

Dream no more Get out there

Many weekend cruisers dream of the day when they will give up work and go cruising for an extended period.

Transitioning to living aboard and exploring further afield is exciting, but also a little daunting. So how do you prepare yourself and your boat?

Initial adjustments

When quizzed on what the initial challenges to living aboard can be, most cruisers talk about financial management and some loss of personal independence. This is an issue anyone stopping work has to deal with of course, but this is even more so when moving to a yacht.

Sjany and Paul Dow, on their 14 metre catamaran *Skellum*, highlight: "the uncertainty around the finances is the biggest adjustment. We have a budget, avoid expensive marinas and live frugally but comfortably."

Sjany adds: "you go from having your own job, your own car, coming and going as you see fit, to being confined to the boat, totally reliant on your partner. This takes some getting used to."

Another adjustment relates to space and personal time. But although

you would think that living in close proximity with limited room to spread would prove difficult, everyone agrees it is not an issue as long as you are sensitive to the other's needs. John and De Deegan, aboard *Silver Air*, a 13m *Savage Oceanic*, ensure they give each other time alone. "You have to be willing to say to each other: 'I would like the boat to myself today, or I would like to go ashore without you.'

Some couples have instigated separate routines like going for a morning walk alone, or exploring in the dinghy without the other. A mix of activities you undertake alone and others you share seems a good way of maintaining harmony.

On the more practical side, everybody says most tasks take much longer on board than on land. Sjany points out "things like washing, running minor repairs, doing the groceries, topping up water and fuel, are always an expedition. But then, you are no longer on a schedule, so it does not matter."

David Nicholson and Mary Sheehan from *Medina*, a 14m *Radford*, comment "you have to be careful with the use of limited resources like power, water or gas."

Christine Danger
gathers some pearls of wisdom from a group of cruisers who are living the dream

Mary adds: "it took me back to my childhood when I was told to turn the lights off when I left a room, or to not let the water run when I cleaned my teeth."

Preparing yourself

The first preparatory step, stressed by John and De, is to build your cruising kitty well in advance, but not sell assets to go cruising. "Never sell your house to buy a boat. Keeping a base gives you more choices and provides a safety net."

Secondly, all couples agree that a critical step in preparing yourself for life aboard is to build your boat handling skills. With all couples interviewed, the male was a more experienced sailor than the female. De points out: "what made me love sailing and made it both our life and our dream, is that I learnt everything about running the boat; radio, navigation, sails trimming, steering.

"It is a partnership".

Mary recalls her early days learning: "we'd reef in five knots of wind; people would wonder what we knew that they did not. We'd hoist and lower the sails, including the spinnaker, we'd put the

dinghy in the water only to lift it up again a few minutes later, we'd do man over board practice, we'd drop and raise anchor; everything you needed to know."

That is the key. If you know the sequences in good weather and daylight, you can apply them in strong weather or at night. It is as much about participation and enjoyment, as it is about safety. Both team members need to be capable of running the boat alone, in case their partner is incapacitated.

You can learn together, teach each other, read widely about seamanship or take formal courses. Whatever option you choose to build your skills, it takes time and practice and it is essential to learn at your own pace, but learn you must.

A third aspect to think about is hobbies. All couples concur this is important to develop, particularly for when you are weather bound. For instance, Paul is heavily into photography, Sjany likes painting. John is a keen woodworker, while De enjoys needlework. Dave and Mary love Sudoku, fishing, writing and reading. Tinkering is always high on everybody's agenda, as is socialising with other yachties.

Regardless of what you choose to do to occupy your non-sailing days it is good to have an absorbing hobby that also provides some 'me' time.

Working as a couple

Treating each other with kindness and respect was a piece of etiquette emphasised by all.

Dave points out "the Barrier Reef is full of men sailing by themselves; their partner won't go with them because they don't enjoy going in uncomfortable conditions, not knowing what to do, or being yelled at."

Nobody wants to share a dream that is scary, cold and uncomfortable. It is not a dream, it is a nightmare.

Another essential aspect is deciding on rules and routines together. Peter Dunn, a volunteer coastguard and instructor highlights: "they are your operating procedures on board. Settle on them before you start cruising and then follow them. You can always vary them, but not in the heat of the moment. You have to anticipate what might happen and take preventative measures. Ask yourself what are the consequences for my partner if I get hurt, fall overboard or break something."

Examples of rules and routines identified by most couples include deciding on the maximum wind speed you will set off in, only leaving an anchorage when both partners are happy to do so, when to reef and processes for night watches.

Some couples like Dave and Mary also take extra precautions such as using a back brace when doing strenuous jobs. It is all about prevention rather than cure. Procedures keep you safe and are all designed to make things automatic and habitual. It means less chance of omission or error and better capacity to deal with pressure.



IMAGE COURTESY CHRISTINE DANGER.



ABOVE: Gippsland Lakes reflections.

Badger Island panorama at the east of Bass Strait.



