

# Rediscovering America: Replicas of Christopher Columbus's ships docked in Grafton

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**GRAFTON** - **Christopher Columbus** may never have made his way into the interior of the continental United States, but two of his ships found their ways to Grafton this week.

Replicas of the **Nina** and **Pinta**, two of the three ships in Columbus's transatlantic flotilla were docked in the Mississippi River, just outside the **Loading Dock** in Grafton.

The ships are operated by the non-profit Columbus Foundation and make several tours across the United States and beyond. Recent deckhand, **John Boney**, of Gulf Shores, Ala., said the ships have made several voyages through the Panama Canal, all while he was not on board.

Boney, like most of the crew on the ships is a volunteer. He and the other deckhands keep the ships clean and functioning and offer tourists a chance to explore the ships. He climbed aboard the Nina, intending on staying three or four weeks, but, like many others who come aboard, those weeks have turned into months.

“Three or four weeks gives most people a time to absorb what we do and how everything goes,” Boney said. “A few people want off from the get-go, but most of them actually decide to stay longer.”

Those sailing the American waterways on the Nina and Pinta have many of the accommodations of home below deck. Each ship has bunks with electricity, a modern kitchen and even air conditioning. The ships are even powered by British-made diesel engines, instead of requiring the use of sails for movement.


“We try to open the sails as often as we can,” Boney said. “But, it can get pretty unpredictable dealing with the wind.”

The steering mechanism, however, is very similar to the mechanism used by Columbus. Boney said steering the ships can be surprisingly easy in calm waters. With waves, however, he said “all bets were off, especially in big waves.”

## WHERE WE TRAVEL



THE NINA HAS BEEN THROUGH THE PANAMA CANAL 10 TIMES FOR HER WEST COAST TOURS



Each ship was built to specifications Columbus outlined in his journal. Letters Columbus sent to financiers were also utilized to ensure the ships were built to exact standards. Boney said the Brazilian-made Nina was utilized in the 1991 Ridley Scott motion picture “1492,” due to its accuracy.

While in Grafton, Boney said he and the crew were able to host as many as 1,000 tourists. In his downtime, Boney had a chance to be a tourist himself. He said he was able to walk to Aeries Winery and mingle a bit with the people of Grafton.

“I love it here,” Boney said. “It's quaint and small, comfy and cozy. Everybody is very likeable and flexible.”

The captain of the Nina is **Steven Sanger** of the British Virgin Islands, where the boats are based. The Pinta is piloted by **Captain Morgan Sanger**. Most of the operations and logistics of the ships are done from an office below deck on the Pinta, outfitted with several modern devices.

Both ships arrived in Grafton on Memorial Day weekend, and honored Memorial Day with a shot from the ship's cannon. They will depart this coming Sunday evening or early Monday morning.

