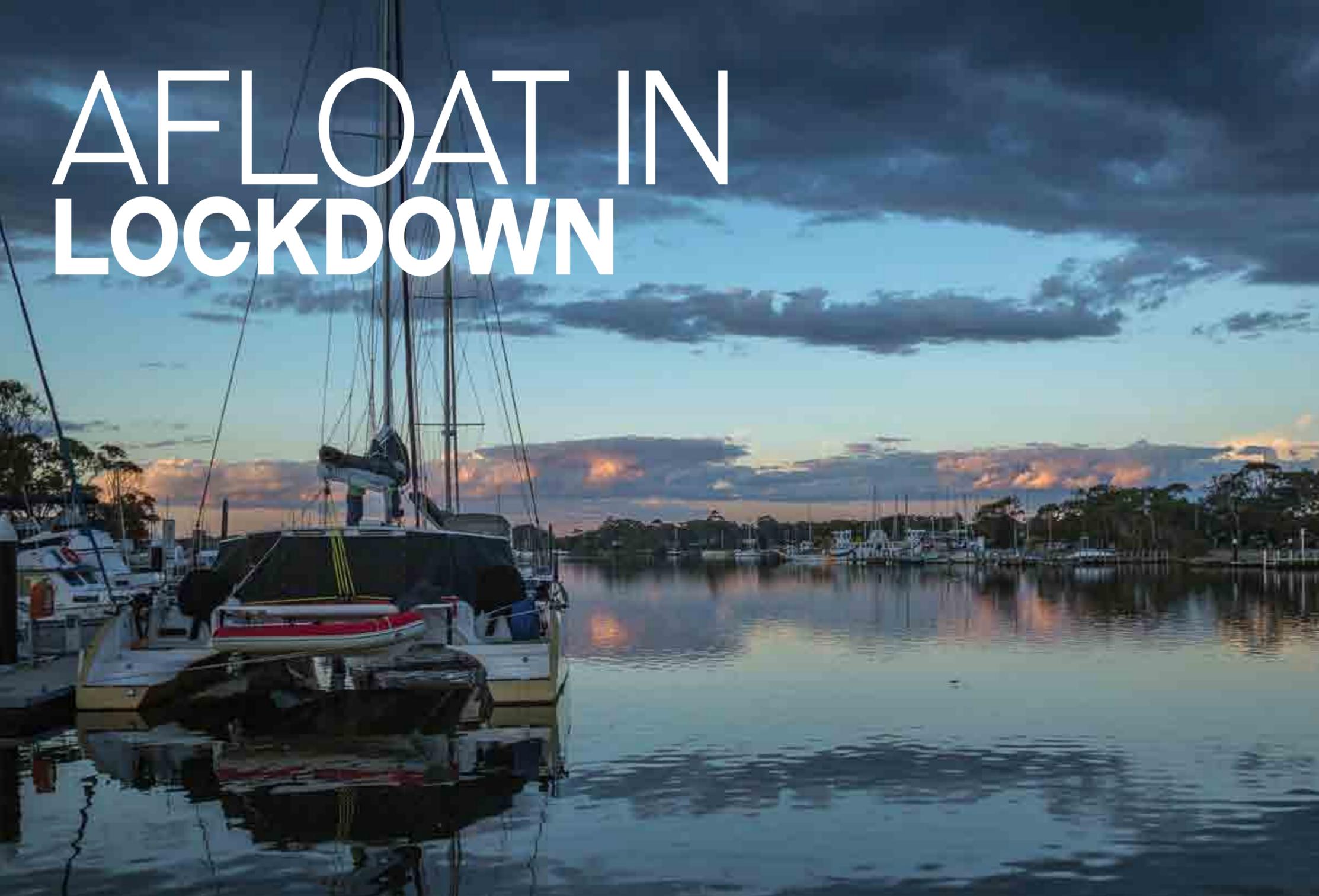


# A FLOAT IN LOCKDOWN



LEFT: Sunset view from our cockpit ... the neighbouring cat *Wildfire* and Raymond Island.

ABOVE: Boating restrictions were severe in Victoria.

With millions of us lying low to limit the spread of COVID-19, how do you manage being cooped up for days on end when your home is a boat? **CHRISTINE DANGER** gives us a rundown on how the *Anui* crew faced the challenge of living afloat in lockdown.

