

# WORD OF MOUTH

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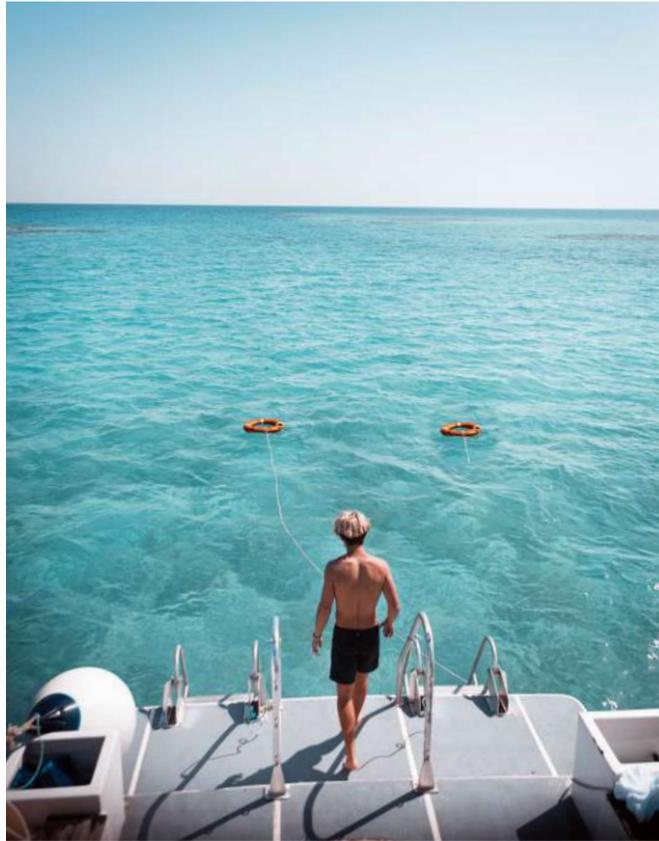


## INTO THE BLUE

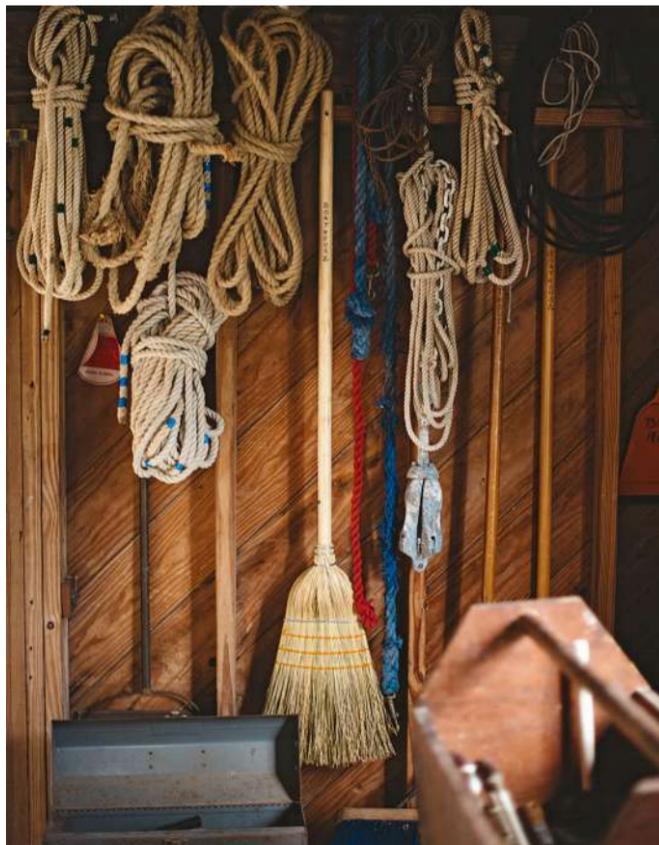
From sailing boats and schooners to catamarans and yachts, a sailing holiday is one of the most delightfully freeing ways to explore this season

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WORD OF MOUTH



Clockwise: Yachts bobbing in Ibiza; diving in the Red Sea, one of many sailing activities; sailing equipment; exploring the waters of the Red Sea; a sleek ship deck. **Next page:** The waterfront at Hydra



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“It isn’t that life ashore is distasteful to me,” said the legendary English seafarer Sir Frances Drake. “But life at sea is better.” His infatuation with open water led him to become the first man to circumnavigate the world in a single expedition and, nearly five centuries on, human fascination with the ocean still endures. There’s nothing quite like the feeling of taking to the sea. To be able to travel without constructs and barriers of land or roads. The wide-open ocean is one of the most ethereal places to be, filled with islands and coves untouched by most travellers. For time immemorial, the world’s most salubrious souls have sought solace and pleasure from the seas. Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, holidayed on *Royal Yacht Britannia* and Prince Ranier of Monaco and Princess Grace sailed on *MV Grace*. The latter was a gift from Aristotle Onassis, himself the owner of 1960s celebrity hangout, *Christina O*.

Today, a sailing holiday is the ideal antithesis to the modern world, offering the freedom to traverse multiple destinations

in one trip, and to dock in hard-to-reach coves far from crowds. Thanks to aquatic entrepreneurs, it’s also now easier to rent a sailing boat or yacht than ever before, with sites like Borrow a Boat and Samboat – dubbed the “Airbnbs of boating” – offering the chance to hire skippers and crew, or, for those with experience, the chance to do it uncrewed. There are also small-ship luxury cruises across the world, from the likes of Unforgettable Travel, operating in the Adriatic and Aegean – because some destinations can only be properly explored by sea.

