

# A blonde's thoughts on cruising

Katja Giannini



# **A blonde's thoughts on cruising**

My view on the cruising lifestyle

*Katja Giannini*

# Introduction

I am a (blond) Danish women, 54 years old cruising *Faidapiu*, a Schionning catamaran, together with my Italian husband. Twenty years ago we cruised *Faidate*, a homebuilt Van de Stadt 47, for a two years sabbatical. That was with three young kids now it's just the two of us with no real end date. I always try to engage with fellow cruisers and discuss our lifestyle, it interests me. And while everybody does it differently, there are many common traits. Here in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, with many different types of music cumulating in the cockpit, I try to put my insights on paper.

There are striking differences between cruising as young parents on a sabbatical at the beginning of the century, to empty nesters twenty years later. But I tend to believe that the biggest change isn't us (or the boat) but technology and the changes it brought to society.

When we left on *Faidate* in 2002 all boats were equipped with GPS and while we had a plastic sextant on board this was not to be used for real. For emergency we packed two spare GPSs. Our older sailing friends couldn't believe that we would set out without any knowledge of astronavigation. Nor could they believe how easy conquering the seas apparently had become. Even sailors like us with zero cruising experience, could set sail and cross an ocean. At the beginning of the century the 'cruising family sabbatical' emerged, a new type of cruisers.



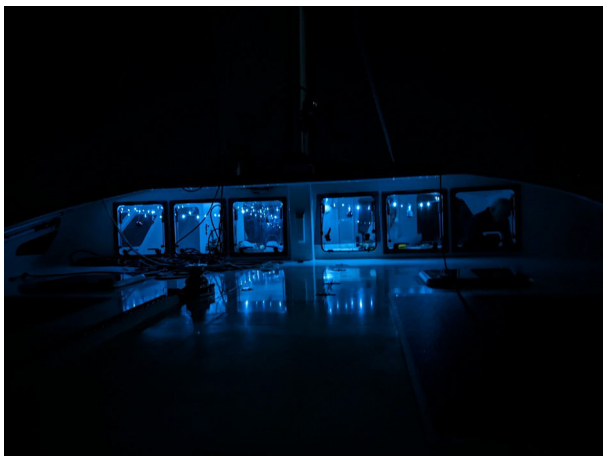
Twenty years later it is the internet that has changed the cruiser's world. I lost count of the times young cruisers told me that they had not idea that you could actually live on a boat. Before YouTube only people like us having grown up in sailing communities and reading cruising stories realised that boat life exists. It's only in the last ten years or so that the fact that you can live onboard a sailing boat and drop your anchor anywhere in the world, has become mainstream knowledge. The realisation by the general public that boat life is possible brought with it a new type of cruiser: the digital nomad. They – and we as well! – live in the digital online world, remarkable alike the life we led on land. We keep virtual contact with our friends at home and we even interact with our fellow cruisers virtually through apps like Navily and Noforeignland. The 'good old times' where you would set out in your dinghy as soon as you arrived in a new anchorage and 'inspect' the neighbours is over. It's like all boats do home schooling even those without kids because everyone is inside 'working' meaning navigating the virtual world. There isn't even interaction in the main ports of departure for an ocean crossing, we seemingly prefer to interpret the weather forecasts by ourselves and rely on our own route planner. If we need any local information we check the apps.

So the cruising community changes at regular intervals but it remains a group of curious creatures preferring change to stability. In which nationality, upbringing, career and social standing appear irrelevant and even wealth is hardly a discriminating element. The main distinction within the group, besides 'kids vs no-kids', is that between sexes, at least that's how it feels to me. Hence the title that is inspired by the book written by Denmark's first female PM: *Blondinens betragtinger*.

Generally conversations with fellow cruisers seem to follow a script. Men brag about the sailing performance of their boats and the heavy weather they encountered while women quietly admit that they do not like sailing; men show off new gadgets while women exchange thoughts on their life on board; men discuss routes, harbours and anchorages, women talk about provisioning. Since almost all the cruising lives start with the husband getting this ‘great idea’ his ideas tend to become the red thread of the couple’s cruising life. I would like (potential) cruising wives to take responsibility, be inspiring and come up with their own ideas even if blond. Perhaps my thoughts can help. I categorised them in 13 chapters, some shorter some longer and would be happy to engage with you, so please send your comments to [faidapiu@gmail.com](mailto:faidapiu@gmail.com)

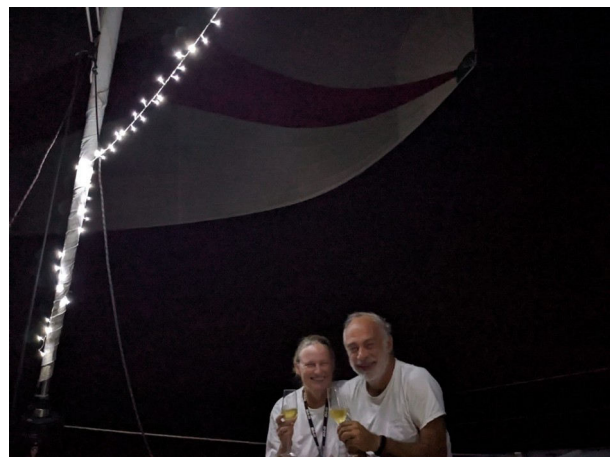
It being December putting my thoughts on paper has the added advantage of becoming a Christmas present to my parents back in cold old Denmark. They started cruising with *Dino* in 1997 and changed to (our) *Faidate* in 2004 which they cruised till 2022 before retiring from cruising life.

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Christmas & New Year’s Eve 2023 on *Faidapiu* in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean

# How does cruising feel?

A day in your cruising life is so unlike your day on land that it takes time, probably many months, to get used to. By which time all days are equal. It doesn't matter whether it is Monday or Saturday, it doesn't matter what the anchorage or town is called, it all feels the same. A fellow Dutch cruiser called the small bounty island we anchored in front of 'cow Berta' because they all feel identical. You live by the wind and weather, your only life goal is the next destination and your social life is restricted to the fellow cruisers. It is when you get visits from home that your new reality becomes evident. And it is when you get the message that someone got a child or has died that you wished that you were still part of the old world. The nearness to family and friends, that as a landlubber you took for granted, is cruising life's biggest flaw.



Slowly your world changes, the freedom oddly enough making it smaller. You have no colleagues any longer, your friends and family with whom you correspond live in another reality, news, fashion and politics no longer interests you. Your world becomes small: it circles the weather and cohabitation with your spouse. Time takes on a completely new meaning. And let's face it if there is only the two of you on board, you will be bored more often than you thought possible. Since there is no schedule planning your life, you just sit around waiting for the next challenge to drop on you. Whether it is a change of weather, something that breaks or one of you falling ill. It is the reason for which we are blogging, painting, filming or writing; it gives us something 'useful' to do. It is the reason why we choose anchorages not based on their beauty but on what we can explore on land or meet fellow cruisers.



It probably takes about six months before you feel at one with your cruising life, or not. It takes time to get to know the boat and its systems, to experience how you want to sail her and how manoeuvres are best done. It takes time to learn how to live together and how, for example, to provision the boat and get the chores done. It takes time to destress from your land life, but also not to become stressed about not actually doing anything. Your diary is completely empty, in fact you don't even have one anymore. As our daughter correctly commented: 'You do not contribute to society, any longer.' I was rather pleased for the added words 'any longer'. For months it can feel like being in a free fall, feeling lost and useless, but we adapt. Adaptation takes time, that is why it is a good idea not to have a fixed goal, like 'I am going to sail around the world in a couple of years'. Chances are it will create the stress that you were actually trying to avoid. Take your time, let the cruising life style embrace you.

Time you have plenty of so you just have to find the patience for the cruising lifestyle to grow on you. Once you have decimated your clothing cupboard, thrown away all the high heels (the home dress code never really adapted to the dinghy ride) and cook with local ingredients, you are acclimatizing and can pat yourself on the back.



There is of course also the possibility that you will not like it: that you suffer seasickness, fear the wind and waves, do not like to sail, suffer not to work, find it difficult to spend all the time together with your partner, or you may miss your sports activities, be 'homesick', or simply find travelling disappointing. Or you might subside in problems. As our Dutch cruising friend Hugo suggested, every age group entails its own problems. Cruisers aged 20-30 have money stress, cruisers aged 40-50 have family stress and cruisers aged 60-70 have health stress. Even if you do not actually dislike it you do occasionally wonder what the purpose is, in particular when you find yourself in a difficult situation, be it seasickness, a family problem at home, a broken essential equipment or simply boredom. There are a lot of men out there trying to convince their partners that a circumnavigation on a sailing boat is paradise. Well, if I should define cruising life with a single phrase it would be something like 'uncomfortable slow travel as a siamese twin solving ever changing challenges in less than ideal circumstances'. Does that sound like paradise to you?

Sailing is uncomfortable, boats are slower than the very first cars and living on a yacht is really nothing like living in a house, whatever your partner tells you. You have no colleagues, water and electricity doesn't come out of the wall and you are far away from friends and family. Yet it is also the magical world of freedom, of living with the nature, in which time takes on another meaning, where obligations hardly exist and you encounter things you never dreamt of and forge extraordinary friendships with fellow cruisers. So dear husbands, don't try to convince us it's just like home, instead try to convey a new way of living.



Another tip for the males out there trying to convince their wives to go cruising. Do the intelligent thing: ask your wives to plan the trip, chances are that once she realises all the interesting places she can visit, she will be the one impatient to leave. That's what my father did with my anti-sailor mother and once she planned a trip across the Mediterranean arriving in Istanbul, she couldn't wait to get onboard and set sail.

