

Windward Sailing Camp for Women
Houston Yacht Club
By Vallerie Gonzales



Pushing myself, I enrolled in a women's sailing camp being offered by the Houston Yacht Club. Not knowing anyone, and unsure of how easy or tough the sailing environment would be, I made my travel arrangements. Feeling like a kid and packing for camp, my excitement grew as I realized I was chasing my dream to sail as much as I can, and for the first time in my life I was doing something completely on my own. I was taking a chance, and not to spoil the end of the story, it really was a trip of a lifetime.

The Windward Sailing Camp, whose camp mascot is the pink flamingo, is sponsored each year by the Women's Sailing Association at the Houston Yacht Club. The camp teaches women to sail in a stress-free environment that promotes the camaraderie of sailing. HYC was founded in 1927, and is affectionately dubbed the Pink Palace. HYC's Women's Sailing Association turned 30 years old in 2013, and has a long standing tradition of providing scholarships to women to participate in regatta's and opens the door for more women sailors to learn or improve their sailing skills. For the 2018 camp, there were 21 participants and 35 volunteers/coaches. Most of the participants were from Texas, with the exception of two sisters from New York, a camper from Tennessee, and me!

The friendly welcoming crew, all dressed in pink shirts, were at the ready to sign me in upon my arrival. They provided me with my own pink shirt along with a boat bag filled with thoughtful and practical gifts for the camp. Next, I was escorted to my room on the 3rd floor of the HYC. The accommodations ranged from shared to private rooms, and were decorated with nautical themes. I would come to appreciate the air-conditioning and comfortable bed more than you could know.

Activities began right away in the bar, with a social event. The camp proceeded to be a nice balance of making new friends, learning new sailing skills, eating good food, and falling into bed each night happily exhausted from the fun and hard work during the day.

The water surrounding the HYC is brownish and warm. The wind and weather must be checked carefully, as thunderstorms and high winds are not uncommon. Lightening only interrupted a few hours on our last day, as everyone was called inside after seeing bolts too close for comfort. Did I mention the humidity? Naturally, it was humid also. This California girl was melting!

Participants of the camp designate their current experience level, and their boat time is spent learning sailing skills based on this designation (novice to experienced). Most of my "on the water" time was spent on a J22, with one other "experienced" camper and a coach. We learned each part of the boat, how to rig it, and how to sail it. The focus was on sailing in heavy winds, racing and safety. Big boat options were available as well. Class time was spent learning and reinforcing advance sailing strategies to include navigation, racing, cruising, knots, sail trim and much more.

Traditions were cleverly inserted into the agenda, which included a fun pool party complete with water blasters, and a panty raid (but don't tell anyone!).

At the conclusion of the camp I felt a renewed sense of confidence having learned new positions on the boat and sailing strategies. I made new friends, and was in awe of the devotion to improving the skills of female sailors each of the volunteers and coaches held. The members of the HYC were all so friendly and welcoming! I plan on returning next year, and am hoping to bring some more California women with me. The price was reasonable, the location and people were 5 star, and the outcome was more than I hoped. Adventures await, so hop on board next year and see where the boat takes you!