

Women and Cruising: Top Tips & Resources

In this handout, we cover some of the most common topics that women have been raising in our Women and Cruising Seminars. We describe alternatives, give some suggestions, and list resources that we have found useful. As we continue to give this seminar, we have more and more resources to share with you – too many to list in this handout. So, for even more resources and web links, visit our Women and Cruising website (www.womenandcruising.com).

If you have other questions after this seminar, we'd love to hear from you!

Communication - Keeping In Touch with Friends and Family Back Home

Email

Although some boaters have cell phones or satellite phones, most communication is by email. Email is cheap and some methods even work when you are at sea and away from phone lines and cell phone towers. Ways you can do email:

- 1) at an internet cafe in port
- 2) connect your computer to a ham or SSB radio with a Pactor modem
- 3) connect your computer to a satellite phone equipped with a data kit
- 4) connect your laptop to the internet through a wifi connection in port
- 5) connect your computer to the internet using a cellular broadband card with a pre-paid account (becoming available around the world)

Most cruisers have laptop computers aboard these days. Wireless internet is available in many harbors. Although you can use your laptop's internal wifi card to connect, an external wifi antenna (and an amplifier) will greatly improve your ability to pick up wifi signals. Buy a headset/microphone combo so that you can use Skype to call home for free or almost free. Netbooks, iPads and iPod Touches are becoming more popular since they are easy to carry ashore to access wifi in restaurants and marinas (and they generally work great with Skype). Get a flash/jump drive for carrying email and files back and forth from an internet cafe. Some cruisers have reported that a Blackberry has excellent range for picking up email.

Don't use your satellite or radio email address for anything that may generate junk email. Create a freebie yahoo, gmail, hotmail or junos email address for these purposes. You can check these email addresses when you have a cheap, fast connection in port.

Voice

When email just won't do, there are several options for voice communications:

- 1) Set up a Skype account and make internet calls via your computer or at an internet café. When you're back home, help your family members set up Skype accounts too so that you can talk to them for free. If you've got grandkids, make sure they've got a webcam so that you can see your grandbabies regularly!
- 2) When you spend a lot of time in one country, consider a local cell phone or sim card and a pre-paid account. If your current phone is not multi-band, either buy an unlocked multiband phone before you leave or a cheap local phone in-country. Texting is very popular overseas and works when the signal is too weak for voice. If you don't need to receive calls, buy local phone cards to use with pay phones.
- 3) Make phone calls over your SSB radio via Commercial Marine Operators.
- 4) Get your ham license and set up phone patches with ham operators in the US.
- 5) Consider a satellite telephone. Although hardware and airtime can be expensive, sometimes the convenience is worth it.

Mail

With email and online access to accounts, we get mail sent once or twice a year, or read Christmas cards during an annual trip home. Still someone needs to receive and sort through your mail. You may be able to use a trusted family member, but many cruisers use mail forwarding services. You can instruct them to only send the important stuff, and they are good at knowing the best way to send mail throughout the world. St Brendan's Isle lets you read your scanned envelopes online - you can select mail that you want them to open and scan for you to read online.

Other

Many cruisers today have blogs and/or use Facebook to keep in touch with other cruisers and folks back home! You can even send quick updates by email. Picasa (free software download + online web albums) is great for sharing your photos whenever you have internet access to upload them. (Plus it provides online backup for your photos!) You can keep family updated with your location via winlink, sailmail or SPOT locating services.

Set up a free "fax" account on the internet with EFax. This service gives you a fax number in the US. Faxes sent to that number appear in your email inbox where you can download and print or view them.

Set up a free FedEx account so that you can more easily have things shipped to you. Shipments are charged to your credit card. Plan shipments where possible: certain countries are almost impossible to ship into; others are straight-forward and quick.

© 2006-2011 Kathy Parsons, Pam Wall, Gwen Hamlin, email: kathy@forcruisers.com site: www.womenandcruising.com (2011/05)

Resources

Useful Addresses, Websites, Books

Us!