It was swimming in the mirror crystal blue water an early October morning in an almost empty anchorage in the Mediterranean that I realised that you have to choose this life, it doesn't arrive out of the blue. As everything it has good and bad moments but unlike most things, cruising life has exceptional moments. The emotions of an Ara landing on deck at sunrise or dolphins swimming at the bow. The curiosity you feel when meeting new cruisers or stepping onto foreign soil. The feeling of achievement after a passage. Moments that only cruising life can give you, I think.



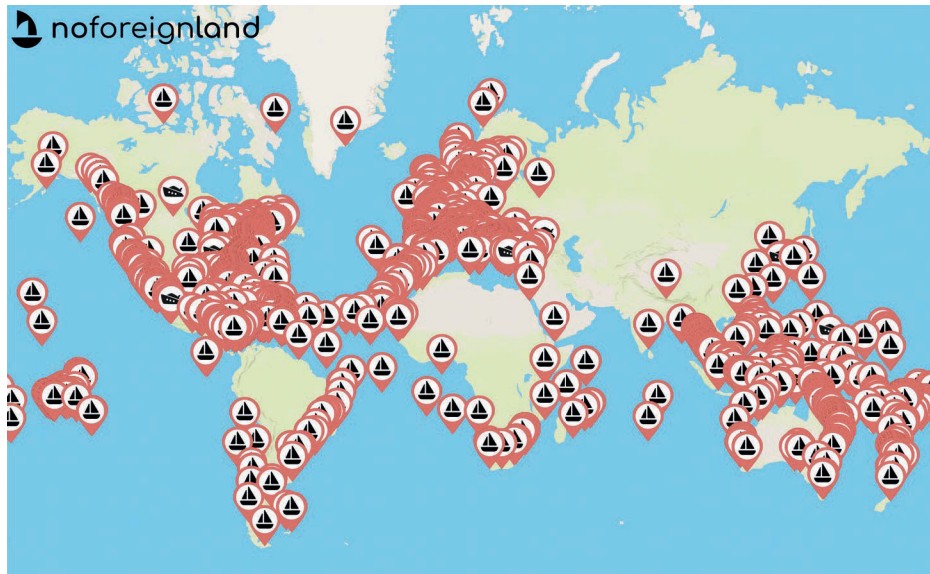
There is another moment that is unique to cruising life: finding yourself sailing in the middle of the night. Subjected to the rhythm of the boat, with only the stars and moon to see and the sea to hear. You feel lost in the darkness. The boat becomes the centre of your world and you will feel like its subject. Everything else is of secondary importance, you are in a bubble at servitude of the vessel and at the mercy of the wind and waves. Fabio and I have never fought on a night passage, that first happens when we arrived and after a good nights sleep!



On a passage times takes on another dimension as all the days are alike. You can't remember whether it was yesterday or two days ago that you saw the dolphins. You have no idea what day in the week it is before you check the weather forecast. Your ordinary 24h rhythm is lost as I laughingly realised entering a restaurant in Spain at 6PM after a three days sail. Spaniards dine notoriously late so that's like ordering a cappuccino in Italy after midday, it is simply not done. Yet I hadn't realised the *faux pas* before the waiter looked at his watch, my mind was still on the sea.

# Why go cruising?

Whereas in the past cruising was something only sailors did, today it has become just another way of travelling the world. YouTube depicts that one can live on a sailboat and even travel the world while earning an income. I haven't found an updated version of Jimmy Cornell's [survey](#) from 2010 where the number of cruisers were estimated to be 10.000. My hunch is that this has easily doubled, given the number of boats sold, the pensionable age of the baby boomers (like Fabio) as well as the post-Covid era allowing for different lifestyles.



Surely everyone cruises differently but I like to distinguish four main cruising lifestyles: the 'sabbatical', the 'sell up and sail', the 'part timer' and the 'voyager'.

## ***The Sabbatical***

The sabbatical cruisers will have a plan for the months or years that their cruise should take. These kind of cruisers – like we were on *Faidate* in 2002/4 – do not wonder about their lifestyle. It is what they planned for years, it's a goal they set out to achieve, the voyage has a purpose. They have a general plan for the whole trip having investigated which way to sail given the prevailing winds and the destinations they want to see. It can be a one-time sabbatical during the working life, with or without children, or it could be a try-out sabbatical wanting to test this way of life. In either case, since time is limited so are the destinations. It is difficult to resist the urge to 'get most out of your sabbatical' and overestimate your cruising pace but you should try. You don't need a lot of imagination to see all the possible retarders: the weather, an engine problem, a blown sail, a lost anchor, a flue or food poisoning, an electrical problem. Things that delay you for weeks without you being able to do anything about it. So if you set out as a 'sabbatical' plan some spare months.

## ***The Sell up and Sail***

The 'sell up and sail' cruisers have sold everything, bought a boat and left. There is no plan other than the next destination. They have permanently exchanged lifestyles and are the most free of us all: they have no constraints neither in time nor in destination. These are the cruisers you find in off the beaten track destinations and it is unlikely that you will find complicate electronics or air-



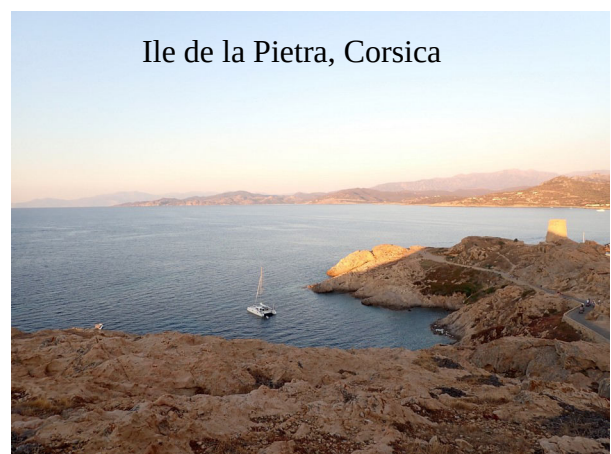
conditioning on these boats. While time isn't an issue, money management often is, so their core principle is self-reliance. Popular wintering marinas are full with these cruisers who create liveaboard communities with countless of different nationalities exchanging experiences, maintaining their boats, planning their next season and forging everlasting friendships. This traditional group explores the wonders of the blue world with freedom – both in time and space - being the magic word.

### ***The Part timer***

The third group, the 'part timers', is preferred by grandmothers and persons like me who love the cruising lifestyle but is unwilling to give up the home base. Fabio is probably a 'sell up and sail' guy but unfortunately for him he is married. So on *Faidapiu* we return home at regular intervals, the length of those intervals depending on where we are. Our reason it to see family and friends (and for me: have some alone time!), others return for seasonal jobs or sports, like skiing. The cruising of 'part timers' is restricted destination wise by the next place where the boat can be left safely for several months. I like my cruising life but it is this intermittent cruising that does it for me as I feel like going from one holiday to the next. It's funny how things I didn't appreciate before feel great: the space in a house, a car ride to a known supermarket, a night out with friends, family visits, a game of tennis and absolute zero worries about the weather. It all feels heavenly after a season of cruising. For some 'part timers' their boat becomes their summerhouse and basically stays put. For elderly sailors – who may have cruised extensively – spending the off season on board in one of their favourite areas, it the way to live.

### ***The Voyager***

Finally a fourth group should be distinguished, the 'voyagers'. YouTube channels have made an ever growing number of people realise that voyaging can be done by boat. Time and destination is not an issue for this group as much as money is. That is why the boats are relatively small and simple. While the other groups consists of sailors, so people who have sailed and decided to live on their boats, this group is generally new to sailing. Sailing sometimes seems a necessary evil and if they could be teletransported with their home to the next destination some of them probably would. They have purchased a boat, learned to sail and travel while working. Twenty years ago we didn't meet a single person living full time on a boat while working other than in the chartering business. Today we meet cruisers who have made cruising their work – as YouTubers – and cruisers whose work doesn't require them to be physically present, they just need Starlink.





Canary Islands 2002: *Faidate & Dino* with their crew

The perfect boat is the one  
you have



Madeira Islands 2023: Cruisers from Denmark

# The perfect boat?

The cruising boat market changed remarkably from when we set out in the beginning of the millennium to now. Twenty years ago the 'average' couple sailed a monohull of 40 feet and the few multihulls around were performance oriented. Now a 40 foot monohull is usually the smallest boat in an anchorage while multihull manufacturers have hugely increased their comfort level and consequently their market share. Catamarans made cruising far more accessible as heeling, the necessary evil of monohulls, is not something that is easy to get accustomed to let alone accept if you didn't start out as a sailor. Also, catamarans have more 'WAF', the *Wife Acceptance Factor*. The idea apparently being that men are interested in technicalities and sailing performance whereas females require other things.

Your cruising boat shouldn't be about sailing stats (for the males) nor WAF (for the females) but about your cruising plans. And about what makes you smile since we do get emotional about boats. Which brings me to the misconception that money equals a better cruiser. Just look at the winners of the 'best blue water cruiser' these are boats far bigger (and costly) than those of the cruising community. The boat is merely the vessel for your adventures, just like a house is merely the place you live. Yes you wish you had a great home but it isn't detrimental for a great life and no such a thing exists as the perfect house. So why do we look for 'the best cruiser'? We have seen too many couples working years towards that 'objectively best cruiser' just to abandon cruising life within the first six months. Like a German family setting out with all the possible water hose adaptors for an around the world cruise to return home before they even crossed the North Sea. Cruising is an autonomous life on the move that you really cannot anticipate. Which boat sails you from one destination to another is almost irrelevant. Keeping this in mind when walking through boat shows is of course impossible, I once vetoed a catamaran for not having drawers for my underwear and have been hearing that ever since.

