

Cruising with novices

Top 10 tips

Getting family and friends to enjoy your lifestyle requires a little forethought and planning writes **Christine Danger**.

You have invited friends or family on a cruise. They have never done it before. They have put their trust in you as their hosts and sailing guides. How do you maximise your chances of a memorable and successful cruise?

We spent three weeks on board *Take It Easy* with our family over from France. We cruised the Great Sandy Straits, the southern Great Barrier Reef and Capricornia coast in winter 2015 and all had an intense, rewarding trip of a lifetime. In the process we learnt a thing or two about what works well and what to avoid.

So here are our top ten tips on cruising with novices.

Involve them in the preparation

It is often said that the enjoyment of any voyage starts in the planning. It is no different with a sailing cruise.

Researching regions to explore and possible anchorages is a great way to engage people and get them excited. Plan together.

In our case we used extracts from cruising guides and sent links to various internet sites, so our family could get a feel for what there was to see and do. We asked them to review a rough itinerary, illustrated with photos we downloaded from the internet and got them to identify what appealed to them most.

All of this was done via email and Skype calls since we were at opposite ends of the world.

Build a manageable itinerary

When on a limited schedule there can be a tendency to want to do too much. You see a lot, but you skim and rush.

Instead, take the approach of planning a varied but leisurely cruise. Start gently: short hops in calm waters are best to begin with, not a rollicking ocean passage. Get them used to the movement of the boat and life aboard.

Do not start with a bang and a full day sail. It is too hard for novices. You want them to feel comfortable, to have fun discovering, to build their confidence and realise they can cope.

Anxiety does not help sea sickness. Minimise the risk of them feeling unwell. This includes finding protected anchorages where your boat will sit reasonably flat and you have easy access to the shore. There is nothing worse than doing the pendulum at anchor.

We found that our family was more prone to sea sickness at anchor in a slightly rolling anchorage than underway.

Brief them well

Life on a boat is different to life on land.

When you come from an environment where unlimited water is on tap, electricity and gas just keep coming as long as the switch is turned on, you do your laundry whenever you need to, the toilet never gets clogged and you can get to the shops easily if you run out of food, spending



three weeks on a boat where everything is in short supply can be a shock to the system.

So a thorough briefing at the start, to make everyone aware of your water/power conservation procedures and to show them how to use the stove in the galley. Plus the big one, how to use the head to avoid catastrophes, is essential.

Show them where the safety gear is stowed and how to use the radio. A reminder part way through the cruise can be useful too.

During our cruise, if taps were left running too long, Wade showed them the empty jerry cans, “we have used this much in a week, if we run out we have to head back to port to fill up.”

It is also useful if the lights are left turned on, to go and turn them off yourself. They notice and remember next time without you having to constantly tell them. We find people self-regulate readily with such reminders.

Wade is the designated power and water ‘nazi’. He will go around turning off lights or lament excessive water consumption. I make disparaging comments on his stingy behaviour and we all laugh, but the message gets through.

Provisioning made easy

Over the years we have developed a provisioning list that allows us to be self-sufficient for six weeks for the two of us. We adapt this depending on the duration of the cruise and number of people joining us.

We have a freezer on board as well as a fridge, so meat and pre-prepared meals are frozen and taken out to defrost as we need. We make our own bread and yoghurt and grow a variety of sprouts for fresh greens. We fish and forage for crabs, shells, berries, mushrooms.

We provision the boat and share the cost with our guests. It is often easier for us to do the provisioning even for a short trip, than to have people bring food as we know what is on board and what space is available to stow everything away.

Activities and variety – the spice of life

People often ask how we spend our time. We respond we never get bored!

There is a lot to do. Apart from sailing, day-dreaming, napping, reading, playing Sudoku, doing running repairs or “just slowing down”, we have a range of things to occupy ourselves and our guests.

It is nice to have options once you anchor somewhere for a few days. We have a number of toys on board: two inflatable Airis kayaks, a power snorkel which allows you to get down to ten metres underwater, a sail kit for the Walker Bay dinghy, fishing rods, snorkelling gear, games and cards.