Kathy Parsons

s/v Hale Kai
kathy@forcruisers.com
www.forcruisers.com

Gwen Hamlin

s/v Tackless II
admiralsangle@yahoo.com
www.thetwocaptains.com
www.womenandcruising.com/admirals-angle/

Pam Wall

s/v Kandarik
West Marine, (954) 527-0874
pamw@westmarine.com
pam@pamwall.com
www.pamwall.com

Women and Cruising website

www.womenandcruising.com

Lots of articles and resources to read and download. You can also download a copy of this handout. Contribute to our blog!

Communication: Email, Phones, Fax

Sailmail: Email service using your single-sideband radio
www.sailmail.com

Winlink: Ham radio-based email
www.winlink.org

Satellite Phones: Iridium for voice & email; perhaps Inmarsat's IsatPhone

Skype – make very cheap calls worldwide using a computer and a headset
www.skype.com

EFax – free fax service
www.efax.com

Radio books -- *Marine SSB Radio, HF Radio Email, and ICOM 802 Manual for "Idi-Yachts"* by Capt. Marti Brown

Finances - Getting Money and Paying the Bills

ATM cards (Visa/MasterCard, debit cards, etc.) are usually the best way to get cash and ATM machines are more and more common throughout the world. It's good to have BOTH a VISA and a MasterCard, because some locations only take one or the other. Sometimes an ATM card that is not VISA/MasterCard may be even cheaper in terms of fees. Credit cards vary in the charges/rates for foreign transactions including cash withdrawals at ATMs. Choose your card for the best currency exchange rates/fees. (CapitalOne has a good reputation in this regard.) Get a card that gives you airline miles for trips home from the areas you will be cruising. Call your credit card company and let them know where you'll be traveling. They will put a note on your account which may keep your account from being frozen the first time you make a transaction in a new country. Some cruisers use a credit card connected to a money market account which functions as a credit card most of the month and is paid automatically (debit card) at the end of the month.

Try to use ATM machines that are inside banks and during bank hours if possible. If the ATM retains your card for some reason, you will be able to deal with it immediately. Never accept the help of a stranger and safeguard your money in your money belt before leaving the bank.

Bring a checkbook too. Some marinas and other businesses with a US bank account may give you a discount for paying with a check. Also, you may be able to cash a check in an American Express office (if you have an American Express card). Cruisers rarely use travelers checks any more - few vendors want to take them and they are not easy to get cashed.

Set up your accounts for online bill paying and account access. (Review your statements online regularly to report any errors.) You might pre-authorize a trusted person back home to speak for you regarding those accounts in the event of problems.

Set up as many bills as possible to be paid automatically.

Sign up for a PayPal account. It is handy for making certain types of payments. Amazon.com has a good reputation for shipping overseas.

Security - Feeling Safe wherever you cruise

In general we feel quite safe aboard our boats, but there are certain areas with security problems so get information on the areas you plan to cruise in. The ham and SSB radios nets are useful for finding out whether there have been security problems in an area. But don't just accept blindly what you hear on the radio. There is lots of misinformation, fear-mongering, and exaggeration. On the other hand, also avoid romanticizing the innocence of the paradises we visit. There are some bad people everywhere.

Research the areas you plan to cruise via these websites: Noonsite, SSCA, and Bluewater. Noonsite is an incredible resource of up-to-date information about cruising destinations all around the world. SSCA is an organization with monthly bulletins chock full with reports for cruisers by cruisers. The Caribbean Safety and Security Net reports security problems in the Caribbean and runs a daily SSB security net.

Get a money belt to wear in areas frequented by pickpockets, for example, the kind you attach to a beltloop or pin and wear inside a skirt or shorts. Avoid wearing expensive jewelry: use street smarts and learn about the local scams (eg spilling something on you and then "helping" you clean it off). Consider who you entertain on board. Be extra careful when leaving banks and at bus terminals.

Don't tempt casual theft: don't store valuable items on deck in easy reach of a swimmer or dinghy, perhaps run a cable and lock through fuel jugs on deck.

Some simple precautions you might take are installing a simple Radio Shack type motion detector, keeping a flashlight in every cabin, having an airhorn or siren that you can easily trigger. Have a bright light that you can shine in the cockpit and on deck.

In some areas, dinghies MUST be raised out of the water at night to reduce theft. Devise a system of dinghy davits or a hoist on a halyard (use cable if possible) so that you can easily raise the dinghy in areas where dinghy theft is a problem. It also keeps the dinghy bottom cleaner!

