected Passenger Vessel; often referred to as a “six-pack” license. In addition, vessels will need to comply with all regulations and requirements for safety and markings. For more detail, consult the fact sheet, “Want to get your captain’s license?”

Biosecurity

Biosecurity is the protection of fish, shellfish, or aquatic plants from infectious (viral, bacterial, fungal, or parasitic) agents. For the farmer, this means both keeping diseases and pests out, and making sure that any problems on the farm do not spread elsewhere. Farmers should consider carefully the protection of their stock and the possibility of transmitting problems on and off the farm. If you are going to engage in aquatourism, develop and implement a comprehensive farm biosecurity plan. Key components and outlines for farm specific biosecurity plans can be found at maineaquaculture.com.

A biosecurity plan might include:

- ▶ Posting signs and notices to all visitors.
- ▶ Maintaining a visitor log.
- ▶ Using foot dip baths to disinfect shoes or having boots available for guests.
- ▶ Having all visitors accompanied by farm personnel at all times.
- ▶ Having visitors avoid direct contact with the crop(s).



Cathy Billings

Insurance

Insurance for aquatourism is likely to break into two general categories: *property insurance* to protect crops, buildings, vessels, employees, equipment, etc.; and *liability insurance* to protect the company and individuals from damages in the event that a guest is injured while on the farm property. Liability is also sometimes referred to as an “umbrella” policy. Both types of insurances are recommended for aquaculture businesses conducting tours. For more info, see the “Maritime law, liability, and insurance” fact sheet.

Business structure

Your business structure will influence the potential success of your tour operation, while also protecting you against legal action. In general, avoid *sole proprietorships*, in which the assets of the business are not separated from your personal assets. Claims against a sole proprietor business can extend to personal property such as a house or boat. You can protect yourself by establishing a business structure, such as a *corporation* or *limited liability company*. Marine industries often use *subchapter-S* or *subchapter-C* corporations, which are feasible for small businesses. Local economic development or business assistance groups in Maine are available to help. See the “Models for fisheries and aquaculture tour businesses” fact sheet for more information. ■

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Models for fisheries and aquaculture tour businesses

As the owner of a fishing boat or an aquaculture farm, you likely have already chosen the type of business under which you operate, whether a *sole proprietorship* or a more complex business structure like a *partnership* or *corporation*. But if you are thinking about operating a tour boat or opening your aquaculture farm to tourists, you may want to reconsider your business structure. In particular, if you plan to bring any partners into the business, you will want to ensure that you and any partners or investors are protected from legal liabilities.

The basics are described here, but an attorney can explain the details and various benefits of each business type.

Sole proprietorship

A person owns all business assets, is personally responsible for all liabilities (taxes, debts, etc.), and operates on his or her own behalf. This is the simplest structure and does not require registration with the state; in the government's view, the sole proprietor or business owner is the business. In cases of civil liability judgment, not only the business assets but all personal assets of the business owner are considered (house, property, vehicles, etc.).

Partnerships

General partnership

Two or more persons own the business and participate fully in running it. A general partnership is structured like a *sole proprietorship*, except more than one person shares in the profits, losses, and liabilities. No state registration is required. A partner can legally bind the other partners to contracts or incur liability on behalf of all partners, with or without their knowledge.

Limited partnership

One or more *general partners* are in charge of operations and are personally liable for any debts, etc., and one or more limited partners invest in the company and share profits under a contract agreement. Limited partners cannot manage the business and are only liable for the amount of their investments. A formation certificate must be filed with the state.

Limited liability partnership (LLP)

A partner is not responsible for actions of any other partner or employees not under their supervision. A formation certificate must be filed with the state. Like a general partnership, all partners share in the profits and losses and each is taxed equally.

Corporations

A *corporation* allows the owners/investors personal liability protection (limited to the amount invested), and also has more beneficial tax structures. Corporations are designed to protect investors of a company from being held personally liable for the actions of the corporation. There are two types: the *C corporation* and the *S corporation*. The difference is in the tax liability of each. C corporations are taxed twice: the income of the business is taxed,

and when the income is distributed to the shareholders it is taxed again. An S corporation is only taxed once, at the distribution level. Either may be a *close corporation*, which has no more than 20 shareholders, and thus would be an option for fishing or aquaculture tour operators. Articles of incorporation must be filed with the state.

