

# Party and Charter Boats: Not Just for Land Lubbers

**Tom Schlichter, Guest Author**

If you think that party and charter boat fishing are hobbies for those poor souls without boats, think again. Heading out on Long Island's 'pay-to-play' vessels is entertaining and challenging. Party/charter boat fishing offers the chance to learn new tricks, try different tackle, and fish in waters you've never cruised. It's a great way to fish in areas that are too rough or too far away to reach with smaller crafts.

## What's the difference?

Party boats, referred to locally as 'open boats' or 'head boats', are vessels that accommodate from six to as many as two hundred anglers on each trip. Reservations are not usually necessary for these excursions, although you might want to call ahead on weekends just to be sure. All you need to do is show up at the dock before the advertised sailing time, get on board, pay the fare, leave the rest to the skipper, and have fun.

Charter boats service groups of fewer passengers (up to six) for a flat rate fee and reservations are always necessary. A captain may sometimes combine reservations and carry more than one group of anglers on the same fishing trip. The big plus is that one can choose one's rail mates because the boat is booked exclusively. Charter boating allows anglers to fish with a specific type of tackle, such as fly-fishing or use spinning gear for stripers and blues, or to target large or less sought after species such as false albacore. Anglers can enjoy informative one-on-one interactions with the mates and skipper and learn neat tricks to improve their overall fishing success.

## The party boat game

Party boats sail for fish species in higher abundance at a specific port in the year. These boats target fish that are relatively easier to catch because the skipper hopes to produce a solid haul for a larger group of anglers.

Most party boats sail on a full or half-day schedule, but there are exceptions to this rule. Several vessels offer evening and night trips and a few have offshore overnight specials. Skippers may schedule additional trips for striped bass or weakfish on relatively short notice to take advantage of late evening tides. Bait is available free of charge on most vessels and they carry rods, reels, hooks and tackle, either complimentary or for a nominal fee.

The fare structure is based on how far the vessel cruises and the fish being sought, and these factors vary from port to port or even by vessel. Many party boats sail seven days each week in summer, as long as the weather is good. A full day of party boat fishing will cost between \$35 and \$55, and half-day trips cost between \$25 and



\$40. Special half-day trips to offshore wrecks or canyon tuna runs can cost more than \$150 per angler, and you should contact the boat to obtain these details. The party boat fare does not include a tip for the mates (15% of the fare is customary to share with the crew), and it is paid when you leave the vessel.

## Charter options

Charter boat fishing requires advanced planning because these captains have regular customers that book trips weeks in advance, especially on the weekends, during the peak tuna season and on the full moon for striped bass. Charter boat fares are higher, ranging from as little as \$250 for a half-day inshore trip to more than \$1,200 for an extended trip to the offshore canyons. The mates' tip is extra.

Ask the captain how many passengers are allowed to fish on the trip that you intend to book, and you can bring a few friends or family members to split the fare. Having more anglers onboard means less time on the rod when trolling for tuna, so consider the fishing-time trade-off before making a decision. Don't be afraid to ask other party/charter boat customers if they had a good time, if you are considering a trip for the first time. Take note of the vessel's condition and pay particular attention to the tackle because top-notch skippers take pride in their business and they keep a clean boat and good quality gear.

How about planning the next office or corporate retreat as a fishing adventure? Several party boats offer this service to large groups, and they can serve as an 'outdoor' classroom for special school outings. Many charter boats offer nature and pleasure cruises to the lighthouses, or to watch firework displays, so don't be afraid to ask the skipper if it's possible to arrange side trips.

Whether you decide to rent a charter boat or take a party boat excursion, it is an exciting way to explore the marine waters.

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## Party/Charter Boat Fishing Etiquette

*Would you like to book a party or charter boat trip, but you don't know what to expect? This list should help to answer your questions and make the fishing trip more pleasant.*

- ▶ **Ask the captain if you can bring your own fishing equipment**
- ▶ **Find out what services are included in the fare**
- ▶ **Bring medication if you are prone to motion sickness and tell the captain if you have any major health problems**
- ▶ **Remember that excessive alcohol consumption impairs motor skills**
- ▶ **Wear several layers and bring extra clothes in case you get wet**
- ▶ **Bring a container with ice to transport your fish from the boat**
- ▶ **Be punctual and arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled departure**
- ▶ **Obtain permission before entering the bridge, and ask the crew to pass a message to the captain if necessary**
- ▶ **Use the railings for support when you move around the boat, and watch the tip of your rod around other anglers**

*Adapted from East End Party and Charter Boat Fishing publication.*