Resources

Mail Forwarding Services

St. Brendan's Isle

www.sbimailservice.com

Wanderer's Mail Services

www.wanderersmailservices.com

More mail forwarding services are listed on the SSCA site under Resource Links: www.scca.org

Security

Noonsite: Excellent website of up-to-date worldwide cruising information
www.noonsite.com

Seven Seas Cruising Association

www.scca.org

Bluewater Cruising Association

www.bluewatercruising.org

Caribbean Safety and Security Net

(reports security problems in Caribbean, runs daily SSB security net)

www.safetyandsecuritynet.com

www.travel.state.gov

Weather

Lee Chesneau's Marine Weather courses

www.marineweatherbylee.com

Ocean Prediction Ctr (NOAA)

www.opc.ncep.noaa.gov

Tropical Analysis Forecasts (TAFB)

www.nhc.noaa.gov/marine_forecasts.shtml

Pacific Seafarer's Net

(Ham net for Offshore passage-making in the Pacific)

www.pacsea.org

BuoyWeather.com

Offshore Weather Service - Weather forecasting service by email

www.buoyweather.com

Don's Andersen's Pacific Weather - Amigo, South Bound and Baja California Maritime Service Nets

Caribbean Weather Center

www.caribwx.com

Caribbean Compass

Download Caribbean weather schedule
www.caribbeancompass.com

Also online: calendar, archived articles, reports on cruising areas

Find more weather links listed on our **Women and Cruising Links page:**

www.womenandcruising.com

Staying Healthy

Most cruisers find that they are much healthier aboard than when they lived ashore. We tend to get fewer colds and flus, to eat better, and feel more fit. But watch out for these areas:

1. **Sun exposure** – Carry good sunscreens that you will use. Have an everyday sunscreen for your face (or face cream with SPF), and a heavy-duty waterproof sunscreen for days when you're exposed to a lot of sun on the water. Find a comfortable (stylish, even) **hat** that you are willing to wear regularly to keep the sun off your face and neck.

Cruisers rarely sunbathe. If you see someone sun tanning aboard a boat, you know they are guests or charterers. Make sure you have a good awning/bimini/sunshade combination on your boat so that you can stay out of the sun while in the cockpit.

2. **Toes** - Have non-skid shoes to wear on deck while underway. Too many cruisers break toes. Get watershoes or sandals that can take salt water to wear while beaching dinghies. We hear that Purell disinfectant is good for toe fungus.

3. **Backs** – Devise a way to raise the outboard without dancing with it in a pitching dinghy. Or get a lightweight outboard. If you haul water from shore, consider using a flexible tank/bladder that fits in your dinghy and a 12 volt pump (a spare for some other pump aboard your boat) and avoid hoisting jerry jugs aboard. Get dinghy wheels (the large ones are the best) for your dinghy before going to an area with tides (eg. Mexico.)

4. **Wound care** – In tropical waters, it is very important that you take good care of scrapes and cuts to prevent infections. Bring lots of GOOD band-aids, bandaging tape and anti-bacterial cream like Bacitracin (not Neosporin). Any infection should be taken to a doctor promptly and treated with antibiotics. While bathing infections in a sterile saline solution may be good, bathing infections in seawater is about the worst thing you can do. Cover wounds.

5. **Bug bites** – Bring lots of insect repellent and use it in areas where bugs are a problem. Buy travel-size spray bottles or towelettes to carry when off the boat. Products with high concentrations of Deet are most effective. Buy or make screens for hatches and ports for areas with mosquitoes or no-see-ums. Bring along a "Sting-stick", cortisone cream, or Benadryl (spray, capsules) for when prevention fails, to relieve the itch of bites and other skin irritations. Lightweight long-sleeve clothing is good for very buggy locations (eg jungle hikes).