Limited Liability Company (LLC)

An LLC offers personal liability protection like a corporation, with the tax structure of a partnership. A formation certificate must be filed with the state.

There is no cost to file business formation or incorporation paperwork with the state, but there will be fees associated with consulting an attorney to do this work on your behalf. ■



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Want to get your captain's license?

Are you interested in taking passengers for hire aboard your fishing boat or another vessel? Here are some facts about captain's licenses that can assist you in your decision.

Any person who operates a vessel that carries one or more paying passengers is required to have a valid U.S. Coast Guard captain's license, also known as a Merchant Mariner Credential.

There are several grades of captain's licenses and endorsements that a person may earn depending on their experience and the activity that they want to perform:

Operator of Uninspected Passenger Vessel (OUPV)

This basic license, also known as a "six-pack" license, is appropriate for those who wish to operate an uninspected passenger vessel carrying six or fewer passengers. It requires 360 days at sea and a series of U.S. Coast Guard examinations. At least 90 days of sea time must be within the last three years.



Catherine Schmitt

Master, 100 Tons License

An upgrade from the "six-pack," this license allows a captain to carry more than six passengers on inspected vessels that weigh up to 100 tons. Requirements include 720 days at sea with 90 days at sea within the last three years. A **Near Coastal sublicense** is needed along the coast of Maine.

An *auxiliary sail* endorsement and an *assistance towing* endorsement are available for qualified Master, 100 Tons license holders. The auxiliary sail endorsement requires 360 days at sea on sail- or auxiliary-sail vessels. The assistance towing endorsement requires a separate exam and is only intended for assisting disabled vessels as a fee-for-service.

Both the "six-pack" license and the Master, 100 Tons license are valid for five years.

Requirements

Applications for a Merchant Mariner Credential (captain's license) are submitted to U.S. Coast Guard Regional Examination Centers (for Maine applicants, the nearest center is in Boston). Tests for the "six-pack" license and the Master, 100 Tons license consist of four sections: (1) Rules of the Road, which covers Coast Guard navigation rules and regulations; (2) Deck/General Safety Exam; (3) Navigation General Exam; and (4) the Navigation Plotting Exam.

The applicant has the option of taking the tests at a U.S. Coast Guard Exam Center or through an approved

course that administers its own exams. These courses provide an opportunity to review all relevant material prior to taking the exams, and they are offered in Maine as well as online. A Master, 100 tons course typically schedules 80 hours of class time and typically costs \$1,000-\$1,200.

Applicants for a captain's license must meet the following requirements:

- ▶ A signed and completed application.
- ▶ Proof that the applicant holds or has applied for a Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC).
- ▶ Evidence the applicant has passed a drug test.
- ▶ Documentation and evidence of the applicant's sea time or vessel experience.
- ▶ Documentation of having passed a physical including a hearing and eye exam.
- ▶ Consented to the Coast Guard check of his/her national driving record for any offenses.
- ▶ Proof of CPR certification.
- ▶ Documented proof of U.S. citizenship.
- ▶ Proof of having taken an oath that he/she will faithfully and honestly perform all duties required by law and obey all lawful orders of superior officers.

More Information

The National Maritime Center provides guidance and forms to apply for all Merchant Mariner's Credentials including a list of approved courses and schools, uscg.mil/nmc/default.asp or 888.427.5662. ■

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Maritime law, liability, and insurance

According to maritime law, once tourists step on your fishing boat or visit your aquaculture site, they become *passengers for hire*, you are responsible for their welfare, and issues of liability and insurance become extremely important.

Duty of reasonable care

You are responsible for the safety of passengers on your boat. The courts call this a *duty of reasonable care*, defined as “the degree of care that a prudent and competent person engaged in the same line of business...would exercise under similar circumstances.” You must take steps to ensure your passengers’ safety, and be prepared to handle accidents or emergencies, including having safety equipment and conducting a safety review before any trip. Consulting the Coast Guard is recommended.