IMAGE COURTESY SCOTT BENNETT

Whitsunday magic

Although some rules are necessary, all couples stress the need for flexibility.

Paul emphasises "you need to be adaptable and be prepared to change plans at the drop of a hat, because you are subject to the weather and sea state. You might have to go later or earlier, or head for a different spot."

Staying flexible keeps you safe and ensures you go in conditions you will enjoy. No point scaring yourselves.

Playing to your strengths as a couple is another point often made.

Dave recounts a time when Mary was helming their boat into the marina. "I am stronger and better able to jump onto the jetty.

"So it makes sense for me to be at the ropes while Mary is at the wheel."

He even told a bemused onlooker "if I am good maybe she will let me take the boat in one day!"

So while all jobs should be interchangeable, thinking about who is best suited for a particular task is common sense.

Preparing the boat

The main differences between equipping a yacht for weekend cruising and extended cruising relate to the length of the passages you will do, the unfamiliar waters you will be in and the fact that you might get caught in bad weather. However Mary points out "anything can happen at any time, whether you are on a weekend trip or an extended cruise."

The consensus is that you should get the best gear you can afford. But as John puts it: "realise that the boat will never be totally ready. If you wait for that to happen, you will never go."

An essential piece of gear on everyone's list is an autopilot that frees you from being glued to the wheel or tiller for hours on end. A strong rig and sails, reliable engine(s), a stable dinghy with oars and outboard, are obvious requirements.



Hans' overall verdict is that Coppercoat "has lived up to our expectations."

COPPERCOAT GOING THE DISTANCE

Offshore cruising was the dream for Hans Klomp and his partner Jeannette from Opua NZ, with the Pacific Islands, USA, and Mexico on the radar.

Over a few years of solid graft, Hans and friends completely gutted and rebuilt 'Tauhara' for their offshore needs.

Hans went looking for a long-term solution to fouling. "To prevent having to haul out in dodgy and/or expensive places. After a lot of research, I decided to go for Coppercoat, since it had the best references on the Internet, mainly from people who were happy with it. One cruiser had it for 17 years and it still worked."

Seven years on, including two seasons in the South Pacific and 14 months in Hawaii, US West Coast & Mexico, would.

Hans recommend Coppercoat to others? "Not" (their journey is quite a story and can be found at www.tauhara.com). With savings of over \$4000 already, Hans believes he would see at least another 5 years if he continued cruising - a lot longer if he doesn't.

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Beyond this, a GPS/chart plotter as well as the paper charts, depth sounder, wind instruments and VHF radio are automatic inclusions. Nice to have includes AIS, radar, sat phone, and HF radio.

Plenty of ground tackle is a must. A modern primary anchor and a couple of backup anchors are recommended (particularly one for weed), at least 50m of chain and 50m of rope, an electric winch to make life easier, long coils of extra rope (50 to 60m) to tie yourself into the shore if need be.

Good offshore wet weather gear keeps you warm and dry and so does a covered cockpit where you can steer out of the weather. Offshore cruising equipment also includes a third reef in the main and a dedicated storm sail, plus things you hope to never use like a parachute anchor and a life raft.

Provisioning is another aspect to think about. A freezer as well as a good size fridge make things easier.

There will be differences between monohulls and catamarans, particularly around carrying capacity. The more water, fuel and food you can carry, the more autonomous you are and the less frequently you need to come into port to replenish your supplies. As a rule, the catamarans have a routine of topping up their water anytime they can, using jerry cans to collect water ashore or a rainwater collection device. Whereas the monohulls with bigger tanks and no weight restrictions are less concerned.

Similarly topping up fuel is a regular affair for cats. Most cruisers avoid expensive marina bowsers and favour the less convenient but cheaper service stations. Paul suggests carrying manageable size jerry cans for both fuel or water and a trolley.

Carrying a supply of bits and pieces for running repairs is useful. However Paul makes this comment: "we don't need to carry a lot of spares. Instead, we rely on our marine supplier. They can ship everything we need to the next port on our itinerary within a couple of days. And there are lots of people around who can fix anything."

The camaraderie and resourcefulness of the cruising community is often commented on and is a great source of support.

The golden rule

Cruising is more fun when it is shared. If you want to live the dream and go cruising with a partner make it enjoyable for everybody.

This means: go out in nice weather; include your partner in the running of the boat; encourage but don't demand; develop your skills and experience; play to your respective strengths; stay flexible; make the boat safe and comfortable.

If you follow the golden rule, the reward is a wonderful nomadic life, full of discoveries, adventures and enduring friendships.

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cruisinghelmsman Christine Danger



Chris and her partner Wade have been sailing on catamarans of various sizes for the last 12 to 15 years. Their favourite cruising grounds are the Bass Strait Islands and Tasmanian waters. They have logged a total of 18 Bass Strait crossings to date. They live for the day when they can give up work and cruise full-time on Take It Easy.

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