6. **Seasickness** – Different things work for different people in different conditions. Experiment with various medications available; use lowest effective dose to avoid side effects. Wrist bands, ginger help some people when conditions aren't too severe. Learn what triggers seasickness for you: eg certain food and drink, anxiety, lack of ventilation, activities below deck. KEEP HYDRATED, prepare meals ahead of time, and have items that you may need available from the cockpit to avoid too many trips below early in the voyage while your body adjusts. Good ventilation below helps: have fans in the head, nav station, galley. Steering the boat may also help you adjust to the motion. There are medications available outside the US (eg Stugeron) that some cruisers use but always check into side effects, interactions, lowest effective dosage. If you expect a difficult passage, take your first dose the night before. Keep suppositories on hand for severe situations when you can't keep anything down. Sea sickness goes away for most people after a few days at sea.

7. **Smoking** - Quitting smoking will save your health and your budget, but quitting on a passage is usually to be a bad idea.

Good, inexpensive **medical care** is available in many countries. The testing equipment is often advanced and tests that are expensive in the US are often inexpensive and readily available. Sometimes doctors will even come out to the boat! Clinics overseas can be a great place to get regular medical testing done. You can usually order tests without a doctor's orders, the tests are less expensive and the results are given directly to you to add to your medical file.

Make up a **medical file**, get copies of your key medical records and carry them with you. Make copies to take ashore.

Health insurance is available for persons who spend most of their time out of the US. Your US policy may not cover you overseas if you are out of the country for an extended time (over 30 days). You will want medical insurance that you can use abroad as well as back home. Consider medical evacuation coverage. Divers Alert Network (DAN) includes medical evacuation insurance (even for if you aren't a diver) with membership. Very affordable! All **scuba divers** should be sure to maintain their DAN membership with its included recompression insurance. Scuba divers planing to dive from their own boats in remote locations should carry an oxygen kit (available from DAN). Inexpensive travel insurance policies purchased with flights back to the boat (or with certain credit cards such American Express) may also cover medical evacuation or some injuries.

If you have an iPad, iPod Touch or Android, there are good medical reference apps (for CPR, choking, medications, emergencies).

Resources

Health

Diver's Alert Network (DAN) provides medical evacuation insurance
www.diversalertnetwork.org

Center for Disease Control (CDC)
Health info for specific areas
www.cdc.gov/travel/

World Health Organization (WHO)
Information on travel risks by area
www.who.int/ith/

IHI Bupa - International Health Insurance
www.ih.com

International Medical Group (IMG)
www.imglobal.com

The **SSCA Links Page** has a good list of **health insurance companies**.
www.scca.org

The Ship Captain's Medical Guide
UK's Maritime & Coastguard Agency Free, downloadable medical guide. The long web address is in the Health section of the Resources page: www.womenandcruising.com (iPad app)

Healthy Cruiser Handbook, book by Janette Loomis & James Bryan

Yoga On Board, by Kim Hess
www.yogaonboard.com

Cruising Boater's Workout, DVD and app by Ada Wells
www.probalancept.com/store.html

Kids Aboard

A must-read for anyone considering cruising with their children is our recent feature article on womenandcruising.com, *12 Questions to 12 Sailing Families!* Detailed contributions with extensive photographs from the 12 families illustrate the answers you are seeking for many questions. Writing from different boats, in different parts of the world, and cruising with children of widely varying ages, these women provide a treasure trove of information and bring alive all the possibilities that your family could be experiencing.

Cruising children are great! They continually impress us with their maturity, social skills, confidence and competencies. They quickly absorb local knowledge and language. If you ask a cruising family where the best place is to fill propane or leave your dinghy, the children are as likely to answer you as the adults. And many cruising children are far advanced of their peers when they do reenter traditional schools after cruising.

What's the best age to take children cruising? Any age works, though generally the younger, the better. Younger children usually adapt quickly, while teenagers often resist leaving the life of their friends, hobbies, and familiar surroundings. Although they will likely love it once they are out, it's harder to get them away from the dock.

Have children learn all the responsibilities of sailing the ship. Let them participate in all the daily chores -- maintenance, fishing, cooking, radio use, even regular watches. Pam and Andy did this from day one when the children were only aged 4 and 7. Although Mom and Dad were always awake and down below ready to jump on deck to help, the kids were responsible.

Kids should always learn something about where they are going BEFORE they get there, which makes it so much more interesting than just another harbor. As much as possible involve both parents in home schooling efforts, because, by all accounts the exceptional time together the lifestyle affords the family is one of its greatest rewards.