Maritime liability

The owner and the master of a vessel, and the vessel itself, can be liable for any personal injury to passengers or damage to belongings, if caused by neglect or failure to comply with any statute regarding the inspection and regulation of vessels or manning requirements of vessels, or if caused by a known defect in the steaming apparatus or hull of the vessel. There is a three-year statute of limitation.

Under the Death on the High Seas Act, heirs of a decedent may bring civil action against the person or vessel

responsible when death was caused by neglect or wrongful acts on a vessel that was beyond three nautical miles from U.S. shores.

Under Maine’s Wrongful Death Statute, heirs may bring action under Maine law against the vessel’s owner, if the death was the result of wrongful or negligent acts that occurred while the vessel was operating in Maine waters. There is a two-year statute of limitations.

Jurisdiction

Your tourism business falls within *admiralty jurisdiction*, which covers legal incidents that occur on navigable waters,

or when the injury on land was caused by or related to a vessel on navigable waters. Under the forum selection clause, you can establish by contract (such as within your ticket agreement or passenger waiver) the place where any possible litigation would be heard, for example your home port.



Cathy Billings

Limiting liability

Creating a safety plan, conducting safety drills, and having passengers sign a waiver prior to the tour may help limit liability. Waivers are generally void, but can demonstrate that you have been thoughtful in developing a safety plan.

According to the Limitation of Liability Act, if a vessel owner hires a master to operate his or her boat, the owner may limit his or her liability to the fair market value of the boat. If you are an owner/operator, this does not apply.

Liability insurance

Maritime insurance is available to cover liability from wrongful/negligent acts resulting in injuries or loss of property. The most common is *protection and indemnity* coverage, covering the vessel owner or aquaculturist for loss of life and personal injury to tourists and staff. Additional protection, typically an *umbrella policy*, can be sought for other events. Insurance companies may demand stricter safety requirements than what is stated by law. Consulting an insurance agent and/or an attorney is recommended. ■



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Tourism and your lobster fishing license

Licensing is nothing new to commercial lobstermen, but those who might also want to run lobstering tours may have questions about licensing. This document reviews basic requirements and limitations of licensing as they relate to carrying paid passengers on lobster tours. Although this fact sheet targets the lobster industry, those targeting groundfish and other species also may want to consider the tourism market.

Captain's license

An appropriate captain's license (Merchant Mariner Credential) is required if customers are paying. Consult the fact sheet, "Want to get your captain's license?" for more information.

Class II or III lobster license

Using your commercial fishing license while running a tourism trip is legal in Maine. Those with a Class II license may have *one* helper (such as a paying customer or volunteer) in addition to the licensed lobsterman, while Class III license-holders may have *two* helpers in addition to the licensed lobsterman. *Note that you must also hold the appropriate captain's license from the U.S. Coast Guard.* For example, if a holder of a Class III license who also holds a "six-pack" captain's license has a group of six paying customers on a tourist trip, any two of those customers may help to handle gear and lobsters at any given time (customers can switch roles so that they all have a chance to participate). It is legal to sell lobsters landed during such a trip to the customers.



Cathy Billings

Demonstration lobster license

An alternative licensing option is a *marine harvesting demonstration license*, available for \$26 from the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR). The license carries a \$15 surcharge for first-time applicants, but commercial fishermen who provide proof of licensing and landings are exempt from the written test and the surcharge. Fishermen are allowed up to 20 trap tags under the demonstration license, and the number of lobster traps allocated to a vessel declared for a demonstration license may not exceed 20, regardless of the number of demonstration license holders fishing from the vessel. Additional requirements include:

- ▶ completion of a lobster and crab fishing examination,
- ▶ all traps used under this license must be tagged and buoys must be marked with “DL” and the license number,
- ▶ marking the vessel with a fluorescent orange semicircle at least 12” in diameter, displayed so as to be visible from both sides of the vessel. The symbol is available from DMR’s Licensing Division, and
- ▶ most importantly, *a vessel identified as a demonstration vessel may not be used for the commercial harvest of marine organisms unless otherwise provided by the DMR.* The demonstration license does not allow your customers to handle traps and other gear, although you can let them return lobsters back to the water. *All* catch from the traps must be returned to the ocean; no landings are allowed. Because of this, no lobsters may be retained for sale to the customers.