If you have a boat already, you should seriously consider setting off in it. By setting off in the boat you have you can try the lifestyle and you will, as many before you, adapt to the boat. That is what we did twenty years ago when setting off for a sabbatical with three small kids in *Faidate* our Van de Stadt 47, a performance oriented monohull. A boat thereafter used by my parents for cruising the Caribbean and Mediterranean during 18 years although they hardly manage to hoist its 70m<sup>2</sup> mainsail in absence of electrical winches. We all loved it though and it gave us all the adventures we dreamt of, and more. This is what always happens, I have yet to meet a cruiser who isn't in love with their boat. The cruising lifestyle depends on you, not the boat, you will adapt!

If you don't have a boat, try to visit and possibly sail as many as possible. Boats are like houses: you enter and feel right away whether this is somewhere you could actually live, or not. So trust that feeling. It was when we sailed an Atlantic 47 (Chris White) that we learned that catamarans can sail faster and more comfortable than monohulls. So for our retirement cruise we wanted a catamaran that could sail like that. Visiting basically all the brands and sizes the concept got more detailed as we realised that we wanted the inside volume of a 40 footer with 50 feet of waterline. Like that it felt like a sailing boat for two and not an apartment for four. We sailed a Nautitec 40 and would have liked to add hull length but we got lost in the Nautitec 46. Once we visited a 17m Schionning and whilst I was standing aft and Fabio at the bow we decided quite separate from each other that this was frightening big. We would not sail a Lagoon but love the vertical windows and the kitchen on saloon level that old fashion performance cats don't have.

The Outremer 45 was the one boycotted due to the absence of drawers in the bedroom. It was when we saw the drawing of the Schionning Arrow 1500 that we knew that this was what we had been searching for, the lines, the volume and the waterline length felt exactly right.

What we didn't do was what I advocate here namely to be rational not in the sense of the 'objectively best cruiser' but in finding a boat that matches your cruising plans both as far as type of cruising lifestyle (see the previous chapter) and type of destination is concerned. Think about your plans first and then seek the boat that fits second. It is similar to buying a house: you don't look at homes before you decide to live in the city or on the country side. Us Scandinavians consider 'our' boats, like a Hallberg Rassy, the absolute best cruiser. But its conservative rig and absence of ventilation makes it objectively unsuitable for sailing in the warm and windless Mediterranean.

Ask yourself where and how you intend to cruise. Do you plan to cross oceans, take a sabbatical with kids in warm places, explore Greenland, combine work and cruising, spend part of the year in the Mediterranean or will you have (paying) guests on board? If you want to be a 'part time' cruiser, chances are you will haul-out twice a year making a smaller production monohull a wise choice. If you plan a sabbatical with kids and friends in the tropics, it sounds like something for a multihull with lots of beds and payload. If you dream to visit Patagonia and round Cape Horn, a tough monohull with a good heating system is the way to go. If you want to cruise the European channels, fly to Europe, purchase a suitable motor vessel, fulfil that part of your cruising dream and then change to a sailboat for the next step. If you want to build *the* boat for your cruise, don't fool yourself; if you want to build a boat then go for it (we did) but not as a step towards a new lifestyle since it takes away too much time that could be used for cruising instead. To actually start the cruising lifestyle is just like reefing the mainsail, do it the first time you think about it to make sure you are on time. I think there is only one group of potential cruisers who never leave port: those who seek the perfect cruiser.

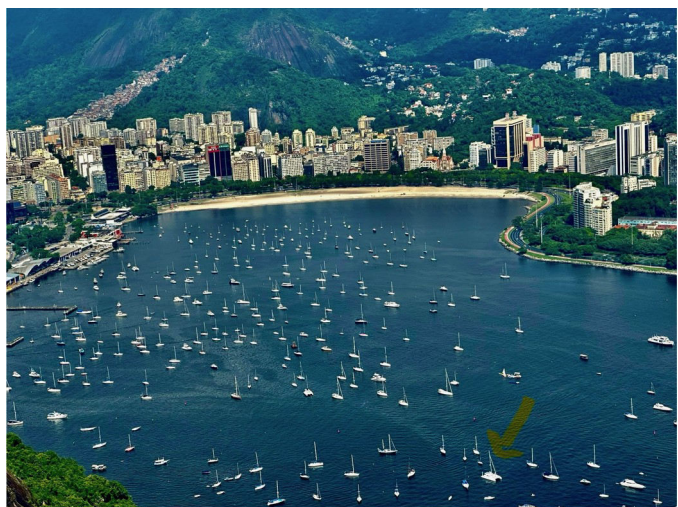
A standard guideline in your thought process of finding the right boat is the triangle 'money', 'comfort' and 'performance'. The idea being that you either have all three (finding yourself in the centre of the triangle) or only one (at one of the three points) or two (on one of the three sides). The three parameters are relative to you, to your way of cruising and to your envisaged destinations. This might seem odd, in particular since the triangle is often used to objectify your boat choice, but there is nothing objective about 'money', 'comfort' or 'performance'. They all depend on your world, your experience and your expectation. Our comfort doesn't increase for example with diving equipment, AC or a dinghy with centre console so these elements - for others paramount - do not form part of the 'comfort' point in our triangle. As also 'money' and 'performance' is something personal, the centre of your triangle will be quite different from everybody else's.

Once your cruising plans have crystallized and you know what type of boat you are looking for, is it time for boat shows, a bit like choosing your brand of car. There you will find out what makes you smile: nice cabins and bathrooms, an office corner, a proper kitchen, water toys, luxurious finish, sailing performance, sea kindness? Keep your cruising ideas in mind while you look at all these accessories: if you intend to cruise for a few years, why spend money on durable sails or stainless-steel anchor chain, if you are not working why mirror your home office, if you plan to visit harbours why complicate your life with a watermaker, or, if you want to go self-sufficient is there sufficient electricity for the huge freezer? Where is the place to store all the great lounge pillows at night when the dew sets in, where is your dream dinghy going to sit and how is the sun protection or don't you need that giving your cruising plans?

Once you know where and how you want to cruise and what makes you smile, it is time for the decision between new or old. It might be suggested to you that with a new purchase when the boat arrives (years after the order) you can take off. In reality however during the first months (and hopefully not a full year) you will see more of the shipyard technicians than you would like. Boats are complicated machines and even huge production sites do not manage to deliver a boat without tens and tens of points on the punch list. Something was forgotten, something was installed wrongly, something was designed wrongly and something didn't light up when first switched on. Pre-owned boats are of course just as time consuming although the type of work differs, it will be (unknown) repairs and personal upgrades, which besides time require money. You should calculate this into your plans as in either case it will easily be six months before you can start the next preparation namely outfitting for your cruising lifestyle. An obvious advantage of buying new is that once your months of tweaking are over you will be on a honeymoon for the next several years. Electronics should last at least five, rigging at least ten, engines fifteen years. That explains why 'sabbatical' cruisers often purchase as close to new as possible and then resell their cruiser when they leave the blue. This brings me to another thought namely being part of an ocean rally as a (partial) way to cruise. Rallies are sailing competitions: they leave a specific port at a specific time with a competitive element. This means that weather conditions will not be perfect and even if you tell yourself that you do not care about the competitive element it is very natural to push the boat. A small warning: production boats are not outfitted for ocean racing, so if that is your plan don't be surprised by the repair bill upon arrival.

I think my main point is that there is no right or wrong choice for your cruising boat. There are only boats more suited for your cruising plans and some of those make you smile. We both develop a huge grin when the boat sails well yet we returned from our sabbatical cruise with a longing for the living quality on a catamaran. So the new boat was going to be a performance cruising catamaran. Fabio has a dislike for old things (hopefully this does not include his wife) so second hand was not an option. With the boat we ended up with we will not be cruising Patagonia and I must admit it was a shocking realization for me that Cape Horn was out of the picture. It was something I really wanted to do, imagine the picture of the boat with a glacier as background! I kind of suspect that Fabio knowing that our catamaran was not built for it choose not to enlighten me due to his fear of the cold. Since our boat also needed to fit a budget she is rather spartan with a limited load carrying capacity and simple electronics. In our decision making triangle we are perfectly centred but in yours we might very well be more towards the performance/money line.

Cruising is a life full of compromises and the boat is the very first one of those. Luckily the success of your cruising life depends on your adaptability to the lifestyle and not on the actual vessel. Although your boat's name does become your surname! Of all the people we have met I don't think we now the 'real' surname of anyone.



Anchorage Rio de Janeiro, seen from Pão de Açúcar

# Monohull vs Multihull

Netherlands 1998



Germany 2019



*Faidate*



*Faidapiu*



Cuba 2004

Italy 2022

# Monohull or multihull?

While dreaming about your cruising destination and what type of boat might fit best to your type of cruising, you will automatically weigh a monohull versus a multihull. Let me start off by stating that I am only considering catamarans not trimarans which is of course technically wrong. The reason for this is simple, I haven't sailed a trimaran nor have I met trimaran cruisers.

Your boat can be in three different situations. When you live on it, it's either (1) sailing or (2) at anchor. When it is off season and/or you have to make repairs, it sits in a (3) harbour. In all three situations it differs whether your boat is a mono- or multihull.

## *Let's start with the sailing*

Both our cruisers are performance cruisers so we are biased in the sense that sailing is an important part of our cruising life (sometimes I think it is Fabio's only reason to cruise). Let me mark the differences that we have experienced.