Most important of all, keep things simple, not just so that you don't add burdensome maintenance to the parental juggling act, but mostly so that you can GO NOW rather than waiting to afford a fancier or bigger boat.

Provisioning

Don't overprovision! Food is available almost everywhere. Food goes stale and oils go rancid in the tropics, so again, don't overprovision! Buy only what you eat at home.

However, *do* provision more thoroughly for a winter in the Bahamas, a summer in the Sea of Cortez, an extended stay in Panama's San Blas Islands, or anytime you think you will spend extended time in remote anchorages. Throughout the Bahamas, food is very expensive and harder to find, and in the Northern Sea of Cortez, shopping opportunities are scarce. In San Blas there are no stores, but you can have grocery orders shipped in by plane!

Learn what's available in the different islands and countries and re-provision as you cruise. Some of your major reprovisioning stops in the Caribbean are: the Dominican Republic (local products and products from Spain), Puerto Rico (Sam's, Costco, Wal-Mart, West Marine), St. Thomas (Cost-U-Less; PriceSmart, Kmart), St. Martin, Guadeloupe and Martinique (wine, cheese, chocolate! ; Leader Price), Trinidad (local brands), Venezuela (especially duty-free shopping in Margarita), Curaçao (Cost-U-Less), Cartagena (local brands).

In Central America, Panama City (PriceSmart & others plus duty free liquor); Golfito, Costa Rica (duty free liquor); San Jose, Costa Rica (requires a car trip); San Salvador, El Salvador (Price Smart); and most of the major coastal cities in Mexico (e.g. Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlan, Cabo San Lucas, Ensenada and La Paz). Sam's Club is big in Mexico.

In the South Pacific, Tahiti, American Samoa, and Fiji will be best for major shopping before reaching New Zealand or Australia, although Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas has some surprising products and decent produce that will be welcome after the crossing.

Resources

Kids Aboard

12 Questions to 12 Sailing Families, Don't miss it!
www.womenandcruising.com/sailing-families.htm

Calvert School
homeschooling curriculum
www.calvertschool.org/home-school/

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Independent Study High School
www.nebraskahs.unl.edu

Outfitting Assistance

Pam Wall
West Marine, (954) 527-0874
pamw@westmarine.com
www.pamwall.com

Laundry

Splendide Washers
www.splendide.com

Lehman's
non-electric washers, wringers
www.lehmans.com

Women and Cruising Books & CDs

An Embarrassment of Mangoes, Ann Vanderhoof

It's Your Boat, Too, by Suzanne Giesemann

Women on Board Cruising: Sharing their Experiences of Taking on the Great Loop & Other Long Distance Adventures, by Lisa Targal Favors

Get Her On Board, Nick O'Kelly

The Motion of the Ocean: 1 Small Boat, 2 Average Lovers, and a Woman's Search for the Meaning of Wife, by Janna Cawrse Esarey

The Cruising Woman's Advisor: How to Prepare for the Voyaging Life, Diane Jessie

Changing Course: A Woman's Guide to Choosing the Cruising Life, by Debra Ann Cantrell

Blue Horizons: Dispatches from Distant Seas, by Beth Leonard

A Prairie Chicken Goes to Sea, by Margo Wood

Living A Dream, by Suzanne Giesemann

Collection for the Nautically Afflicted, Music CDs by Eileen Quinn

Carry lots of **Ziploc bags** of all sizes, including really big, sturdy ones available at places like Wal-Mart. (Consider stripping your purchases of their cardboard packaging into Ziplocs right at the parking lot dumpster!) Bring along several packs of Evert Fresh Bags. If you have a vacuum aboard, the Space Bags are handy for extra bedding and clothing.

Carry lots of **toilet paper, paper towels**, etc. Quality and price are better in the US. However, you can restock in any of these major ports.

Ice cube bags are a handy way to make ice cubes and TechniIce sheets can be used to keep coolers cold. They are also convenient for icing down injuries since they are flexible and don't leak. Carry a good **soft-sided cooler bag** for bringing back cold food from the grocery store as well as carrying your drinks to potlucks.

Bring **snacks** – you can get almost anything else in the bigger islands. You spend a lot of time socializing with other boats and sharing snacks over happy hour. But, packaged snacks like crackers and chips eventually go stale in the tropics, so don't overdo it.

