

Down the track how is the life afloat?



ONE YEAR DOWN
AND CHRISTINE
AND WADE TAKE A
LOOK BACK TO SEE
IF ALL THE ANXIETY
AND HARD WORK
IN BECOMING A
LIVE-ABOARD WAS
WORTH IT.

CHRISTINE DANGER

WIN July 2017 we retired; we hate that word because it conjures up the thought of giving up and retreating. Check it out in the dictionary: 'to shut oneself away, retreat, withdraw from action or danger.'

The one definition we did like was: 'to quit working'! That is what we did.

We gave up our jobs to live on board our catamaran *Take It Easy* full time; we put our home up for rental and organised ourselves for a life afloat, until it stopped being fun.

There was never any doubt we would like the live-aboard lifestyle. We had spent many years cruising in summer for eight weeks at a time and most weekends saw us make the pilgrimage from Melbourne to Gippsland for a sailing fix.

Do we still like it? Yes.

Do we want to come back to land life? No.

But: "how have you found the transition" is a question many people ask.

The first thing we say is that there is no doubt that living on board permanently is different to being on board on holidays, even extended ones. So yes, there are some adjustments to make.

The reality is there is a transition to go through not only moving from land life to life afloat, but also from working to not working.

When anyone looks at our life there are often two diametrically opposed reactions. On one hand we often get the comment that we are living the dream, which we are to a large degree. On the other hand some look at us in disbelief and say "I could never do this; I could not give up the home comforts, be away from family and put up with the other half in such a small space." Truthfully, there are times when life afloat is not quite a dream!

What follows is what we have found, the highlights, but also the aspects to be aware of.



NO SCHEDULE, FEW FAMILY TIES

One of the things we were really looking forward to when still working was to do away with deadlines: not have to go back to our 'normal' life by a certain date; to not have to worry of returning home as soon as we got somewhere exciting.

That is the wonderful thing about a full time cruising life: because you have time there are less restrictions. Your cruising range is increased. You can stay or go as you please.

We often say a calendar is the most dangerous item on board. It tempts you to go in conditions you should not.

But now, other than our yearly cruising plan to fit in with our insurer's requirements to be south of 25° south between 1 November and 30 April, we can come and go as we choose. This spot is appealing, let us linger longer. The weather looks horrible, why don't we hide and wait.



CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN: Idyllic destination, the lagoon and cay at Lady Musgrave.

Cruising in company is part of the fun.

Always something to fix: this time we had to beach *Take It Easy* to fit a new sounder!

CLOCKWISE: We caught a fish, dinner is getting prepared.

Sunsets are one of the special pleasures of cruising.

That sense of calm and freedom, dawn at Fitzroy Reef.



The wind is perfect, let's keep going and take advantage of the conditions.

It is also easier for us as we do not have kids or grandkids; plus only one of our parents is still alive but lives overseas. So there are few family ties to force us back to our home town for traditional gatherings.

Our self-imposed calendar is to avoid winter in cold climes. So Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia are fine in summer and autumn but we want to be in the tropics in winter and spring. We follow the warmth.

LIFE OF ADVENTURE

There is nothing more satisfying than having escapades, big and small, to make you feel like your life is your own.

The beauty of life afloat is that it is one big escapade, one endless adventure. Life becomes adventurous the moment you add uncertainty to it and lots of excitement.

Cruising really is the heart of adventure. To us it is just a matter of using our imagination and following our desire for discovery and exploration.

Too many of our friends have waited and waited, worked and worked, putting off 'living their dream' till it was too late. In many ways this strengthened our resolve to live life to the fullest, sooner rather than later.

But let me assure you, we do not wander totally aimlessly. We have a loose

plan of what we would like to do about a year ahead.

When we started our life on *Take It Easy*, we drew a few X's on the charts. One of our big goals was to do a few of the things we could not achieve on our previous limited schedule. So, our first year was the circumnavigation of Tasmania plus time at the Swain Reefs and the Whitsundays. This coming year it will be a return to Lord Howe Island and time further up the Great Barrier Reef.

"LOO PAPER? YOU DO NOT WANT TO BE CAUGHT SHORT IN THIS DEPARTMENT!"

There is lots to explore around Australia and although one day we will go further offshore, while our pussycat lives with us, we will not put her through horrible quarantine.

THE PEOPLE YOU MEET

Life afloat can be isolated, you have to be self-sufficient and resourceful. So there is a lot of time spent on your boat by yourselves, away from 'civilisation', or at least that is what we like to do.

