



# The hitch hiker's guide to crossing oceans

You don't need to own a yacht to go blue water cruising. Regina Petra Meyer describes how she thumbed a lift to cruising paradise

**A** love affair with sailing began during a short stint in South Australia. One date with the ocean and the wind relentlessly pushing our boat through the choppy seas, it was breathtaking to witness the waves breaking on the bow, washing all the way back to the cockpit, then smashing into our faces and drenching us entirely.

To this day, I have never felt quite as alive as I do at sea.

**Learning the ropes**  
With my sights set firmly on the high seas, I signed up with the local sailing school and took part in an RYA accredited

introductory course to keelboat sailing. During quiet periods, I mentioned my plans to crew on yachts overseas to our instructor.

A complete novice on liveaboard life, I took the opportunity to grill him about the differences between ocean passages and coastal cruising, the crewing 'dos and don'ts', what to pack and expect from a cruising lifestyle and... what happens if things take a turn for the worse?

I was lucky he was a patient fellow. Passionate about yachting, he let himself be infused with some of my overflowing enthusiasm.

After reading Southern Ocean sailing books, we didn't just stop at the sailing basics, which included how to hoist and trim sails, or get a tack or gybe down pat. My instructor went far beyond the

fundamentals of sailing. He unearthed the sea anchor from a well-hidden locker, and I learned when and how to correctly deploy this contraption. During a particularly gruff sail, we ate our lunch with the yacht comfortably hove-to and, to my astonishment, I noticed the boat settle, despite angry waves rolling beneath our hull.

I was thrilled and this only intensified my yearning to explore the ocean world. From the comfort of my computer at home I looked up prospective crewing opportunities and eventually committed and converted my dream to reality.

But before I set off for my first seabound adventure, my sailing instructor gave me a few tips on how to become an appreciated crew member. Firstly, be courteous. This was common sense – no one wishes for a demanding

or disrespectful guest. Got it. 'The second tip – never 'assume' on a new boat. At first, I was puzzled. "Every skipper runs their boat differently", he said, "there are often variations in how a captain likes their tacks and gybes sequenced. Some boat owners are very specific in how they want their ropes coiled and stowed or how to use the head (toilet) on board."

Now I understood. A valued recommendation and it is one I still live by today.

By sitting quietly and observing from the sidelines we can learn a lot about the skipper and the boat's rhythm. After all, being allowed

to play with someone else's toy (and home) – sailing and exploring on their yacht is an honour and a privilege.

**Caribbean bound**  
My first crewing experience began in 2007. I harnessed my courage and chose a 46ft cruiser-racer, built in the early 1970s, located in the Caribbean as my first floating home. The plan was to sail the yacht from Antigua back to Australia with the skipper and four crew.

Once onboard a new yacht, each journey starts off with heartfelt smiles and a warmly extended "Welcome aboard!". As an extrovert and a naturally curious person, I adore meeting new people, but setting foot on a new yacht when you know it's going to be your home for the foreseeable future, is always a little nerve-wracking.

In such a tight space with no option to step off once at sea, creating an enjoyable and harmonious time together, was my main objective. For those non-sailors out there, picture inviting someone into your home, then shutting the front door and coexisting with your guests without ever leaving your home for the next month. (I think these days we'd call it 'lockdown!'!)

Over time I've found unpacking my personal belongings helps me to settle those early nerves. Stowing and seeing my familiar items in my cabin or bunk feels grounding and

the allocated lockers, however small, become my little space.

**First date at sea**  
After that, it's time for the future sailors to get acquainted. In my experience these first interactions are not unlike a first date. Often a little awkward, a bit exciting and, usually, a cautious and 'on best-behaviour' affair. Sailing experiences feature highly in those first conversations, especially any exciting or scary stories that contribute to the thrill of the moment.

"There's no doubt living and sailing with people we don't know can be challenging, but it's also a valuable practice in acceptance and not taking oneself too seriously. In moments when things get a bit tense, a little time out on the bow of the yacht will allow for those fiery frustrations to be carried away with the breeze...."

By and large, with a bit of tolerance and curiosity on everyone's behalf, sharing a cruising experience or an ocean passage with strangers can be a wonderfully enriching and stimulating experience.

I have been able to journey far and wide and my travels have instilled in me a great faith in humanity. With all this in mind, I count myself lucky to have connected and travelled with capable and kind yachtsies that broadened my horizons, quite literally.

**ABOVE**  
Up the rigging running repairs on the course and if you boat, you'll be popular with the skipper

**BELOW**  
Regina at the helm



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**  
Regina Petra Meyer is the author of *Change of Course*, published by Love & Adventure on Caribbean Shores. Follow more of her adventures at [reginapetrameyer.com](http://reginapetrameyer.com)