Nice to Have Aboard

Buy comfortable **walking shoes**. Most boaters prefer sandals but make sure you can walk two miles in them. Many boaters love their Crocs aboard. Reef walkers are also handy.

12-volt Fans: Put them in the head, nav station, galley, where you sleep. Have portable ones that you can move around. Caframo fans are quiet, efficient and easy to keep clean.

BreezeBooster wind scoops for hatches and ports – they bring in lots of air.

Take **hobbies** with you. If you like to watercolor, quilt, make jewelry, or play the flute, take it with you. Bring cards, dominoes, cribbage boards, games, books to trade, books and courses on tape, things that you enjoy doing.

An iPod or MP3 player with headphones for standing watch. Download music and free podcasts from iTunes when you have a free internet connection and listen to them underway or while doing boat chores.

A **vacuum sealer** (e.g. FoodSaver with the continuous roll bags) is handy for meats, fish, storing extra flour, etc., especially when you buy in bulk at Costco, Sam's Club or Cost-U-Less. Also useful for storing and protecting spare parts.

The Brother Key Touch Labeler (from office supply store) is handy aboard for labeling wires, hoses, valves, almost anything. (Label everything!!!!)

If you have an inverter and like whole-grain breads, consider a compact **breadmaking** machine. They don't use as much power as you think, can be run while motoring, and save a lot of below-deck heat.

A multi-system TV and all-region DVD player are great for nights and days in anchorages when the weather is awful.

To schlepp back parts and treats from home, use disposable suitcases from thrift stores. A simple traveler's luggage scale can aid in keeping to your baggage allowance, and you can use it aboard to weigh laundry before when using a services that charges you by the kilo. Kathy wears a travel vest and fills its pockets to increase the carry-on items she can get away with!!

Bring whatever makes the boat HOME for you: nice dishes to eat your meals on, select Christmas decorations, whatever!

Spares, Spares, Spares

Spares, spares, and spares! Carry as many spares as you can, for the engine, head, watermaker, pumps, fuses, bulbs, etc.

Develop a boat inventory (complete with part numbers, replacement costs and storage location aboard). Over time, knowing where your stuff is becomes a major challenge. Spares are squirreled away in inaccessible lockers, and you often know you have something aboard, but have no idea where. Take your inventory with you for trips home so you can restock. For geeks, a listmaking program (like ListPro) that syncs with your iPod/iPad/SmartPhone makes it easy to keep it up to date and consult it without printing. Carry lots of fuel and oil filters and engine oil. Don't procrastinate on refueling and restocking.

Take off the Boat

Clothes: You don't need as much as you think. Clothes will mysteriously stain in your lockers, and elastics will melt. Plus it's fun to buy t-shirts and sundresses as you travel. Most island cultures are fairly conservative. For example, in the Pacific you will want long shorts (men, too) or capri-length pants, skirts or sarongs and shirts that cover your shoulders. You will buy goodwill if you respect local conventions.

Books

Buy up-to-date **cruising guides** for the areas you plan to cruise. The more you can learn about an area, the more you will enjoy it.

Buy **travel guides** for the countries you'll visit. Lonely Planet and Rough Guides are difficult to find once you leave the US. Guides that cover individual countries are more useful than those that cover a whole region. You can now download guides and individual chapters from the Lonely Planet website.

Get **service manuals** for key equipment. They're expensive, but worth it when needed. If you can't do it yourselves, you can often find repair help IF you can provide them with manuals. Many Users/Service Manuals, and Technical bulletins can be downloaded from the manufacturer's site in pdf format.

Carry **Spanish for Cruisers** and **French for Cruisers**, plus a general dictionary for Spanish or French-speaking countries. For other languages, get Lonely Planet's regional phrase books.

Book and Language Resources

Spanish for Cruisers, French for Cruisers

The Boaters' Complete Language Guides by Kathy Parsons
www.forcruisers.com

Download free cheat sheets, shopping lists, crew lists, etc from the "Cheat Sheets" and "Tips and Notes" pages on the "Spanish for Cruisers" and "French for Cruisers" sites. Plus, check out the Links page for other useful websites.