**W**e live on a 52ft catamaran. It is our home and we have been liveaboards for three years, since we retired. In truth we haven't felt vastly different these last months from our normal cruising life. Distancing ourselves, having limited social interactions, being in the confined space of a boat, stocking up for a few weeks and keeping ourselves occupied is not new to us. Nor is spending extended time just the two of us and the pussycat without sending each other crazy. So at first glance it may seem like the perfect lifestyle during a pandemic. What was new is being forbidden from moving our vessel when we saw fit or where we saw fit and being unable to be with friends and family.

## CONFUSION AND UNCERTAINTY

First we must say that we have been very lucky. Being retired, without kids, we do not have to deal with job insecurity, income drop, children's home schooling ... We have it easy. We know this has been a much tougher challenge for many on land, and our thoughts are with those who have been hit hard by this pandemic.

When all this disaster first started, we were of the belief that there is no better way to isolate yourself than being on a boat, anchored in the wilderness in complete isolation. On *Anui*, we are self-sufficient. We make our

own water, our own power, we don't need access to bathrooms or laundromats ashore since we are well equipped on board, we can stock up with food for weeks. We can be away from civilisation for extended periods without the need to come back to port. It is practical and comforting, and it was our hope that we would be able to stay far from all the coronavirus drama, floating around somewhere warm!

Our intention originally was to leave Melbourne where we had been for several months for medical issues, spend time at Wilson's Promontory and at the Gippsland Lakes, before heading to Far North



**TOP:** The big cats squad, all stranded: *Anui*, *Wildfire* and *Novae*.

**ABOVE LEFT:** One of our last passages before lockdown, rounding the Prom.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Piano playing on board – music has a way of soothing the soul.

Queensland to spend six months at the Reef. But things changed in early April. All recreational boating was banned, and although our boat is our full time home rather than just a recreational vessel, things have not gone to plan as is the case for so many other sailors, whether they are on board full time, for a season or just for a holiday escape.

We made it to the Gippsland Lakes a few days after the ban on boating was instituted, proceeded to make enquiries with the Coast Guards, the Water Police and Ports Authorities as to what we could and could not do, where we could or could not go. But all this highlighted the lack of clarity and consistency in the rules between states, even between locations within a state, as well as their constantly changing nature. In addition, rules were applied with varying levels of stringency in different states. What all this meant for full-time liveaboards was also unclear. It was frustrating seeing the Queensland boaters able to move around, and the Victorians not able to move an inch!

Ports and waterways are monitored for illegal movement, just like with land-based travel. Not wanting to flaunt the rules nor cop a \$1600 fine, we stayed put in Paynesville until restrictions eased. We were not

allowed to move around the Lakes, not even anchor somewhere. We were tied to a floating jetty, and that is where we stayed. We hasten to say that Gippsland Ports were fantastic and gave up a permit to berth for as long as we needed. It helped that we were known to them, having berthed our previous two boats there for some 15 years! And if you have to get stranded somewhere, Paynesville is the place to be. For us it was like a home coming. We know many people who came to visit, chatting from the jetty to obey distancing rules. For a few dollars a day we had access to shore power and town water; grocery shopping was within walking distance and we were close to nature for walks. We felt safe which was critical to us, both of us having compromised immune systems. We would have preferred to be much further north in warmer conditions, but we could not complain too much.

### THE SPECIAL CHALLENGE OF BEING AFLOAT

People often ask how we cope in our gilded jail. Being in lockdown on a boat is a little different from being in lockdown on land. Space obviously is more confined. So this impacts what you can do and your general comfort level. The limited room can seriously affect how much personal space you have and can make it tricky to exercise. We are fortunate that *Anui* has a good size saloon and large cockpit, which allows us to have some personal space. No matter how well you get on, there are times when you feel you are on top of one another and need some distance! If you can't do this physically, you need to have ways to escape mentally.

The cockpit also gives us enough room to exercise under cover, without feeling like we are exhibitionists on deck. We often say there is quite a difference between living on board permanently and being on board for a holiday. Things that you put up with when your stay is temporary will seriously bug you when your boat is your full-time home. For us it meant moving to a larger and better equipped vessel and we are glad we are on *Anui* rather than *Take It Easy* for these challenging times.

### SURVIVING LOCKDOWN

Whether you live afloat or on terra firma, surviving lockdown has a lot to do with your attitude to life in general. Once you realise that where the boat is moored is where you will be for an extended sojourn, all you can do is make the most of the situation.