If we compare the joy of sailing with a monohull or a multihull, I think there is no doubt that a monohull wins. The way it steers, the way it interacts with the waves, the fact that it heels, is all part of the genuine sailing experience. Yet since we are sailing with our homes it is not actually sailing experience that we are after but comfort on the move. The fact that the multihull doesn't heel nor roll, generally makes for a far more comfortable ride. I hate to admit it having sailed all my life in monohulls and never felt uncomfortable by the heeling, but after four years of catamaran sailing I cannot imagine to have an angled home. Honestly, horizontal sailing is the way it should be when you live onboard. Just the other day Fabio seriously suggested that we should find a monohull and go for a day sail because he has forgotten how it feels, how it sails and how it moves on the waves. The flat sailing of multihulls comes at a price of course and that is the banging of the waves on the hull. Which is why the waves (direction, height and period) has become our main routing parameter. It is far more tiring to sail in a catamaran with waves from across (or worse on the bow!) than in a heeled over monohull. Another price for the flat sailing catamaran is that a wind gust doesn't make it heel. On a monohull you put your sails according to the average wind and when a gusts comes you just lean over a little bit more automatically depowering the sails. This depowering doesn't occur on the catamaran as it doesn't lean over. In stead the forces on the sail stress the boat and in the worse case makes it capsize. A catamaran is not as sturdy as a monohull, the construction with a front beam, an aft beam and a mast in the middle, moves. Whereas the forces on a monohull are obvious and nothing should break or move by wind speed alone, this is not the case for a catamaran.

Sailing with a cruising boat means passages and that means that you will be sleeping on the move. It depends on the wind (and wave) angle which one is most comfortable. With the wind/waves from the bow quarter the monohull wins because when you sleep the heeling matters little. What disturbs you from falling asleep and wakes you up are jerky moments – a catamaran is really like a jumping cat as seen in the cartoons – the acceleration and deceleration and the sound of slamming waves. But with the wind/waves from the aft quarter a monohull will roll uncomfortably whereas a multihull will surf steadily down the waves making for much better sleep.

On the subject of sail handling, the multihull is the clear winner. Changing front sails is facilitated by the huge flat deck/trampoline and the space you will have to store the sails (in the front sail lockers or strapped to the trampoline). Also the absence of a spinnaker pole (you can fly a spi from the bows) is a huge benefit in short handed sailing.

### ***At anchor***

Once you reached your new destination, you dream of being on a catamaran. That is at least what we did and the very reason for why we set out on a catamaran on our current trip. When we cruised South America in 2004 there was only one catamaran in our group of boats. It was merely 35 feet but this was the place where we would all meet up as it was the only place we all fitted. Now that we are cruising one ourselves we also realise the other advantages, in particular that it usually doesn't roll in anchorages and can get further in due to the shallow draft. Also, the catamaran has excellent dinghy storage between the two hulls. Then, because of the extensive roof a catamaran can hold a very large amount of solar panels, ensuring that your time at anchor will not be disturbed by noises charging the batteries. In the charter world catamarans are becoming the standard because they have four bedrooms and a big living space. Cruisers might not appreciate the bedrooms (and bathrooms) of such cats but they do like to convert those into 'sheds' for all the toys. Perhaps the biggest advantage of the multihull isn't all these technicalities but the feeling that you are living in a penthouse instead of in a cave. When you go back to a monohull that is what you miss most: living on the level of the sea where you feel part of your surroundings also when you are cooking. Yet there is one advantage of the monohull over the catamaran at anchor and that's payload. Your monohull has no problem carrying tons of water, diesel and all the toys and food you can fit. Catamarans on the other hand have payload limitations, in fact the specifications of a catamaran states how much weight you should carry and this, you will find, is rather little. Obviously it won't sink if you carry more but it will (severely) affect the sailing abilities.

### ***Harbour/on land***

The last situation in which you and your boat find yourselves is in a harbour or on land during off season or repairs. If it were a contest there is no doubt that here the monohull is the absolute winner. Everywhere in the world you will find harbours and haul-out facilities for a monohull, yet for the catamaran there might well be far between. We assumed wrongly that the width wouldn't be a big problem since a normal crane would be able to lift us out just as it had also launched us. Until we tried a year after launch and failed due to the back swept mast, so now we are searching the world for wide travel-lift basins. Hopefully we will never find ourselves needing emergency repairs as that would be quite the headache. Since the catamaran occupies more space the harbour fees are between 50% and 100% higher than a monohull of the same length. Then, being a catamaran, it has more things to maintain, like the two engines and because weight is an issue it will have more expensive (and complex) options such as lithium iron batteries.

In conclusion, the cruising experience is quite different. In a multihull you live at deck level, sleep better at anchor and have more privacy with guests on board. A monohull is more robust, easier to harbour and a cheaper option if you opt for less living space. For example, a (Beneteau) Lagoon 420 is similar - in both costs and living space - to a (Beneteau) Oceanis 51 but you might be content with 5 feet less effectively making the monohull a cheaper option.



# Extras and today's problem?

It is just so typical: you arrive in an anchorage, scan it for liveaboards, drop by to be invited over and the very first thing the males discuss are their gadgets. If it was up to them the kitchen would be transformed to a work bench with cabinets for all the tools and spares.

Outfitting your cruiser is an art. It takes time, effort and money and is a compromise between the added value and the effort to keep it functioning. Years ago in the Canary Islands one couple choose not to benefit from the weather window for the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean because their big inverter was down. For them it was an essential equipment to run the bread maker since they didn't know how to bake bread in their gas oven. How easy it is to believe that everything on board is essential. There are very few things that are essential, many are merely very nice to have and others are objectively superfluous but somehow we cannot imagine life without. Like, for some, a bread maker. Since much of your life on board will be devoted to keeping the boat and its equipment running, you should have a serious look at that list of 'nice to have'. Ask yourself the question whether it really adds value to your cruising life and how that added value compares to the worry of the energy it consumes and future repairs it requires. We were lucky in the sense that we only had two boats and both of them were outfitted by us for cruising as a family. Usually a boat is purchased and you will have to adapt to the constructor's (and previous owner's) decisions which leads to a surplus of things since everyone seeks something different. A day cruiser/racer will have performance sails and complicated electronics, a charter lots of bathrooms and cabins, a holiday cruiser 'luxuries' not very compatible with extensive use or limited electricity capacity, and so on. I suppose it would be wise to strip everything down to the minimum that you think you require for your type of cruising and start from there.

Naturally you will outfit your boat with far more than you need, we all do this. It's similar to a house really, when you move you realise how much stuff you have and how little it is used. By dividing the outfitting into three separate lists you might have some clue where to cut: (1) essential equipment, (2) value outweighs worries and (3) the nice to have.

## ***List 1 – essential equipment***

The priority items on list 1, those you do not cruise without, are perhaps wrong to include in a chapter titled 'extra's'. But I do this so that list 2 and 3 makes sense. List 1 items primarily include autopilot, dinghy, anchor gear and sails. The latter, sails, is actually an item for all three lists: your working sails on list 1, a broad reach light wind sail and a heavy wind jib on list 2 and all the other sails that you would like to have, like a symmetrical spinnaker, a parasailor or an upwind code on list 3.



And then there was only  
one light wind sail  
left....



How many sails you carry depends as much on the finances and available storage space as your willingness to sail. It is not uncommon for the husband to outfit the boat with an extensive and expensive sail wardrobe that rarely sees the light of day because the wife doesn't actually like sailing.

If you are just the two of you, you cannot cruise without a working autopilot. So this means that you will need an installation that can steer your boat for days on end. It is one of those things that just must work so make sure you have the best possible installation, check for wear and tear and think about backups. Windpilots are excellent since they are mechanical units that you can repair and they don't consume electricity. On *Faidate* we attached a tiller autopilot to it so that it would also steer when motoring. Windpilots unfortunately do not work on catamarans, so there you will need another backup. Some install fully dual systems, others carry loads of spares but most have some kind of secondary temporary system, like us. We can attach a tiller pilot to one of the tillers on *Faidapiu* enabling us to steer the catamaran on a compass course should our main autopilot pack up.



A removable tiller pilot installed on one of *Faidapiu's* tillers as backup.

The second essential item is your anchor gear. One of the major differences between sailing (by landlubbers) and cruising is that your boat isn't moored in a harbour. Cruisers basically only stay in harbours during the off-season, for land-tourism or when something needs to be repaired. Life at anchor is our natural habitat. You can swim, you swing freely allowing natural ventilation and there is no noise (I am writing this in the harbour of Salvador de Bahia that hosts a Samba event). Your anchor gear must be reliable and geared so as to make the anchoring procedure as smooth as possible. While anchors exist forever they have revolutionised in the last 50 years (starting from Danforth to Delta to Bruce to Rocna) and it probably pays to get the latest invention. But don't focus on the anchor itself, think about the whole system, how and who will deploy it and all the things that can go wrong or get entangled.

The third primary outfitting item is your car, otherwise put: the dinghy. Cruises have many different ideas about 'the best' dinghy and there is no right or wrong. But before falling in love with one, keep in mind that you will need to put your dinghy on board when sailing and at night (unless you are in a particularly safe part of the world). So make sure that you look at the whole package. We launched *Faidapiu* with an electrical outboard as we enjoyed the idea of a petrol-free boat. Yet when it didn't start up at the beginning of the second season, it took 3 months to get it repaired by which time we had of course left the country so needed to organise shipping to a harbour we were sure to pass. Since we don't consider cruising without an outboard we purchased another one, this time petrol. We purchased a never used 15hp secondhand because it was too heavy for the owner's tackle system when sliding the dinghy inside the transom of his ICE 54. After two years of use and countless repairs, (apparently Brazilian petrol isn't liked by Italian outboards) it's good we have the electrical one for backup. With the dinghy being your car you will still need a bike. With this I mean a paddle board or a canoe, something that can take you ashore or to a fellow cruiser. You don't want to depend on your partner's plans at all times of every day, so make sure you have a second mean of

transportation. When we sailed with three small kids we opted for a small second dinghy that they could row and it also enabled Fabio to go spearfishing with the master dinghy whenever he felt like it.