What other regulations on the gear or the lobsters apply?

Whale-safe gear, escape vents, minimum and maximum sizes, and all other gear and catch regulations will apply, just as they do in the commercial fishery.

Finally, consult the “Maritime law, liability, and insurance” fact sheet for details on how best to protect your business and personal assets from actions in case of accidents or injury of customers.

Resources

See Maine Revised Statutes Title 12, section 6810-A, mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/12/title12sec6810-A.html, and DMR Regulations Chapter 110, maine.gov/dmr/lawsandregs/regs/index.htm, for more information on licenses and restrictions.

You can also contact your local Marine Patrol Officer in Boothbay (Division I) 207.633.9595 or Lamoine (Division II) 667-3373, maine.gov/dmr/bmp/homepage.html ■

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Marketing 101

A marketing strategy includes everything you do to inform potential customers what you have to offer, and to influence their decision to spend their money with you.

1. Identify your customer.

Who are your target customers? Not everyone is looking for the same experience. You need to focus your marketing on those who might actually spend money with you. People who choose to go on boat tours are likely interested in nature and culture, or want to experience the outdoors and meet people who make a living on the coast. A growing number of people are looking for this kind of experience, so focus your marketing efforts and dollars on this group. For example, advertising in *Audubon* magazine might bring you more customers than the local radio station. It depends on the nature of your tours. Think about what you offer, who might be interested, and where they get their information.



Natalie Springuel

2. Define the experience.

There are plenty of excursions on the coast of Maine, what makes yours unique? Remember that you can offer a wide variety of tours from the platform of your boat, such as lobstering, aquaculture, offshore bird-watching, whales and seals, lighthouses and maritime history, fall colors and spring migrants, Native American heritage, island lore... What do you know and love about the coast of Maine that nature and culture tourists would like to hear? Market these experiences to them.

3. Establish the price you will charge.

Many resources are available to help you identify what to charge to break even or draw a profit. Tour price is

an important part of your marketing strategy—the cost must fall within the range that your target market expects, striking a balance between affordability and quality. Business-support resources include the Small Business Administration (sba.gov), Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (ceimaine.org), Sunrise County Economic Council (sunrisecounty.org), and University of Maine Cooperative Extension (umaine.edu/ext-business).

4. Promote your tours.

Target your promotion dollars for the highest return. Websites and social media like Facebook are critical to helping your potential customers plan their vacation. Brochures and business cards help once tourists are in the region and looking for things to do. Ads are expensive, so place them only where your target market gets their information. Promotion organized by your local chamber of commerce or other tourism entities reaches a wide audience. Invite reporters and travel writers on your tour. Consider partnerships with other businesses to pool marketing dollars, such as creating package tours (see the fact sheet on “Creating partnerships with tourism businesses”). Finally, remember that tourists ask for recommendations, so make sure staff at inns, hotels, restaurants, and even the local gas station know about you.

Marketing resources

The Maine Office of Tourism (visitmaine.com) has FREE options to market your tours, events, specials, and travel packages. Some tourism regions have their own website and when you enter your information there, it will automatically be listed in the visitmaine.com site, and vice versa. All for free.