Women and Cruising's Reference Books Resource List

Our Reference Book List has lots of ideas for stocking your onboard reference shelf:

<http://www.womenandcruising.com/resources.htm#ReferenceBooks>

The First Year Out

Shake down the boat as much as possible! Find out what doesn't work well, and what doesn't work for you. Take mini-cruises, live at anchor on your boat's batteries/solar panels etc. as much as possible so you find out if your batteries are good, if your charging capacity is adequate, and if your fridge and freezer work.

Take it slow! Forget what you told everyone back home about your grand plans. Take it slow and enjoy yourself. Perhaps you just sail the Bahamas or Mexico this year and go further the next year. Drag out your fun. Don't rush to cross the Pacific or Atlantic before you're SURE you're comfortable with the commitment; it's a long way back.

Make your own decisions. You and your mate should get the weather yourselves and make your own decisions about when to travel. You can listen to others, but don't let the "herd" decide when you will travel. Keep yourselves and your boat ready to go so if a window appears on short notice, you can take advantage.

Avoid making commitments to be somewhere you aren't. Deadlines, fixed rendezvous, meeting visitors often push cruisers to travel in less than ideal weather conditions.

It's not just a vacation. The first year is often stressful. The boat may break down too often. You might have some hard passages. See it as a challenge to have a good attitude, to deal with your fears, to communicate with your mate. You will become more comfortable in time.

HELP OTHER WOMEN! If you see a woman who isn't comfortable running her dinghy, take her out and teach her. If you feel awkward yourself, ask for help! Many things are difficult to learn from one's mate (sorry, just fact of life). Reach out to other women and go do things together, have an adventure together. Shop 'til you drop, have a meal out, take a hike, whatever!

Attitudes

Identify your biggest fears and find ways to handle them: If you're afraid of handling the boat, take a course. If you're afraid that you might lose your partner overboard: then develop a good system of jacklines and safety harnesses, perhaps even a personal EPIRB. Practice skills that you would need in an emergency. Prepare – but don't over-prepare – for disaster. Develop confidence in yourself and your crew to handle whatever comes along. We all three feel that cruising is safer than life ashore! Women and Cruising has a feature on dealing with Fears and Worries.

Cultivate an open mind and a flexible attitude. A more flexible, relaxed attitude is one of the longer-term benefits of cruising, so start working on it from the beginning. Challenge yourself to develop a good attitude and to go with the flow. Write email and trip reports to the folks back home describing your adventures. What seemed like a major worry beforehand often becomes a great story and a successful adventure afterward.

Skills

Understanding weather is important to comfortable and safe passages. In the end, each crew should make their own decision about when to travel, and everyone aboard should participate in the decision. Learn to read weather charts and pilot charts, and make sure you have a system aboard to get weather when you are away from the US. Learn to read the sky and what the different clouds formations mean. (Bring a cloud chart aboard.) You might take a marine weather course. (See L. Chesneau's Marine Weather courses.)

The greatest thing a woman can do for herself is to understand and know how to sail her boat. Without this knowledge, sailing can be frightening and uncomfortable. Take a sailing course: It's often hard to learn to sail from your mate. There are many sailing classes just for women that will give you the confidence to sail a boat efficiently, safely, and comfortably. Know the fundamentals of how to run your boat, navigate, drop sails, heave-to, anchor (down and up!). Practice aboard. Know how to use the radio. Learn to use your navigation equipment, radar, hardware, software before you leave. You might also take a Power Squadron course.

Develop your areas of skills and competence and divide them up between you and your mate. Maybe you want to be the person to get the ham license or take a Spanish or French course.

Make your own manual or cheat sheets for the boat. Your mate might be able to remember how to bleed the water system when it gets air in it or how to set the mizzen staysail, but you may forget. So make little cheat sheets for yourself listing the steps in detail, sometimes even list the tools you would need, or take photos. Label switches, valves, wires and even lines coming out of the mast. People might laugh, but you'll feel more confident KNOWING you have the right line or position on the switch.

Make up checklists for going offshore, for leaving the boat unattended for awhile. Copy a diagram of the boat and note all the through-hulls, bilge switches and locations, etc. Do whatever makes it easier for you to understand your boat.