Besides the autopilot, anchor and dinghy, there is some basic navigation and safety equipment you would not leave without. There is no necessity for the complete dual steering setup that you find on boatshows. In fact many cruisers prefer navigating on tablets (Navionics) and computers (OpenCPN) and do not even use the built-in chartplotters. Safety equipment is dealt with in the next chapter but here I would like to point out that landlubbers are generally far more scared about your passage than yourself. So to give them peace of mind and make sure that they can track you but also tell them not to worry if they hear nothing, after all you rely on electronics in the middle of the sea.



Some tools and spares also deserve to be on list 1. I think Fabio carries every kind of diagnostic tool for our onboard ‘electricity grid’ as well as every type of connector.

In addition we carry consumables such as anodes, alternator belts and filters that aren’t always easily purchased. But we don’t carry many ‘real’ spares as we are trying to keep *Faidapiu* light, quite different from *Faidate* where we never gave weight a thought and carried spare alternators, deck equipment and a load of electrical tools to do any kind of boat work.

Finally there is the kitchen! There is a lot of discussion amongst cruisers about fridges and freezers, mainly because they are likely to be your main electricity consumers. I find that there is a reverse relationship between experience and freezers: long time cruisers are much less likely to have freezers than newbies. Some would put wine glasses or an ice maker on list 1. Just remember, even with the longest possible list, a cruising boat will never be a house. Living on the move and off-grid is really not like at home.

### ***List 2 - value outweighs worries***



Installing a watermaker on *Faidapiu*

I have met few cruisers without a watermaker, making this an item on list number 2 (not essential but very nice and feasible to have). Everyone agrees that it is a complex equipment that requires daily care and consumes your hard generated electricity, but it really makes your cruising life so much easier when you don’t need to worry about getting water. Of course if you plan to cruise between harbours, it isn’t needed.

So while you need a watermaker unless you plan to regularly visit harbours, for the air conditioning it's just the opposite. If you are in harbours in warm climates it should be on list 2. Sleeping in the tropics without wind flowing through the boat like it does when at anchor, is close to impossible. If you are predominantly at anchor – as all the cruisers we know - it shouldn't be on a list at all since you will become very unpopular in an anchorage if you keep your generator running to power it. Another thing for list 2 is stainless steel anchor chain and/or fresh water rinse. Galvanized steel rusts and the mud that sticks to it stinks. Also think about the toilet: some upgrade of the standard off the shelf marine toilet is worth investigating. Getting it electrical is by now standard as it reminds us of our landlubber life. A recent item that made it to list 2 is Starlink. While none of us dare to consider it essential, we all carry it! Something we put on list 2 on *Faidapiu* and we didn't on *Faidate* are electrical winches. The reason is obvious: we are getting older, well Fabio is and he does the winching :-)

### ***List 3 - the nice to have***

The 'nice to have' stuff is probably endless, so let me mark some standard items.

The first one being a washing machine, not that we use much cloths but bed sheets and towels are big items. It makes sense, both from an economical and liveable point of view. In a year we spent more than the purchase price of a machine in launderettes. Of course running it from board means you need water, energy and space. On the plus side, you can wash whenever you want (or have the water/energy required) and do not need to carry loads of washing through unknown towns. I have yet to meet a cruising wife who doesn't dream of it, if she doesn't have one already.



In search of a launderette

Other items on list 3 are a sewing machine, bikes and/or electrical scooters, a dishwasher and 'male gadgets' like a wet-dry vacuum and a high pressure washer. Of course list 3 also includes all your water toys, diving and fishing gear and drones. You do not need this, it is just for fun.

### ***Break-in cruise***

When you are outfitting your boat – be it is new or second hand – you will need to plan a rather extensive break-in cruise. Things break, things don't work as intended, things need to be added, things need to be checked. Both our cruisers were built to our specifications, we choose every single item on board and everything was bought new. Yet on *Faidate's* maiden trip (crossing the North Sea in a force 6) the lines of the kicking strap snapped. And the first time we anchored the weld of the special oversized shackle broke so we lost the anchor the very first time it ever touched water. On *Faidapiu* we lost count of the items reshipped by the (what we believe top) manufacturers in the first two years of warranty but it surely included two hatches, the autopilot drive, a solar panel, the watermaker, the electrical outboard and the VHF. This in addition to construction problems like engine coupling screws too short, leaking windows and a jib that needed to be recut. It is all part of the start of cruising life but it would be a shame not to include several months in your planning to thoroughly test everything and get it working before you cast off for destinations where marine shops and postal services are not what you are used to.

## Today's problem

Our cruise on *Faidate* twenty years ago predated Starlink and I actually think that this is as big a difference to cruising as kids are. The possibility of connectivity is identified as 'today's problem'. After all what is the difference between watching America's Cup from your couch at home or in a secluded anchorage? It is this connectivity that together with the post-Covid allowed a new type of cruiser. Those who continue their lives as if they didn't live on a boat. When you set out you will have to ask yourself what you seek and if you choose to let go of your home lifestyle you shouldn't equip your boat with Starlink. Yet however good your intentions, chances are you are going with the flow, after all once the GPS arrived we left the sextant at home, paper charts got exchanged for chartplotters (Imray just announced they will withdraw from the paper chart market in 2025!) pilot books are replaced by online communities like Navily and Noforeignland, book exchanges hardly exist anymore since everyone is doing E-books and your friends and family expect real time vlogs. It must be a very decisive couple who sets out defying modern technology. We are not one of them, honestly I loved my land life and can't see why I shouldn't keep the virtual part of it.

If we add other recent innovations like electrical cooking, scooter or outboard it's apparent that all this new technology devours electricity. In fact we increased our daily energy consumption by a fivefold from *Faidate* (2002) to *Faidapiu* (2022). It is important to have a clear understanding of your energy needs and production before you set out. We checked cooking appliances at home, e.g. it takes 35Ah (12V) to boil pasta and estimated the daily electricity consumption for cooking (1.5Kwh). Looking at the specs for the other equipment (watermaker, electronics, autopilot, Starlink, dinghy outboard etc.) we estimated the number of hours they would run and arrived at a daily consumption of 5.5Kwh. In practice we used between 4.5 and 5.0Kwh a day in the two seasons we cruised in the Mediterranean. Now that we are cruising in Brazil and produce relatively little (short days and deteriorated solar panels) we consume an average of 3.5Kwh a day (including 8h of Starlink). It's as Fabio says 'you use what you've got'. Compared to other boats we easily use more than the double of 'simpler' boats like *Faidate* where we cooked with gas, had a windvane as an autopilot, no electrical outboard nor Starlink. But we also use less than half of the more 'complex' boats with far more equipment for both boat and personal use. We take pride in living off our solar panels and only very rarely do we need to revert to charging the batteries with the engine alternators. But it all depends on you and how you choose to cruise!



# Are you safe?

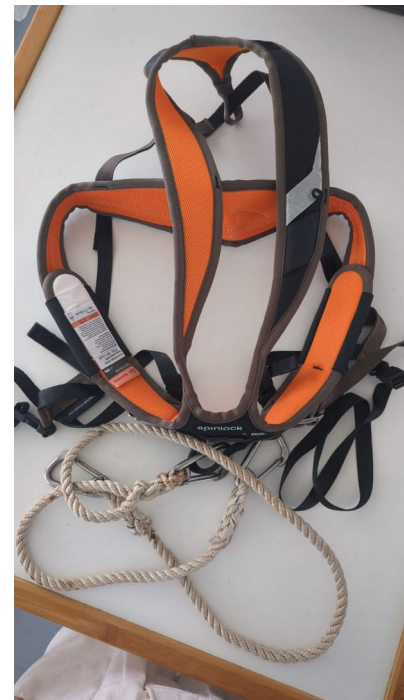
No such thing as a safe cruising boat exists. If you purchase a new boat it lives up to the safety requirements set by the industry. If you buy second hand your agent can check that the upgrades done by the previous owner live up to those standards. Does this make your boat - new or old - safe? No, not really because safe cruising is something quite different from a boat that is certified.



To give you an example the European CE requirement states that you need attachment points for a life raft. Mind you, you do not need the life raft itself. Also, there are a lot of rules concerning gas and diesel on board but nowhere does it state how your freshwater – something you really cannot live without – must be stored or accessed.

Boats can burn, sink or capsize, those are definitely unsafe situations. And yes they do happen, we have cruising friends in all three categories, but it is very rare and it happens to perfectly safe boats with experienced cruisers on board. Accidents happen, a certified boat doesn't exclude those. Nor does certification concern the primary thing to keep safe, which is yourself.

Your biggest bodily risk is falling overboard (there is no certification requirement for the tethering lines to attach yourself to the boat). If you are cruising in two I think it is an illusion that a man overboard is recovered. I cannot imagine how to do it and will surely be sound asleep. So make sure you do not fall overboard. Think that you are sailing solo so there is no one to retrieve you. Fabio is not much concerned with safety on board but agreed to use a harness once I told him that my worry that he would fall overboard prevented me from sleeping.