INDEPENDENT ADVENTURE

For centuries, private yachts and sleek sailing boats were the preserve of a privileged few. But thanks to a new wave of online platforms, enjoying a holiday on the water has never been simpler. Borrow A Boat offers would-be-sailers the chance to rent one of over 35,000 vessels. Launched in 2016 by Matt Ovenden, a serial entrepreneur with a love for sailing, the company now has boat rentals and yacht charters in over 65 countries. Between

Borrow A Boat and its luxe spin-off service Borrow a Boat Plus, it’s a delightfully uncomplicated system, giving access to everything from catamarans and motorboats to sailboats and superyachts in dreamy destinations like the Mediterranean and Caribbean. Customers can either crew it themselves or opt for a personal skipper, just a handful of the filters presented upon booking. Sailing boats start from AED 5,000 a week, but if you dole out AED 50,000, you’ll find yourself cruising on a sleek motor yacht.

The platform is popular in the Middle East, with Turkey and Egypt seeing a surge in summer bookings – what better way to avoid the masses than at sea? Guests can enjoy diving holidays in the Red Sea, their vessels serving as departure points for dives into the sun-dappled deep blue, or sailing the iconic Blue Voyage along the Turkish Riviera. For that trip, opt for a traditional gulet, the three-masted sailing vessel born in the Turquoise Coast. No longer dependant on the winds, modern gulets are diesel-powered and boast air-conditioning and plush modern cabins. →



## GUESTS CAN BOOK ONE-WEEK SAILINGS FROM ATHENS TO THE SARONIC ISLANDS, HOME TO CAR-FREE HYDRA

Samboat offers a similar user-friendly experience, with a global fleet of 40,000 stylish boats, including catamarans and yachts. Much like Borrow A Boat, guests choose whether to rent with or without a skipper, and add-ons include food, water toys and an attentive crew. Many of Samboat's sailings take place in the warm waters of the Balearic Islands or the sun-bleached Greek archipelago by way of Athens' Attica peninsula. A 12-metre, three-cabin Bavaria 39 Fluid 1 Cruiser is one of many options, sleek and contoured with a billowing white sail. Guests can book one-week sailings from Athens to the Saronic islands, home to the car-free marble cobbles of Hydra, or the Cyclades, whose whitewashed villages and windmills are the archetypal emblem of the Greek islands.

It's no surprise that Greece is a popular destination for sailing, with around 6,000 islands in its ancient landscapes. Founded by Ileana von Hirsch and Evi Aidonopoulou, Five Star Greece offers the perfect mix of land and sea holidays, pairing luxury sailing yachts with impossibly fabulous villas. Guests enjoy being rooted in historic

mansions, before hopping aboard their tailored vessel for more intrepid exploration. Sailings can span a whole summer, with the Five Star Greece team curating the perfect itinerary. In the Cyclades, days include morning swims on the uninhabited island of Poliegos on the way to Milos and Kimolos, and exploring the dramatic spires of volcanic land and echoey sea caves. There's plenty of time factored in ashore, too, with stops at Milos' Venetian Castle, archaeological museum and dinner in a seafront taverna.

### SMALL-SHIP SAILINGS

While the freedom of a private rental delights keen thalassophiles, to sailing novices, it can seem daunting. But dozens of luxury travel companies offer small-ship, fully-crewed and inclusive sailings, a superb stepping stone into holidays on water. Here, a small number of cabins are rented out to various parties, and food, beverages, crew, mooring and mapping are all in the hands of the operator.

On Croatia's island-speckled Dalmatian Coast, Unforgettable Croatia operates a series of luxury small-ship cruises, some

vessels with only 19 cabins on board. Ships trail the coastline, the terracotta-hued walled city of Dubrovnik, ancient city of Split and lush islands like Korčula, home to thick forests, vineyards and limpid Adriatic waters. A number of seven-day itineraries sail between Dubrovnik and Split or the once-grand resort town of Opatija, its heyday in the early 19th century leaving behind fading Hapsburg villas. Guests enjoy a luxurious en-suite cabin, inclusive dining and guided shore excursions like local grape and oyster tastings. Part of the Unforgettable Travel Group, the brand also offers private charters on boats in both Greece and Croatia.

While the Mediterranean is a perennial favourite for those in search of lazy, hazy sea days, the enigmatic coastlines of Asia are just as enticing to explore. Surrounded by the jade-green waters of the South China Sea, many of Thailand's 1,430 islands are home to empty stretches of pristine sands. One outfit crafting small-ship cruising experiences slicing through these peaceful waters is G Adventures, a luxury cruise line specialising in adventurous yet refined yachting holidays. Travellers can board the line's 25-metre, 16-passenger catamaran, with deluxe cabins showcasing views onto the sea as passengers embark on four-day jaunts between Phuket and Ko Phi Phi. On board, a cook serves up fresh, aromatic Thai dishes, and informal cooking classes in the ship's galley are a common occurrence.

A life on water like that of Sir Francis Drake may be unattainable, but a seafaring holiday certainly is easy enough to pursue. Whether it's a search for adventure and freedom, a desire for peaceful luxury or a need to disconnect from the world, a sailing holiday can give you it all, right now. 🌊

### HOW TO BOOK

Modern-day chartering platforms have made booking a sailing holiday incredibly fuss-free. Along with **Borrow a Boat** and **Samboat**, try platforms like **The Yacht Week**, US-based **Boatsetter**, **Get my Boat**, **BoatBound** and Parisian **Click&Boat**. Rentals can cost anywhere from AED 150 a day to AED 150,000, most with insurance and all with rigorous safety procedures.

Those who prefer to leave the experts to it can rest assured when booking a sailing trip through the dozens of luxury small-ship companies that operate across the world. Top operators include **Variety Cruises**, **Unforgettable Travel** and **The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection**.