But, after a while at sea you can crave the company of others. One of the

delights of cruising is meeting up with like-minded people in some beautiful anchorages. You meet a lot of people, either by chance because you are sailing similar routes and socialise along the way, or by need because some disaster has happened and one of you needs a helping hand.

Because you have a lot in common, because you live similar lives with similar outlooks and similar challenges, it is easy to develop friendships.

They are transient though, you never know when you will meet up again or where. But the stories and experiences shared, the help and tips exchanged, the support given and received are something that lead you to strike up friendships quickly. You get a feel for people, decide who you click with and form enduring networks.

SAILOR BEWARE

Not every aspect of the live-aboard life is champagne sailing though. We found that slowly travelling up from Victoria to get to the tropics was a bit of a struggle.

Sailing in cold conditions, always pushing against the east coast current and making slow progress was demanding and not a lot of fun. It is not until we reached northern New South Wales that the feeling of doing it hard, eased.

There were times when we felt a little disheartened. We were late coming up the coast for a range of reasons and we were pushing hard.



There were also a few aspects we noticed, which those contemplating a life afloat need to be aware of.

ALWAYS SOMETHING TO FIX

Every time we get *Take It Easy* running along and all is shipshape, the boat gremlins make sure that Wade will be occupied and tools will be strewn about the boat for a while.

There is an old adage that cruising is all about doing boat maintenance in exotic locations. When your boat is your home and your mode of transport, it is endless and if you do not fix things the right way, it comes back to bite you on the backside.

It seems it is common whether you have a new yacht or one with a few years under its keels. Every week little things test you. It could be: losing the bung on the dinghy; needing to service the winches more often than you thought necessary; the lazy jack ropes needing replacing; a locating bolt coming loose for the tillers.

Or it could be bigger things: the autopilot refusing to work; the battery bank running low; servicing the engines every 100 hours; servicing the outboard engine; servicing the generator; servicing, servicing, servicing. It is just as well Wade enjoys tinkering, boats really are the man shed on water!

But there is no doubt that although we were well aware of the tinkering workload when we were holiday cruising, it is a lot

more intense when you live aboard. I guess it is to be expected when you spend your entire time putting the boat through its paces day in day out.

BATTERIES AND WINTER

One of the things, which we had not really thought about until we moved on board full time, is that battery charging is not as efficient in winter as it is during the rest of the year.

With the sun lower on the horizon the angle to our solar panels is such that you produce less electricity. We have 500 watts of solar panels as well as a 300W wind generator feeding into our lithium battery bank.

If there is little sun or wind for a few days we have to run our generator for several hours. Between the fridge, freezer, computers, navigation instruments, phones, tablets and cameras to charge, your power consumption is significant.

WHERE HAS MY INDEPENDENCE GONE?

When you have spent many years of your working life living independently and spending a lot of time apart: doing your own thing, being your own boss, moving on board permanently requires quite an adjustment. No more interstate travel, no more car, far less personal space. Now we are together all the time.

Wade is the skipper and is very particular with how things are done. Do we sometimes clash? Hell yes!

But you cannot let things bottle up. You have to talk through whatever is not working for you and find a way to keep life harmonious.

You also need to have personal interests: do some things together and some individually. You need to be able to keep yourself amused, especially when weather-bound.

The one aspect we do share is the running of the boat because it could not work any other way. Whether it be passage planning, navigation, sailing; we do this together.

But we also have our own hobbies. Luckily, Wade likes to tinker and is the one typically looking after boat maintenance. He says he enjoys it, I gladly let him worry about that. My hobbies are photography, both landscape and underwater, plus writing: blog, articles, cruising stories, etc.





TOP: Always something to fix: this time it is the outboard release!

BOTTOM: Snorkelling, great exercise and underwater exploration.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Adventures at Boult Reef, just look at those colours!

EXERCISE IS AN ISSUE

Cruising is a healthy lifestyle where exercise is happening every day just by keeping yourself balanced on a moving platform, raising sails, working the winches, going up and down the steps. That is what we hoped, right?

Well, it is not quite like that. There is truth in it, but staying fit still takes effort and commitment. It does not just happen.

It took us a while to find what works best for us and even then it takes regular adjustment based on our location, the weather and other factors. What works for us are long walks ashore, kayaking, and snorkelling. But sometimes you are boat-bound or you are in Tasmania in 12° Celsius water. So we have discovered two things.