Being in lockdown does not mean being starved of adventures, bored or without purpose. You have to find new ways to get your fix and engage in a mix of activities that are enjoyable, rewarding and make the time pass pleasantly while you can't sail.

One important aspect of surviving lockdown is to see the situation as an opportunity instead of a setback and to look for ways to spend the time well. There are three critical things we consciously work on: staying connected, keeping the mind active and the body moving. So let us expand on this.

### STAY CONNECTED

When you are in physical isolation you don't have to be emotionally isolated. More than ever we are staying in touch with friends and family all over Australia and overseas. We have conversations to share our ups and downs, our activities, good things or ideas we have come across. These happen regularly and frequently.

We are lucky to live in an era when communication is easy and cheap no matter where your friends or family live. We are learning new tricks with video calls through Facetime, What's App or Skype, recording the crazy antics we get up to and sharing this for a laugh. We



Floating around freely at the Prom before restrictions hit.

are reframing the way we connect. But it is not always rosy. Sometimes there are dire situations when friends or family members are terribly sick and dying. You can't visit them, you can't hold their hand or give them a hug. For us this distance from family at a time when you want to be physically close has been the toughest and most confronting aspect of the lockdown. So finding a way to talk and stay close virtually is our only option. It is interesting how it takes a calamity like COVID-19 to make you realise you should keep in touch more with people you care about. We had become a little complacent and distant ... not anymore! And this is one change of behaviour we will maintain well after the pandemic has gone.

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From a practical point of view, we are glad we upped our Telstra plan a while back. We have unlimited mobile calls within Australia and 100GB of data a month, which is not often used entirely, but it allows us to surf the net from multiple devices, manage our website, stream a few programs, and make calls without having to worry about running out of data. For anyone contemplating life afloat, don't be too frugal with your communication



**TOP:** Three big cats on show in Paynesville, attracting lots of visitors.

**ABOVE:** Room with a view. For once, red skies in the morning don't worry us!

spend. Think about what your land based internet and mobile costs are, and don't expect them to be lower on a boat within Australian waters.

Another useful thing we have also done while in lockdown to help us stay connected is purchasing a Telstra Go Repeater and installing an antenna to our highest spreader. In future this will ensure that even in remote areas our signal for voice quality and data speed is boosted and our coverage extended. It will be nice to be able to make calls or get internet service from the Ribbon Reefs in Far North Queensland, from Fitzroy Reef or Lady Musgrave in the Southern Great Barrier Reef, even cross Bass Strait or brave the West Coast of Tasmania and not be out of range.

## KEEP THE MIND ACTIVE

Keeping your mind active is critical to your wellbeing. Giving yourself the challenge of new experiences and learning can keep you mentally fit and you can do this equally easily from a boat or from land. You can set yourself some objectives which in the short term give focus to your everyday and in the long term allow you to project beyond a difficult situation.

As human beings we have an incredible capacity to keep improving, learning and adapting, regardless of our age or stage of life. Taking positive steps towards any goal, no matter how small is going to make life feel better and give us some control over our future. It is all about using the time constructively and pleasantly. The key is to do things you enjoy and may have put off when you had less time! It allows you to be in the present, switch off and get lost in the activities of the great indoors! You might choose to learn a language or play an instrument, enrol in a few online courses, sharpen particular skills, or throw yourself into creative pursuits.

For instance doing a Photoshop boot camp program and a landscape photography master class while in lockdown has absolutely blown my mind, while providing an absorbing occupation and a structure to my days. Another positive was the realisation we could have an electronic keyboard on *Anui*. There has always been a piano at home since childhood, but once we moved on board, piano playing obviously stopped. Seeing other catamaran friends with a Yamaha digital piano on their boat resulted in us buying one before leaving Melbourne, a great decision to reconnect to a lifelong love of playing music. A guitar or ukulele will do just the same thing for those who don't have the space on board.

Doing problem solving and boat maintenance while you are stuck in one place is another positive of being in lockdown. Wade has spent hours fixing instruments which had stopped working, refining systems and making additions to the boat to make our life more comfortable. Some of the things he has worked on included lacing the mainsail boom cover so the zip does not undo when at anchor in 40 knot winds, making clears for the back of the cockpit to keep the rain away, re-bedding a bow cleat, repairing the trampolines frame, installing our Telstra signal booster, learning the intricacies of our NKE navigation system ... Being absorbed by fixes and improvements without time pressure kept him busy, gave him a sense of achievement and has had great benefits for our life afloat.