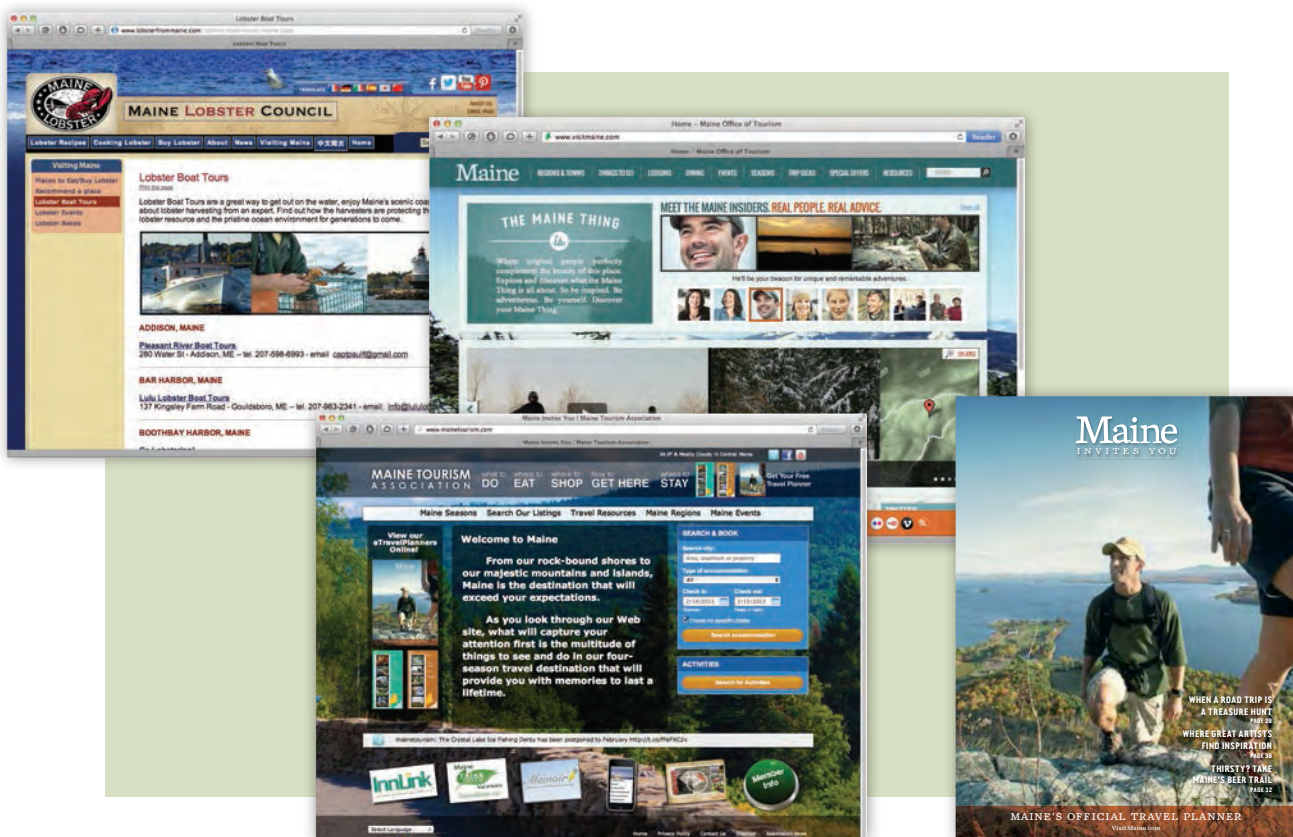
Join (for a fee) the Maine Tourism Association (mainetourism.com) to

- ▶ get listed in their promotions, including “Maine Invites You,” the state’s printed travel planner that gets distributed worldwide; and
- ▶ display your brochures at one of Maine’s eight visitor centers (including those along I-95).

List your tour with the Maine Lobster Council (lobsterfrommaine.com/lobster-boat-tours-maine.aspx).

Connect with your local chamber of commerce.

Finally, remember that word of mouth and your customers themselves are your best marketing tools. ■



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Creating partnerships with tourism businesses

Fishermen and aquaculture farmers who partner with tourism industry members can leverage respective skill sets to save costs and increase visibility and marketing options.

Types of partnerships

Informal cooperation: Businesses can recommend one another, share website links and social media posts, display another's brochures, and invite staff to experience their respective businesses.

Joint promotion: Take it one step further by developing joint brochures, advertisements, web pages, or other materials that promote thematic experiences. For example, you offer a restaurant a wholesale discount on lobster. In exchange, the restaurant lists details about your lobster tours on their menu.