Adapt the boat's systems so that you have the strength to operate the boat: get double-grip winch handles, self-tailing winches for sheets AND halyards, block & tackle for lifting heavy things like outboards onto the rail, a good electric windlass, a way to brace your shorter legs in a wide cockpit while heeled, an extra reef point in your mainsail, etc.

Learning to Sail Resources

Women on the Water Week at the Bitter End Yacht Club (sponsored by West Marine) www.beyc.com

American Sailing Association
www.american-sailing.com

Blue Water Sailing School
www.bwss.com; info2@bwss.com

Steve and Doris Colgate's Offshore Sailing School
www.offshore-sailing.com

Mahina Expeditions
www.mahina.com

National Women's Sailing Association
www.womensailing.org

Orange Coast College School of Sailing and Seamanship
www.occsailing.com

Sea Sense Women's Sailing & Powerboat School, www.seasenseboating.com

Womanship, www.womanship.com

Tethys Offshore Sailing for Women
www.tethysoffshore.com

Check your local area and our **Women and Cruising Resources** page for more:
www.womenandcruising.com

Peace of Mind

Know what to do in an emergency and be prepared.

- ☛ Pack an overboard bag/bottle and put in your passports and money before every passage.
- ☛ Know how to turn off the auto-pilot, start the engine and drop the sails!
- ☛ Practice man-overboard (MOB) drills, know how to deploy your Lifesling or other MOB rescue device, and how to use MOB function on your GPS.
- ☛ Know how to call for help on your VHF or HF radios (See the prepared pages for making an emergency call in Spanish and French in Kathy Parsons' *Spanish (or French) for Cruisers* Books.
- ☛ Preprogram the US Coast Guard emergency phone numbers for your area in the first speed dial positions of your cell or satellite phone. (You may think they are a long way away, but they are set up to coordinate rescues pretty much anywhere!)
- ☛ Know where your flares are kept and how to use them.
- ☛ Keep your fire extinguishers current and know how to use them.
- ☛ Make sure you have a high-water alarm in the bilge and tape wood bungs (plugs) next to every through-hull.
- ☛ Have a checklist for launching your life raft (don't forget your EPIRB and you overboard bag/bottle.)
- ☛ Put out jacklines for all passages and make it a ship's rule to wear a harness when out of the cockpit.
- ☛ Take a First Aid/CPR course (these are also available from dive shops).
- ☛ Have a good first aid kit and be able to get to it quickly.

Chances are you will NEVER have to call on any of these preparations, but knowing the answer to any "What-if?" your mind can come up with will save you a lot of anxiety.



*See you out there!
Have fun!
Kathy, Pam, Gwen*

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Pam Wall – pamw@westmarine.com

Gwen Hamlin – admiralsangle@yahoo.com

Learning about Cruising

Women and Cruising website

LOTS of articles and resources to read and download. You can also download a copy of this handout. Contribute to our blog!

www.womenandcruising.com

Admiral's Angle column in *Latitudes and Attitudes Magazine*

Wide-ranging topics of interest to cruising women, by Gwen Hamlin with input from the Admirals
www.womenandcruising.com/admirals-angle

Seven Seas U - online cruising webinars (including Women & Cruising!)
www.sevenseasu.com

Noonsite – website founded by Jimmy Cornell - for world cruising
www.noonsite.com

Seven Seas Cruising Association
www.scca.org
office@ssca.org

Latitude 38

Monthly magazine from West Coast that everybody reads for cruising info, especially for West Coast, Mexico and Pacific Central America
www.latitude38.com

The Cruising Life section in *Cruising World Magazine*

Features interviews with interesting cruising women, techniques and ideas for cooking aboard, stories about cruising and family and relationships, and inspirational interior makeovers

Bluewater Cruising Association
www.bluewatercruising.org

Women Aboard Organization, website, and newsletter
www.womenaboard.com

Beth and Evans Website

Beth Leonard and Evans Starzinger's website has logs of their travels plus lots of articles on cruising. Also Beth's *Voyager's Handbook*.
www.bethandevans.com

TheTwoCaptains.com

Gwen Hamlin's excellent site on the travels of Tackless II from the Caribbean to the Pacific.
www.thetwocaptains.com