

Maritime Aquarium Offering Cruises for Birdwatchers, Others

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Categories : [Maritime Aquarium](#)

Tagged as : [Birdwatching 2020](#), [Long Island Sound 2020](#)

Date : July 10, 2020



Birdwatchers can enjoy close access to a federally protected haven for native and migratory species through three special Birding Cruises offered this summer by the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk.

— *an announcement from the Maritime Aquarium*

The cruises aboard the Aquarium's quiet hybrid-electric research vessel will bring birdwatchers close to the Norwalk islands — just outside the city harbor — to look for osprey, oystercatchers, terns, egrets, herons and more.

Dates and departure times are: Saturday, July 18 at 9 a.m.; Wednesday, July 29 at 6:45 a.m.; and Sunday, Aug. 16 at 8:30 a.m. Each cruise lasts 2 hours and 15 minutes.

A portion of the Norwalk islands chain is protected as part of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge, a collection of coastal areas in Connecticut that provide important resting, feeding and nesting habitat for many species of wading birds, waterfowl, songbirds, shorebirds and terns.

One of the islands, Chimon Island, is known to have supported as many as 1,200 breeding pairs of herons, egrets and ibises.

Participants are strongly encouraged to bring cameras and their own binoculars.

The Maritime Aquarium's R/V Spirit of the Sound is a 64-foot catamaran that runs quietly as the country's first hybrid-electric research vessel.

“By running silently and offering two deck levels for viewing, she’s a great platform for observing the natural sights out on Long Island Sound and along the Norwalk islands,” said Nicki Rosenfeld, manager of the Aquarium’s educational programs who also is one of the vessel’s captains.

“The new Birding Cruises will be a bonanza for birdwatchers, giving them safe and proper access to an offshore resource during a program intentionally created for their interests.”

The cost of each Birding Cruise is \$41.50 (\$36.50 for Aquarium members).

COVID-19 precautions include masks must be worn at all times, as well as physical distancing through reduced capacity.

The Birding Cruises aren’t the only way to join The Maritime Aquarium on the water this summer. Although the Aquarium’s signature Marine Life Encounter Cruises currently are suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic, a fun mix of regular daytime and evening cruises are available.

The regular public cruises are:

- Norwalk Islands Cruises – at 1:15 p.m. daily except Mondays

- Evening Cruises:
 - Norwalk Islands Cruises at 6:30 p.m. Thursdays
 - TGIF Cruises at 6:30 p.m. Fridays
 - Saturday Sunset Cruises at 6:30 p.m. Saturdays

Each cruise of those four cruises is 90 minutes long and – although the names differ – offer a similar experience. Maritime Aquarium educators will point out waterfowl and sights, and offer information on Long Island Sound’s marine life and cultural history, but there’s no structured program.

Tickets for these cruises are \$31.50 (\$26.50 for Aquarium members).

Rent the Boat

In addition, R/V Spirit of the Sound can be chartered, with the option of adding a focused presentation about marine life, lighthouses, bird-watching and more. Maximum capacity is 25. The Aquarium’s on-site caterer can provide a range of food and beverage options.

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The Maritime Aquarium's cruises are perfect for family fun. However, for all cruises, all passengers must be at least 42 inches tall. Participants under age 18 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Advance reservations are required for all Aquarium cruises. Reserve your tickets online – and see the full summer schedule for R/V Spirit of the Sound – at www.maritimeaquarium.org.

For details about renting the boat, call (203) 852-0700, ext. 2206.