Packaged experiences: Research shows that demand for package tours is on the rise. Tourism packages offer tourists one-stop shopping with centralized reservations/booking/payments for "complete travel experiences." For example, the package experience might include a weekend getaway at a local inn, with meals at local restaurants, a boat or fish farm tour, and a visit to an historic house. The customer books everything through one of the businesses, and each respective business gets a cut of the price paid by the customer. Individual businesses can join forces to develop their own package experiences or can work through existing package tour companies (for example: a bus tour can offer local boat excursions). Be sure to develop a written agreement or contract that covers all the legal details between the partners, including:

- ▶ Who is responsible for marketing, reservations, bookings, transportation and other details.
- ▶ How the price the customer pays gets divided among partners.
- ▶ How cancellation/refund policies affect partners, including weather cancellations.
- ▶ Who is liable for what (refer to the fact sheet on "Maritime law, liability, and insurance"),
- ▶ Consider alternative dispute resolution, such as arbitration or mediation, as a stipulation of the contract, to prevent costly litigation if something goes wrong.



Natalie Springuel

Kathlyn Tenga-González



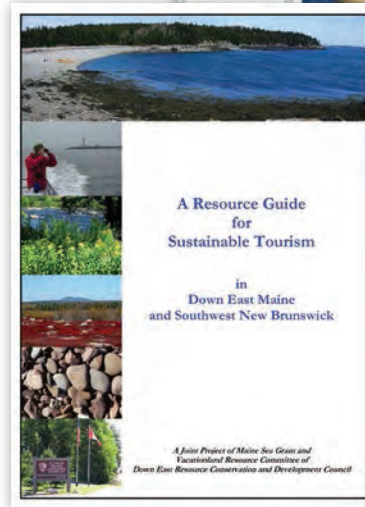
Specialized agreements: In some cases, you will have a very specific need that can be solved less expensively by forming an agreement with another business. For example, perhaps commercial entities cannot load and unload customers at the town dock, or your lobster cooperative does not want tourists wandering the work area. Set up an agreement with a waterfront hotel, restaurant, campground, or other business to gain access to their wharf for loading your customers in exchange for increased traffic at their business. Written agreements should outline details, such as, in our example here, who is liable for injury on the wharf?

Formal business partnerships: In a formal business partnership with another business, the ventures become joint in more ways than any of the options described above. For details on these options, including tax advantages, refer to the fact sheet, “Models for fisheries and aquaculture tour businesses.”

Resources

List your overnight package experiences with the Maine Office of Tourism, visitmaine.com/help/tourism/add-package/ and group tours you could offer through tour bus companies at visitmaine.com/group-tour.

For sample contracts, see Appendix A of the Sustainable Tourism Resource Guide, seagrant.umaine.edu/extension/sustainable-tourism-resource-guide. ■



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Getting your boat ready for passengers: vessel requirements

Are you interested in taking passengers for hire aboard your fishing boat or another vessel?

Federal law requires that vessels used to take passengers for hire from Maine ports are owned and constructed in the United States. A fishing boat may be classified as an *inspected vessel* or an *uninspected vessel*, depending on the number of passengers it will carry and whether it meets the required construction and safety requirements.

Uninspected vessels

Uninspected passenger vessels generally weigh less than 100 gross tons and are limited to carrying a maximum of six passengers. Most inshore fishing boats in Maine are constructed to meet this classification. An uninspected vessel must still be compliant with the minimal federal standards for safety. Requirements for an uninspected vessel are available from the U.S. Coast Guard, uscg.mil/pvs/UPV.asp.

Inspected vessels

There are two classifications of inspected passenger vessels.

A passenger vessel is a vessel of at least 100 gross tons carrying more than 12 passengers.

A small passenger vessel is a vessel of less than 100 gross tons carrying more than six passengers. Most inshore commercial fishing boats in Maine would meet this classification. A small passenger vessel is required to have a valid U.S. Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection and to be in full compliance with this certificate when passengers are aboard. The Certificate of Inspection is valid for five years from the date it is issued and describes:

- ▶ the vessel,
- ▶ the route that the vessel may travel,
- ▶ the minimum number of required crew members,
- ▶ the number and types of safety and survival gear which must be on board,
- ▶ the maximum number of passengers, and
- ▶ the total number of persons (including crew) that may be carried.



