

# **Boating Tips Living Aboard**

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To live aboard a boat, whether for months or years, is a complicated and challenging decision. For answers, I interviewed two local couples. The McKenzie's lived on their 36' Morris sailboat in the summer, sailing the Chesapeake, New England, at the St Lawrence River. The Ellis' lived on their 40' Bristol sailboat for five years, sailing among the Caribbean Islands, the Keys, and Florida coast and ICW to the Chesapeake. Each couple's perspective and suggestions were pretty consistent.

Foremost, both members of the couple must agree as well as be comfortable with living aboard no matter the length. Second, each couple chartered or had smaller boats to experience extended cruising to determine what they wanted and needed for their safety and comfort on their live aboard boat. You can always go up or down in boat size. They also studied and prepared before committing to the boating lifestyle.

Once they selected a particular boat model and size, they chartered that boat to become familiar with its layout and characteristics, ensuring it met their requirements.

Both couples opted for larger refrigeration capacity. Both also chose ample ground tackle, anchor(s), and chain/line combinations. Each upgraded the batteries and increased the number then upgraded to a high output alternator to support the batteries. Further battery support came from solar and wind power. The Ellis' added a DC to AC power inverter (converter). To set the sails in adverse conditions both opted for more strong winches. They added or upgraded covers for protection from the sun and weather.

For electronics, both added or updated GPS with integrated chart plotter plus one added radar. Because electronics can fail, both couples bought current paper charts for long-distance cruising and another set with harbor and port details. Communication was critical, whether by VHF, single sideband, and even cell phone. The McKenzie's added a cell signal booster to their boat while the Ellis' added a Wi-Fi hot spot.

For long-range cruising and living aboard, drinking water is critical. One couple opted for bottled drinking water only. Bathing and cooking water came from their freshwater tank. The other decided to use water from their freshwater tank yet filling it from only reliable sources. They also rigged a filtered funnel, never allowing the hose end to touch the funnel to avoid "skanky" water, but they still carried water purification tablets.

Each couple developed a budget. The McKenzie's figured it cost the same to live on their boat and cruise for months as it did to live at home for the same timeframe. The Ellis' opted to scale down their expenses.

One key factor in controlling expense is free anchorage rather than paying for dockage. All the couples did get a dock to re-provision, do laundry, pick up mail, call home, plus if needed, see a doctor.

When anchoring out a dinghy is essential for errands, exploring and visiting others on the hook. It's also useful with exterior boat maintenance. When ashore, the couples explored. They found locals helpful and welcoming, even loaning them a car for provisioning or just exploring. They always filled the car before returning it.

Each couple appointed a trusted friend or family member to pick up and forward mail along with pay bills within specific guidelines. Most of their cruising time was before automatic or electronic bill payment. The Ellis' had what was then called "pocket mail" that converted the written word to voice. So, they "listened" to their mail once in the port when pocket mail had a signal.

A constant frustration is the weather, whether to stay or go or being caught in an unexpected storm. Because the couples were retired, they opted to stay put when weather reports predicted adverse conditions. Weather controlled so much of each couple's lives. Still, a few days of rain for a month of good weather in paradise, who cares?

Storage was another significant factor. Everything has a place and should be kept in its place. Two reasons: stuff can't be flying around in rough seas, then, you can't be searching for what you need in an emergency. You must keep the boat ship-shape. Each couple felt they lived well in less space than today's tiny house.

In extended cruising, you must become highly self-sufficient with the tools and parts necessary to fix essential components; engine, wind vane or solar panel, refrigerator, battery charger, radio, change the engine oil, and all filters as well as replace an alternator, fuel or water pump or belts. You also need enough of the right fluids to maintain specific components, but not too much. For example, if you need two quarts, have four but not six.

When it comes to food, they ate a lot of fresh fish. Except for instructions, discard unnecessary packaging before stowing aboard. Some prepackaged and dry meals are small, tasty, and nutritious. They ate fresh fruit and vegetables whenever possible.

As noted, water is essential to survival. Each couple learned to bathe and wash dishes in the ocean using Dawn or other suitable soap. For a hot shower, catch rainwater in a solar heater. Neither couple opted for a water maker; however, they might now because they are smaller and less expensive. Each couple did opt for larger freshwater tankage. Blackwater, human waste, is kept to a minimum then goes overboard when permitted. Gray water goes directly overboard in most instances. The Ellis' added a tank tender to monitor freshwater, wastewater, and fuel tanks.

In addition to frustrations and foul weather, each couple shared the exhilaration of freedom and travel. They marveled at the beauty of the ocean and sky in addition to the places explored. Each couple took advantage of every opportunity to explore, to taste, and to see and hear the unusual and new to them. Long-range cruising and living aboard are about the adventure, the journey rather than the destination.

The McKenzie's boated into their early 80's, the Ellis' lived aboard in their late 50s and still boat. Each person acknowledged it's critical to have a plan, to know when and under what circumstances to stop adventuring. You need an exit strategy though it can be flexible, plus you can scale back activities. It's time when you can no longer safely hop on and off the boat.

Just do it; live aboard or extended cruising. It can be the best years of your life.

I thank the Ellis' and Mackenzie's for their sharing their time and stories with me, and now you.

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