



Spending their Days in the Sun

by Katie O'Sullivan



"Every day is different," says Peter Spalt, captain of the *Perseverance*. "Wherever we go, we find a show."

A year ago, the Spalt family of Harwich Port made a leap of faith. They purchased the 43-foot, high-speed catamaran named *Perseverance* and the business that went with the boat: Monomoy Island Excursions.

With that, the family went into business together. With over twenty years experience at sea, Peter feels comfortable sitting in the captain's chair, while Kara Spalt manages the office. She's the one answering questions, taking reservations, and selling tickets.

"He's the boat guy, I'm the office guy," Kara says, smiling. "We're definitely equal partners in this, but we have our own domains."



The *Perseverance* Catamaran

Their five kids get in on the act as well. You'll find their daughter Nancy working the phones and the boys like to work on the boat with their father.

Their daughter Laura attends Mass Maritime Academy in Buzzards Bay, and served as mate onboard the *Perseverance* several times last summer, and will most likely be out there again this year.

"The kids kind of like to do their own things in the summer, and they have their own summer jobs," explains Kara, "but we like them to work at least one shift a week, so they know what to do around here."



Gray Seals Photograph by Kara Spalt

"Last summer was a little hectic," Kara admits, "trying to learn the ropes on the go. This year I feel more organized. We've already had a lot of phone calls and it looks like it's going to be a good summer."

Over the winter, Kara and Nancy put together a new website for the business, featuring many great photographs of the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge and its number one inhabitants: gray seals.

Since 1944, North and South Monomoy and 40 acres of Morris Island have been designated a wildlife refuge, providing a habitat for migratory birds.

More than ten distinct species of seabirds, shorebirds and waterbirds nest on the islands. With over 8,000 nesting pairs of common terns living on Monomoy, the area is a bird-watcher's dream.

And then there are the seals. Monomoy Island is the largest haul-out site of gray seals on the Atlantic Seaboard.



Cruising out of Saquatucket Harbor Photograph by Cinthia

Approximately 5,000 seals call this area their home, and at times there can be up to 12,000 seals in this area, including Harp seals in the early spring.

Although there is a visitors' center on Morris Island, about 94% of the total area is designated as wilderness, so the best way to see the seal colony is from the water. The Spalt family is more than happy to give you a ride.

Starting in mid-May and continuing throughout the busy summer months, the *Perseverance* takes about three cruises a day, each cruise lasting about two hours. A minimum number of seats have to be sold in order for the cruise to set sail.



Chatham Lighthouse Photograph by Peter Spalt

A trained naturalist is on board to narrate the tour and answer any questions passengers might have.

"The naturalists have a lot of input and knowledge about Harwich, Chatham and Monomoy," explains Peter.

"People ask questions about the seals, the sea life, and even the lighthouses.



In addition to the Monomoy tours, the Spalts are offering something new this summer. For \$10, visitors can hop onboard the *Perseverance* for a sunset cruise of Saquatucket and Wychmere Harbors.

"We took a few family cruises last year, and I realized how beautiful this short ride is," says Peter. Great blue herons, seagulls, the large homes along the shoreline and the sunset all combine for a pleasant evening cruise.

"People get excited when they're out there," Peter says. "The fresh air, the sea spray in their hair, kite sailors whizzing by off Red River Beach." He smiles, adding "People can't believe how much fun I get to have while



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In addition to reporting and editing, she writes contemporary fiction. Her first suspense novel, *Unfolding the Shadows*, was released in 2009. Her second novel, *Perfect Strangers*, is due out this summer.

For more information, visit Katie at her website (<http://www.katie-osullivan.com>) or her (<http://katieosullivan.blogspot.com>) blog

Monomoy Island Excursions

702 Route 28, Harwichport
www.monomoysealcruise.com
508-430-7772

If You Go...

- o Bring a jacket or sweatshirt, camera, binoculars, sunglasses, and sunscreen.
- o Tours generally last about two hours.
- o Evening harbor cruises last about 30-40 minutes.
- o Departure times may vary, please call ahead for schedule.
- o A minimum number of fares are required for all tours.
- o Arrive 30 minutes prior to departure time.
- o Free ample parking.
- o Cancellation policy: 24 hours in advance of departure.
- o All sales within 24 hours are non-transferable and non-refundable.

Adults.....\$35
Children under 12.....\$30
Evening Harbor Cruise:.....\$10

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