Catherine Schmitt

In order to obtain a Certificate of Inspection, a boat owner must apply for an initial inspection by the U.S. Coast Guard Officer in Charge of Marine Inspections for your area (located in Portland for all of Maine). The application for this inspection (Form CG 3752) must be submitted before a new boat is constructed or an existing boat is converted to take passengers for hire.

The initial inspection includes review of construction materials, workmanship, and condition of all parts of the vessel, its machinery and equipment, including all life-saving, fire-detecting and fire-extinguishing equipment. Operating boats will likely be dry-docked for this inspection.

A stability test will also be performed to ensure that the vessel meets seaworthiness regulations and also to assist in determining the number of passengers that can be safely carried. This is done by fully loading the boat's deck with known test weights, such as barrels of water or bags of sand, and shifting the test weights to the rail to simulate the movement of passengers. The boat passes if a line on the outside hull does not submerge.



Catherine Schmitt

The U.S. Coast Guard Officer in Charge of Marine Inspections will determine the number of passengers that a vessel can legally carry and issue a Certificate of Inspection that is very specific for the boat.

These requirements for an inspected small passenger vessel are available from the U.S. Coast Guard, uscg.mil/pvs/SPV.asp. ■



Dana Morse

This fact sheet is part of a series intended to provide resources for fishermen and aquaculture farmers who seek to augment their earnings through tourism. More information, including the legal research upon which these fact sheets are based, can be found at seagrant.umaine.edu/fisheries-tourism.

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FISHERIES & TOURISM

FACT SHEET SERIES

What makes a great tour?

Happy, satisfied customers will return, and they will tell their friends about your business. They are your best marketing tool. Below are “tried and true” methods of running tours that lead to happy customers.

Know your customers and deliver at least what they expect.

The key to running a great tour is giving customers what they want and expect. At the very least, deliver what you said you would deliver (truth in advertising). Your guests want to know you are committed to their safety and comfort. They want to see that your operation causes no environmental harm, and that you follow relevant codes of ethics or regulations, such as maintaining required distances from wildlife.

Get personal.

Your target customers are buying much more than a seat on a boat for a few hours. They are paying for an experience, an interaction with the sea and the coast of Maine, and above all, you. They are buying your knowledge, your stories, your skills, your humor, your connections, your conversation, and your love of this place. They enjoy learning in the outdoors, and they want to connect with people who live and work here. Your customers expect you to talk to them a lot! This is important to consider in your decision to start running tours. Without plenty of interaction with your customers, you will fall short on the vast majority of their expectations, and lose their business.

Provide good interpretation.

Talking is only part of the art of engaging people in a learning experience using all their senses. Give meaning to the facts. Tell stories that personalize what guests see; make it relevant to their lives. Use props and objects they can touch, food they can taste. Surprise them, provoke them; ask questions that make them think and talk to each other and to you. Be positive. If they learned or felt or saw just one new thing, they are more likely to recommend you. The National Association for Interpretation provides training in the art of good interpretation.



Dana Morse

Elevate the customer service.

As a tour operator, you and your staff are in the service industry. Tourism research shows that good customer service makes customers come back. Be professional, courteous, and informative at every step of the way. Be clear about trip details (fees and cancellation policy, trip timing, safety, etc.). Your passengers likely have been on other boat tours before yours, and they expect certain industry standards: a clean head, a place to get out of the elements, food and drinks (in addition to the interpretation discussed above). Be prepared to answer questions about any-

thing and everything, from where to eat that night to what species of bird just flew by. Remember the old Maine Guide joke: “How old is a deer when it becomes a moose?” You will get these questions. Have fun, be polite, and answer in a way that makes people want to come back for more and specifically with you.

The University of Maine offers *Welcome ME*, an on-line customer service training for people who work directly with Maine’s visitors, umaine.edu/centro/welcome-me-quality-service-training-home/. ■



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