## KEEP THE BODY MOVING

Staying on board with either not enough to do or too much time for cooking tasty meals can lead to over eating and a little too much imbibing of alcohol! This may see us emerging from lockdown a few sizes bigger! We definitely don't want to turn into blobs or couch potatoes on *Anui*. And being in lockdown means spending probably more time at the computer, with a desk set up that is far from ergonomic, which means our backs take a beating. So keeping the body moving, establishing an exercise routine and sticking to it are important steps to take.

In fact this has been a bug bear of ours even before lockdown! People think you get a lot of exercise on board from just bracing yourself, winding winches, going up and down steps ... You do get some, but it is far from sufficient. On occasions we'd do a few interval training sessions but were not very disciplined. In fact let's be truthful, we would come up with all sorts of excuses not to do it: the boat is moving and posing an extra challenge for balance, we are on watch with other things to focus on ... So we had a tendency to not be as physically active as we should have and that is not a good thing, especially as you get older.

What lockdown is doing for us is creating a much needed workout habit, which we hope we will continue once restrictions are lifted. Research suggests that it takes 21 days to create a habit, which is probably right if you are trying



to do something easy, like drinking a glass of water after breakfast or lunch. For anything more difficult, like starting a new exercise routine, it can take two or three times that. So three months later, we might have a chance. Seeing or feeling results for your efforts definitely helps embed the habit: less backaches, better tone, more energy, more flexibility, better sleep ... these are all the advantages that go with regular exercise.

There are plenty of exercises that can be done on board, but it can be hard to stick to a fitness regime without some external help and encouragement. So we have downloaded a couple of Apps to help. We can't join a physical class, but we can do a virtual class! There is plenty to pick from on the net, just google 'Home Exercises' and prepare to be overwhelmed with choice.

Our cockpit has become our gym: we take yoga sessions daily, helped along by the Asana Rebel App. It is not free but is well worth the investment and covers not just yoga, but also meditation, nutrition and sleep. Beyond this we do Interval Training sessions a few times a week, again with another App, the Johnson & Johnson 7 Minute Workout. It is free, quite

**ABOVE LEFT:** Yoga in action – Wade showing off with a head stand, something easier when the boat is stable!

**LEFT:** Yoga in unison! Lots of Downward Dogs!

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basic but provides a mix of strength and fitness exercises based on seven minutes circuits. You can do one round or multiple ones depending on your energy level! The tracking on both apps keeps you motivated and honest: if you miss a few sessions, you soon get a reminder to get going again!

And then most of us have access to the outdoors, so can go for walks or runs. The natural light will stimulate the brain and the feeling of fresh air on your skin and in your lungs can be a game changer to mood and

from the added stress and anxiety. It is not the magic formula that takes all the negatives away, but it certainly makes you better able to cope.

Lockdown living is definitely not all doom and gloom whether on land or on the water. In fact for us it will turn out to have a positive impact on our life afloat. A little more discipline, some changes to our routine, a new awareness of what helps us and what hinders us, some practical additions to the boat will all contribute to the new and better 'normal'.



**ABOVE:** Our spot in Paynesville from above!

**ABOVE LEFT:** Moored in front of the Gippsland Lakes Yacht Club, this is where we stay!

**LEFT:** Arrival at Lakes Entrance, pre-dawn.



positivity. We do take daily walks ashore to get off the boat while in lockdown. Being stranded in the Gippsland Lakes had its advantages: close to nature, plenty of tracks to explore in beautiful surroundings, the chance to see some wildlife while being away from people. If we are offshore, anchored at the reef for instance, walking gets replaced by swimming, snorkelling or kayaking.

There is no denying that exercise has a positive impact on your frame of mind. With our own health issues and family concerns, we needed to protect ourselves

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*Chris and her partner Wade Bishop have been sailing on catamarans of various sizes for over 20 years, cruising Bass Strait, Tasmanian waters and Australia's East Coast. In July 2017, they finally retired, and are now sea wanderers, living on board their catamaran, Anui, a 52ft Crowther. Follow their adventures on [www.sv-anui.com](http://www.sv-anui.com)*