We also have camera gear for a certain photographer!

MAIN: Yellow Patch iconic anchorage.

TOP: Novices at the helm!

ABOVE: Dolphins at the bows, a delight for old salts and novices.

BELOW LEFT: Bustard Head Lighthouse.

BELOW RIGHT: Sunset at Lady Elliott Island.

OPPOSITE PAGE: TOP: Snorkelling off the boat at the Keppels.

You don't have to be together all the time

Having passengers on board can be test for how well you get on, especially in restricted space. But you do not have to be together 24 hours a day. It is also good to be able to do your own thing.

Someone might like to go for a paddle, while someone else might take the dinghy ashore for a wander. Personal time is an important consideration when you live in a confined space for a time.

We found we mixed it up with our family: we snorkelled together, did a few walks ashore together, but also had time to ourselves when everyone did what they fancied. Having those toys helps.

We are also lucky that the boat is big enough to allow people to spread out a little. The nets at the front were a great spot for private chats or for watching wildlife. The cockpit and its comfy seats were good for a read or the odd nap, same for the saloon. The sugar scoops were perfect for fishing.

Give them tasks

One thing we are not particularly good at but are learning, is that people like to have a job on board. Be it taking turns at the tillers, helping with sails trimming, making breakfast or lunch, helping with the dishes, cooking the evening meal, making cups of tea or coffee, or keeping the boat log; it is good to share the load.

We found our family was keen to be involved in the running of the boat. Galley work was not a favourite underway as being down below often led to feeling unwell.

Benevolent dictatorship

When it comes to deciding whether to go or stay put or choosing the location of your next anchorage it is worthwhile to involve your passengers, even if the ultimate decision rests with you.

It is all part of building engagement and enjoyment. People are always interested in how you make your decisions, so sharing information about weather forecasts, anchorage options, advantages and disadvantages of one spot over another, is likely to work better than dictating where you go next.

On board *Take It Easy*, we sit down together and discuss possible destinations in conjunction with current weather patterns. For instance, when at Lady Musgrave Island we knew a strong change would come in the next two days.



We had a choice: leave immediately and head for the coast to 1770 or Pancake Creek, move for a day to Fitzroy Reef then onto the coast, or stay put for another day, then sail to the mainland. We opted to miss out on a brief visit to a different lagoon, enjoyed another brilliant day at Lady Musgrave before heading to Pancake Creek, which offered a secure anchorage and land-based activities during rough weather.

Teach'em

If they are willing, get them to have a go. Show them how to keep a course, use the radio or GPS, trim the sails, or steer.

Our family loved steering and even though we meandered widely at times, they had fun and learnt a lot. They enjoyed being active, feeling the wind and acceleration, watching their speed and trying to outdo one another.

It also had a side benefit: while they did that, they were in the fresh air and forgot about feeling green!

What to bring

Sunnies, hats, sea sickness tablets, e-readers or books, camera, Sudoku or crossword books, reef shoes, snorkelling gear, multiple pairs of bathers, quick drying towels, drink bottles for hydration, premoistened towellettes to freshen up, lip balm, chargers for cameras or laptops...; these are some of the things we recommend our visitors bring with them.

Girls, bring more knickers and less shoes!

We have had friends also bring a guitar or their drawing kit.

We supply sunscreen lotion in large tubs, a well provisioned first aid kit, food and drinks; oh and the boat!

But the most important thing to bring is a sense of fun and adventure. Most of us have a yearning for experiencing something different from the routine.

To people who have never sailed or do not often get the chance, you can provide the most memorable, extraordinary experiences. Do not lose sight of what it was like the first time you sailed though. Make it fun and enjoyable.

Follow this recipe and take it easy!

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cruisinghelmsman Christine Danger



Chris and her partner Wade Bishop are Melbourne based. They have been sailing on catamarans of various sizes for the last 15 years. Their favourite cruising grounds include Bass Strait Islands, Tasmanian waters and Australia's east coast. They live for the day when they can give up work, cruise full-time on *Take It Easy*, and explore further afield. Follow their adventures on www.sv-takeiteasy.com.

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