Total resistance exercise is a full body strength workout that uses a person's own body weight instead of relying on machines or dumbbells. Squats, push-ups and burpees are good for working a range of muscles and training your core.

Though it can sometimes be hard to keep your balance when the yacht is moving, you do not need any equipment except maybe a mat and do not require much space. We do this in the cockpit.

We refer to an app on our phone for sequences and timing, such as 'Bodyweight' from Freeletics.

We also substitute things. For instance instead of a stepper we use the steps down to the hulls, instead of a Swiss ball we use a fender.

The other discovery is a Yoga blog called Yogaliciouslifeblog.wordpress.com, which we have subscribed to. Once a week a short post appears in our e-mail inbox with a link to a YouTube video. This gives us a set of exercises, focussing on a particular part of the body, such as yoga for spine and hips, or yoga to open the solar plexus, or gentle yoga for your knees. Very handy and very free.

DIET

My shorts have shrunk, I swear! Eating lots of fantastic food washed down with a glass of wine or two is all very pleasant but eating and drinking more while exercising less can be a bad combination. So we are careful with what we eat and enjoy going to fresh produce markets along the way to stock up on vegetables and fruit.

As for drinking, we were conscious that the 'sundowner' habit can get a little out of control quite easily. It seems to us that some yachties have developed an alcohol problem and we definitely do not want to go down that path.

We have regular alcohol-free days. Even if you are socialising you can still give the vino a miss.

We find that soda water with some bitters cordial is a great way to go. Not as boring as flat water but refreshing and with texture.

We bought a Soda Stream together with a selection of flavours such as soda, ginger ale or tonic. Sometimes we simply have the carbonated water, other times we add a flavour. It is definitely better for our health and figure.

Seafood is a big part of our diet but only sporadically at the moment. Somebody needs to learn how to fish better.

If a tuna catches itself on the trawling line, we and the pussycat are fed for days. We have got better at catching flathead. Wade spearfishes the odd stripey. We do like foraging for oysters and mussels.

PROVISIONING

We have had a provisioning list for years and this allows us to be independent from shops for four to six weeks. We have made adjustments along the way, but overall it works well for us.

We bake our own bread, make our own yogurt, have a sprouter for greens, a Soda

Stream for soft drinks. The main addition to the list since living on board has been to increase the treats and nibbles to share at sundowners when we are in a popular area.

Probably the one thing we have noticed, when we have friends accompanying us for a while, is that we have to adjust our pantry supplies for different tastes and dietary requirements. Toiletries also have to be adjusted and this includes copious amounts of loo paper. You definitely do not want to be caught short in this department!

"TRUTHFULLY, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN LIFE AFLOAT IS NOT QUITE A DREAM!"

Because reprovisioning the boat requires you to walk a fair distance ashore to the shops with heavy bags and ferry everything from shore to ship via the dinghy, we have bought two fold-up trolleys and we stack our provisions in collapsible crates. The trolleys work equally well for fuel jerry cans.

We have heard of other yachties ordering their provisions online from Coles or Woolworths and having them delivered to the boat at a marina. As we tend to stay away from marinas we have not tried this yet, but it sounds like a good idea.

Hand in hand with provisioning goes with our personal effort towards the war

on waste. Because we have limited space on board and have to manage our waste carefully, we are very conscious of avoiding any packaging we cannot burn or recycle. It influences how we purchase our goods.

We collect food scraps in a kitchen bin and dispose of these overboard when offshore. Any cardboard packaging is put in a green bag for burning on a beach.

THE VERDICT

Yes there are some adjustments to make to enjoy a harmonious and gratifying life on board, but the few frustrations are easily outweighed by the sense of wonder and freedom you feel exploring as you see fit.

While it is not a lifestyle for everyone we have found that we have adapted easily, helped along by many years of holiday cruising. The biggest pleasure for us is living life at our own pace, on our own terms.

We are wanderers and adventurers at heart and life afloat fulfills those needs for us, as does the mix of solitude by choice and socialising for company. ≈



CHRISTINE DANGER

Chris and her partner Wade Bishop have been sailing on catamarans of various sizes for the last 15 years, cruising Bass Strait, Tasmanian waters and Australia's East Coast. In July 2017, they finally retired, moved on board their beloved Take It Easy and are now sea gypsies. Follow their adventures on www.sv-takeiteeasy.com.