After which I blamed him (of course, after all I am female!) for rattling the stainless steel hook of his tethering line above our bedroom. Perhaps worse: our friend who joined for the Atlantic Crossing in 2003 still has the unwanted image of Fabio jumping around on deck stark naked except for the harness trying to lower the spinnaker in a squall.



The next safety risk is being injured. In the summer of 2022 the mainsheet managed to fatally injure an experienced German couple sailing a 65 footer off the east coast of the US. Without going to such extremes, injuries are extremely likely on board in particular when boats get bigger and the cruisers older.

Fabio dislocated his shoulder pulling a mooring line, twisted his knee when he slipped on the swimming platform, injured his thumb on a rope. Always put your personal safety first, so don't jump into the water to retrieve an outboard with the risk of tearing a bicep, just let it sink (the bicep is Fabio's and the one dropping the outboard was me). Every time something happens we learn but it comes at a price and as we get older, the price seems to keep rising.

Seasickness is a very common evil and potentially dangerous because you can't be counted on. Only very few of the people suffering from seasickness have been dissuaded to cruise. Some take pills before a longer passage, others ride it out with ginger or anchovies, either are supposed to work. What roots do you have?



Even if you do not suffer from seasickness, like us luckily, there are times you will feel queasy, usually at the beginning of a passage, when you have not sailed for some time or when the waves are rough. The common factors that induce seasickness are stress, tiredness and cold so try to take care of yourself and stay calm, rested and warm. If you suffer from seasickness it makes sense to take crew for passages to prevent your partner sailing solo. As far as kids are concerned they are prone to seasickness just as their parents. Our daughter never felt it and just complained that it was difficult to draw with the crayons flying around on a particular nasty tack while our son got seasick in a rolling anchorage. Our baby wasn't seasick until he started walking. But a young Dutch couple needed to modify their cruising plans when they discovered that the 6 months old baby got sick as soon as they weighed the anchor. They adapted and one parent sailed solo to the next anchorage whereas the other and the baby took the train.



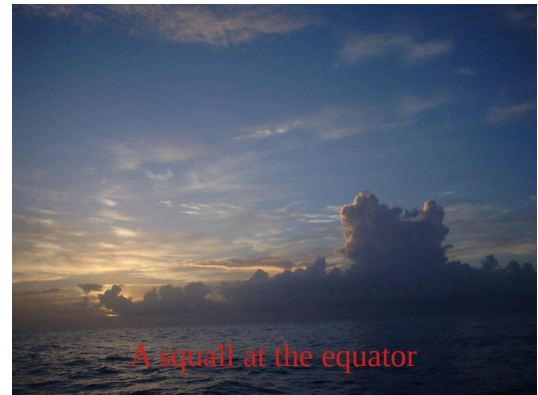
Fire blanket, EPRIB  
Flares, Extinguisher

There is a lot of safety equipment on the market. Some items may be required by your insurance, like flares and man overboard retrieval packages. I think most boats have an EPRIB, a beacon that sends your GPS position in case of distress. Quite some cruisers use personal locator beacons (PLBs) attached to their lifejackets. Life rafts are safety requirements for some rally's (like ARC) and in some part of the world (like Patagonia). We don't carry a life raft onboard *Faidapiu* nor did we on *Faidate*. *Faidapiu* is a catamaran that cannot sink, so the only danger is fire. We abolished gas, carry three extinguishers on board and the dinghy is always inflated and easily launched. *Faidate* with its 6 tons keel could definitely sink. The reason for the absence of a life raft was because we didn't see how we would manage to launch it and safely transport our three very young children into it. So also there the contingency plan was an inflated and easily launched dinghy on deck. Luckily we have never needed to put that plan into effect (touch wood). To those who do carry a life raft I suggest you find a copy of Alain Bombard's thesis that you need the right mindset for staying alive in the raft, which he tested on himself in 1953.

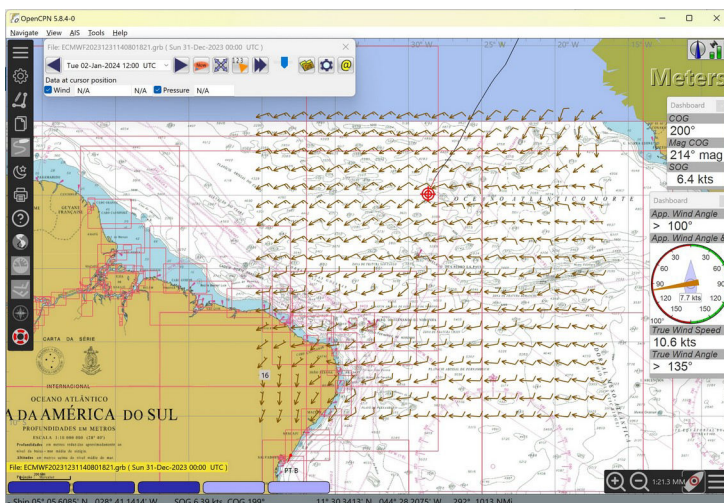
Safety is something very personal I suppose and there are many different ideas out there. I remember Fabio's father (a ship's doctor!) being against us crossing the Atlantic Ocean with his very young grandchildren. Once he realised that he couldn't change our plans he filled the boat with the strongest antibiotics, anti-inflammatory and painkillers on the market. His idea being that like that we could keep a *status quo* before reaching land. This time we don't carry anything (tough wood).

Some suggest that as boats get bigger and more complex they actually get safer. I think the opposite is true. Yes, being in big waves with a smaller boat is extremely uncomfortable but – as long as you are properly hooked on – you can manage it, you can contain the sails, you can hand steer. The German couple sailing the 65 monohull were in a complete other situation, they were physically overpowered. Bigger complex boats rely on electrical winches and many lines some running out of sight. Try to practise on how to act if something should fail or get caught. We have a clear procedure on how to handle the mainsheet and what to do should the autopilot fail in strong wind.

Another often heard idea is that a fast boat is a safe boat because it can outrun weather systems. I don't think a difference of 3 knots, because that is the structural difference between a fast and a normal cruiser, can outrun weather systems. Safe cruising is to ensure that you are nowhere near dangerous weather systems and that if you get caught try to understand the situation, what actions to take and what course to steer.



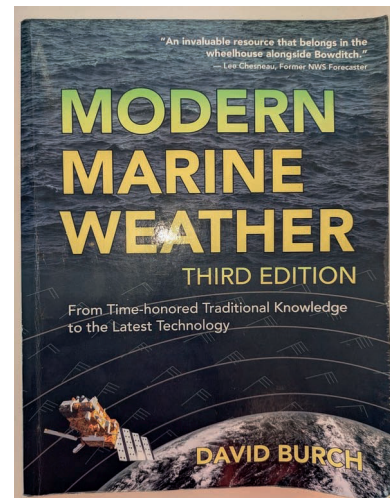
That brings me to the core of safe cruising: planning. Think about the safest way to get to your new destination, with what kind of forecast you leave and what course to sail. Think about how to set up your boat for safe sailing when the unforeseen happens, make sure it is easy to reef, that you have several autopilots, a fool proof system of tethering lines, ensure a continuous watch system, wear proper shoes to reduce the risk of slipping, have handrails everywhere you need them and make sure you cannot burn yourself while cooking. Make sure you have access to weather forecasts and spend as much time as possible to understand them and your best course of action. After all you are on a sailing boat so you are ruled by nature. Do watch out that you don't get paranoid. Which was what a Danish wife claimed about her husband when he was checking the weather forecast every six hours many months after a Medcane hit their anchorage in the Mediterranean.



Weather forecast in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean

&

My bible







# Cruising skills?

If you ask landlubbers what they think is number one skill needed for the cruising lifestyle the likely answer is 'sailing'. They fail to recognise that cruisers don't sail for the sport, in fact sailing as you do a dinghy isn't even a cruising skill at all. Fabio and I grew up with dinghy sailing as a sport but in the cruising community this is a rarity. Quite some cruisers hardly have any sailing experience before setting out, in particular the wives, but luckily sailing isn't rocket science and is easily learned.

## *Sailing?*

In any case you will not be sailing more than 10% of the time and I think that if we exclude passages it's half of that. Of the 100 hours spent on board, you will be sailing 5 hours. On top of that, all cruisers have auxiliary engines. We try to sail – as opposed to using the engine - whenever we can. This is made possible by the type of boat (a performance catamaran) and the absence of schedule (we don't mind speeds below 5 knots). Even so an estimated 25% off the nautical miles 'sailed' in the Med (notorious for the lack of wind) were under engine and elsewhere motoring accounts for at least 10% of the voyage. Those numbers are relatively low. I think that in average cruisers are under engine 20% of the time a number that raises to 40% in the Med.



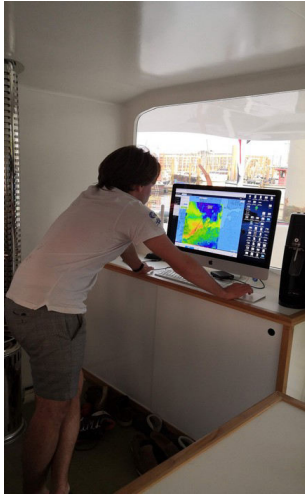
Motoring on the north coast of Sicily

Not only is the amount of actual sailing rather negligible, it isn't even sailing in the sense of the day sailor. You are moving your home not indulging in a sport. In fact 'real' sailors immediately get bored onboard a cruiser because there is nothing to do: sailing is done under autopilot with a limited sail wardrobe and in one direction only, nothing like a race.

## *Weather forecaster*

I think the core cruising skill is learning how to live on the sea relying only on yourselves. To learn to live together 100% of the time on a fraction of the space, to be an electrician and a mechanic, to learn how to anchor, to cope both with happiness or success and frustration or fear. Aside from that mental skill, I think you need to be a weather forecaster since your cruising life evolves around the weather. Where you are in the world is decided by the seasonal weather. The monthly weather dictates whether you can cross an ocean. The weekly weather determines where you anchor. And finally your individual day depends on the weather at the moment. The availability of weather models for sailors – in particular when combined with connectivity at sea – is something we couldn't dream about 20 years ago. Today we have Windy over Starlink and foolishly enough we think that the colours and the animated arrows imply reliability, it doesn't. Don't get fooled into a false state of security that you will actually experience the weather that shows up on your screen. The input hardly changed and no human forecaster has looked. Actually the only certainty about the weather is that it will differ from whatever the colours and arrows indicate. If you are lucky it will be close to the forecast for the next 48 hours. If you are unlucky the central weather system that

pictured well clear of you on your computer screen will have moved slightly or changed speed and already the very next day you are faced with something different. So your plan shouldn't be written in stone. For longer passages don't pin down a day of departure, a 10-days route or even the exact destination. Let the weather decide for you. Use one of the advantage of the cruising lifestyle: feel free to decide when to make which passage, choose your route along the way and modify the landfall accordingly. You will also need to be patient since you can't force the weather. Be ready to include weeks of waiting for a weather window to materialise itself. And remember: conformation bias is human. Fabio and I smilingly tell each other that there are certain models we don't like since they have unwelcome projections more often than others.



We learned it the hard way not to give greater credence to predictions that fit our plans. We had left The Netherlands for a planned four days non-stop sail to Copenhagen, Denmark across the North Sea and the German Bight. Our son Luca had spent days studying the departure times and routing suggested by Predictwind. But after the first day we found ourselves seasick with waves crashing on the boat and sought refuge in Thyborøn harbour (on the rough west coast of Denmark) at 2AM with a force six and pouring rain. We never made it to Copenhagen but did have a nice time in Limfjorden which is entered in Thyborøn. After that time I stopped using routing programmes. Not only do the underlying models use the same unreliable forecasts, their suggestions are optimums: so sailing on the edge of the weather system and of the boat's ability. Which is completely unrealistic for a cruiser.

I tried to find a setting on the routing programmes that would give me a comfortable ride but eventually gave up. I was so focused on getting the programme to do the departure planning and routing for me, that I lost the overall perspective. You know best how your boat sails so you are best placed for the risk-analysis on when to set sail and what route to take. Your input is no different than the routing programmes but you make decisions based on your parameters. It takes far more time than clicking on the programme and uploading the tracks to your chartplotter and you can't even pass the blame when you got it wrong. But that's cruising life, you need to learn to rely on yourself.

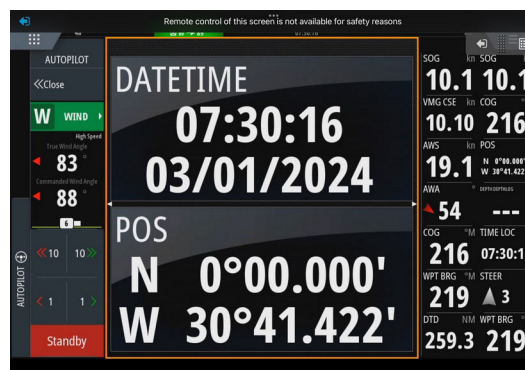
### ***Navigator***

Alongside reading the weather you must be able to navigate. When we set out on our first passage in 2002 our cruising friends couldn't believe that we didn't know (and still don't) anything of celestial navigation. For centuries the only guide to crossing an ocean were the stars. So the general availability of GPS a few years prior was a game changer. The stars became decorative, the machine told your position and you didn't even have to calculate the shortest grand circle line. You just fed the start and end coordinates from the paper chart into the GPS and the magical machine would tell you what route to follow. According to our friends we weren't real sailors at least not proper navigators. And they were right, we were a different breed. Twenty years later we have chartplotters, integrating the paper chart with the GPS. So we were delighted when we chartered a Nautitec Open 40 in Croatia in 2017. Until the day that we arrived in Hvar, where I had been with the kids and my parents a few years earlier and didn't recognise the harbour at all. I turned red by embarrassment when I realised that I had routed to the island Hvar and ended up on the north coast (in Primosten) in stead of in it's capital on the south coast that bears the same name as the island itself. That was the first of many lessons in chartplotter navigation.

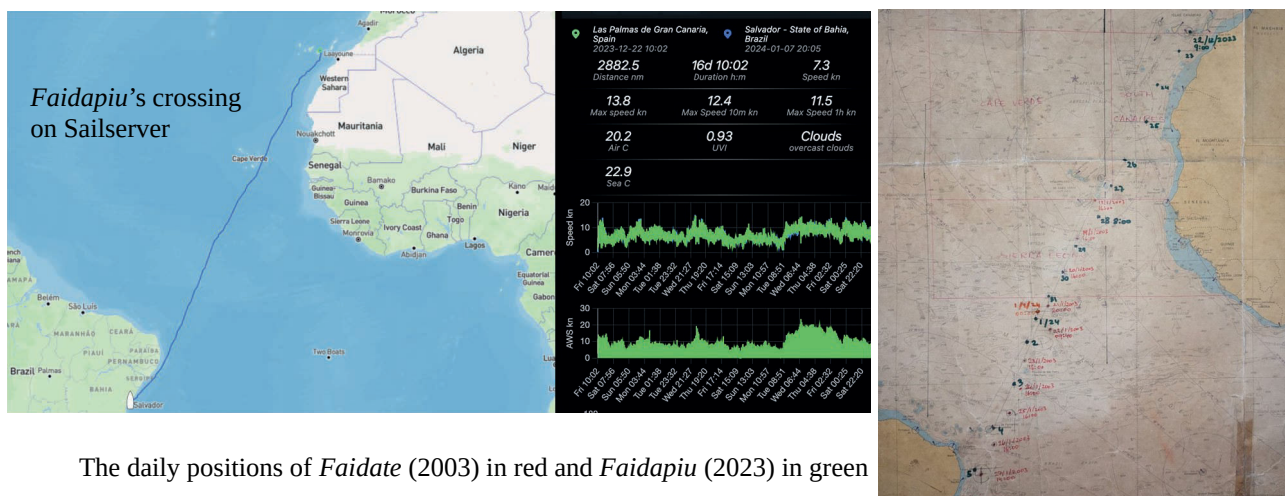
Rule number one of chartplotters (and other screens like AIS or radar) is watch your zoom. If the zoom is too high you don't see the names of the harbours, you don't see rocks or buoys and you don't see other vessels whereas if the zoom is too low you see fast moving ferries too late, loose track of the coast line or just press on the first Hvar without realising that it is simply the name of the island and not the town itself.

## Realist

Being realistic, in the sense of managing your expectations, is another core concept of cruising. *Faidate*, our former Van de Stadt 47 monohull is a relatively fast boat as is *Faidapiu* our current Schionning Arrow 1500 catamaran, but there is a remarkable difference. Our monohull was comfortable doing 6 knots and in the right conditions 8 knots, whereas the cat in equivalent circumstances does 8 respectively 12 knots.



On top of that the cat doesn't have a maximum hull speed so it can surf down waves at 20 knots. In theory this would mean daily runs of 170NM for the mono and 215NM for the cat, but that is exactly that: theory. The 3000NM sails from North Europe to the Mediterranean had identical averages (6.7 knots or 160NM/day). The crossing of the Atlantic Ocean to Brazil was an average of 6.9 knots in *Faidate* and 7.3 knots in *Faidapiu*, respectively 165NM/day and 175NM/day.



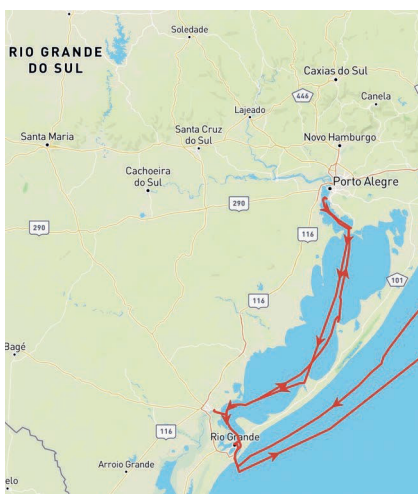
The daily positions of *Faidate* (2003) in red and *Faidapiu* (2023) in green

So the catamaran sails nowhere near its speed potential. The reasons are obvious: you never have the perfect wind (the catamaran is fast but only at certain wind angles), you never have the optimum sails, you encounter lulls (and we motor slow), you sail conservatively to avoid breakage and you make wrong routing decisions. A Belgian friend of ours provisioned for 18 days of 'rally racing' across the Atlantic Ocean on a TS42. When I commented that this seemed tight – usually one calculates 3 weeks for a crossing from the Canaries to the Caribbean – he replied that he was on a performance catamaran. I commented that even such boats rely on the wind, a comment that seems to have jinxed his undertaking. Either they had no wind at all or too much wind so they arrived after 22 days, with both spinnakers blown and no food left.

Think about the way you want to sail and be realistic. When cruising in two you do not seek performance such as ‘tacking’ down wind (which is faster than dead down wind). You are alone on watch but also need to visit the toilet, cook or fix something and since you wish your off-watch spouse their well deserved rest so you trim the sails for comfort not speed and wait until they awake to shake out the reef or switch on the engine. Your cruising speed is much lower than your boat’s potential.

### ***The right mindset***

It is not only the speed of the boat that requires expectation management but also yourself. Cruising requires planning (where am I going next and when) and it is deluding when those carefully made plans can’t be executed. While you are planning you mind is already executing them, so when the time comes to put them into practice them it feels wrong to stop and not continue as planned. What you should think, Brazilian solo sailor Karina told me, is that there is a reason to act differently than planned. Your plan assumed certain things, like a certain weather, a certain state of your boat or perfect health. So if it rains, a pump breaks or you have the flew, the plan as you imagined it can’t be executed anyway, reality will differ from the mentally executed plan. In order to avoid executing a plan in different circumstances (which is prone to be disappointing) force yourself to rethink at all times. Yes, you thought to set sail today, you went for a last swim and you said goodbye to your neighbours but then as you check the weather forecast you see that it isn’t favourable. So the prerequisites for your departure aren’t fulfilled, you should stay put and live with the delusion. The same applies to you general plan. There are many places I would have liked to stop (like Tropea, Italy) but it just didn’t work out, usually do to the weather. Either the wind was coming from the wrong direction or we needed to benefit from an advantageous weather window and keep going while the sailing was good. Sometimes you need to divert your carefully thought out plan because the planned destination can’t offer what you need at that moment. If you need repairs or a place to haul out, your original plan must change. We ended up in a 120NM long ‘lake’ just to be able to leave *Faidapiu* in Brazil for our summer break in Italy. I had never heard of Lagoa dos Patos nor the capital city of Porto Alegre and had certainly never thought that *Faidapiu* would be sailing in fresh water. But that was the destination we needed so I took a plane to Buenos Aires in stead of sailing.



Sailing in Lagoa dos Patos, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil





Friends steering *Faidate* on its maiden trip, North Sea 1998

Just like it makes sense to have plenty of capable people on board the first time you set sail, it makes sense to have an extra crew member on your first passage to give you extra peace of mind. You will find yourself and the boat, in a new situation. You, and the boat, will experience stress for hours or days, at a time. Many unexpected things will occur and despite you being tired and feeling nausea you will have to deal with them. You will have to force yourself to wear your thinking hat at the most inconvenient of times. An extra person on board can alleviate that pressure and also means longer time between watches.

We asked a friend to join us for the Atlantic Crossing to Brazil in 2002. With three small children on board we didn't want to risk anything happening to one of us making the other one responsible for everything and everyone. Of course while time and sleep management benefit from extra crew the food and interpersonal management might suffer. Also, having crew on board only helps if you trust them. You have to fully trust each other's capabilities of driving the boat forward. Once started, it is not like a bus where you can press the bottom and get off. You are on board of an airplane until it lands. It can help to create a framework, a handhold, so that your mind and actions aren't spinning and everything gets the attention it deserves. For this reason many work with fixed watches, with a list of daily checks (autopilot, chafing halyards and sheets, battery status, weather forecast etc.) and clear division of tasks. On board *Faidate/Faidapiu* with an Italian captain such kind of organisation is obviously not the case.



*Faidate's* Atlantic crossing crew Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 2003



# A team?

Is your couple a team? Do you talk through manoeuvres so that it is clear who does what and nobody yells instructions? Are you a symbiosis of separate individuals working together as one? Probably not but I do think that it is the utopia we should strive for.

The number of cruisers that I have actually met with the wife being the captain, is zero. *Faidapiu* is no different: Fabio is the captain both on paper and in reality. Land-friends often ask me how I survive living with my captain 24/7 and oddly enough it isn't a problem. At least not anymore. Four months into our former cruise on *Faidate* we almost gave up and headed home. We were both doing the same things, feeling that the other one didn't do anything and frustration builds up fast when you are confined to a boat. The solution was a clear separation along the traditional lines: I am responsible for the home stuff and Fabio is responsible for the boat stuff. Teamwork – different roles working towards the same goal - is what makes our cruising life work and I prefer doing the dishes to changing the engine oil (and Fabio can't cook).

The husband might be the captain but the wife is often characterised as the admiral. Traditionally the persons on a sailboat are termed 'skipper' and 'crew'. The skipper is in control, he shouts orders to helmsman and bosun yet takes responsibility for the course. There is a natural hierarchy onboard. When setting out cruising the husband and wife will have to break with this tradition and change, or perhaps more correctly 'evolve', from skipper & crew to captain & admiral. In that way the wife does not get shouted at and the husband doesn't feel the full weight of the responsibility.

The captain & admiral are the cruising team. As a team you are on the same page as far as the sailing plan is concerned to avoid any blaming when the inevitable unpredicted change of wind or sea state occurs. As a team you discuss long and short term cruising plans and whether you are comfortable with an overnight sail without extra crew. You look at the weather forecasts together and jointly decide what type of anchorages you seek. And at some point you realise that not only do your preferences and expectations differ, often you do not even think alike. Any board member will recognise this and while at times it can be frustrating, try to remember that heterogeneity is a good thing! The added complication for your cruising team is that you are together all the time and sometimes suffer illness, lack of sleep or exhaustion. How I long for my board member days, because there I could go home and now I am stuck. One of the many (irritating) differences is risk tolerance, which I believe is higher in men than in females. I think we generally play it safer and try to plan for when things go wrong. Such an underlying difference creates tension and discussions. I get nervous when we tack close to cliffs or drive the autopilot on wind angle in stead of compass course when crossing other boats. Fabio finds this utterly ridiculous but after our ninth discussion (probably ending in tears at some point) he kind of takes notice. At least now he looks at me with a grin when we find ourselves in such a situation his eyes saying 'yes, ok, I will do what you like even if I consider it ridiculous'.

The captain and admiral sharing the responsibility applies 90% of the time: the part of your cruising life that you are not sailing. When sailing, your boat needs a skipper. On a cruising boat the skipper is not the captain – as on your day sail – but the person driving or on watch at the time. The skipper takes decisions based on a great variety of input, decisions that are never right or wrong but vary from better to worse. Take the 'simple' case of another vessel on coalition course: do you trust them to give you right of way or do you contact them, is the autopilot on wind-mode so a shifting wind



alters your course, if you must yield do you bear away or head up, if you bear away will that effect your speed and hence intersection point? It takes time to trust oneself to take such decisions when on watch, just as it takes time for your spouse to trust yours. You must feel able and your partner must trust that you are able. Unfortunately the more you sail together the bigger the competence gap becomes since us wives are prone to occupy ourselves with the non-sailing part and only asked to join our husbands when they need extra hands. It is our own fault of course and sometimes I must force myself to be more 'sailing-active' to prevent the gap from becoming unsurmountable. Because should this happen, the predominantly important teamwork and trust this assumes fades away. In the beginning Fabio asked my opinion every time. I think that now, after three years of cruising, it fell to one out of five and I am certain that in a few years time, when he knows his boat inside out and has experienced most situations, he will not bother at all.

There is something magical about sailing at night. Everybody – even my mother who doesn't actually likes sailing – appreciate at least one overnight sail every ones in a while. One misses it, the night sky, the sound of the boat making its way, the loneliness.

What I don't miss is the responsibility, you and you alone are the one to decide in the middle of the dark sea. I actually realised the weight of this not on a night passage but at an anchorage in Bonifacio, Corsica. It is a special anchorage where you must go ashore to pick up an anchor line. This meant, of course, Fabio since there was no way I was going to step on the slippery rocks and look for anchor lines. It was first when he left in the dinghy that I realised that I really was completely alone and that the responsibility for the boat was mine alone. I didn't like it!



There are only two sailing situations where you really need to be two: sail change and docking. These are high stress situations, where split second decisions may turn out very wrong and that are prone to personal accidents, like a slip or a finger caught in a line. Good teamwork is detrimental but so is clarity about who is in charge and communication (on board headsets are not for nothing called 'marriage savers'). Usually it is the captain (husband) who takes charge and the admiral (wife) who fulfils the function of crew. Yet is difficult for this admiral to let go and just obey. For example in the last seconds of a harbour manoeuvre Fabio (driving) told me to throw the front mooring line first. I didn't obey but threw the rope on the middle cleat, after all this is what we always do when the wind comes from abeam. I soon realised my mistake, the wind had shifted and the bow drifted away while the stern hit the harbour wall. The scratch on the transom serves as a daily reminder of what happens when I do not trust and obey when it is my turn to do so.



Fabio and I have very different styles, I tend to discuss whereas Fabio just does what feels right (to him). It took months before I realised why our dinghy beach landings never went perfect. That day, basically windless, hardly any slope to a pristine sand beach, I started shouting about getting wet yet again. Fabio looked at me in disbelief: 'It is your own doing for not turning the dinghy stern to and just sitting there waiting for my to do it!' I shouted back: 'If I am the one supposed to do it, why didn't you tell me?' He replied: 'Because it is obvious'.

The lesson learned was that I had dreaded the arrival onto the beach due to non-communication, I should have asked him how he thought I could stay dry. That realisation opened a whole Pandora's box: whereas I seek to evaluate the manoeuvres, the navigational decisions, the weather assumptions, the procedures such as reefing or entering a harbour, this is of no interest to Fabio. He just does the things as they come natural, they are hardly every planned. My theory of evolutionary team work based on discussions before and after, encounters deaf ears. Maybe because he is male, maybe because he is Italian, maybe because he is Fabio and quite possibly a combination of all of the above. He reasons that there is only one thing for sure and that is that there are no repeats. He is wrong there - think about beaching the dinghy – but it is true that cruising life is a build up of ever changing challenges. There is always something else that breaks, there is always another wind than expected, there is always a new harbour or mooring, there is always a new problem to affront. You need to become the king and queen of adaptation and improvisation and, luckily, as your experience grows the number of 'better' decisions automatically increases. Even with clear roles, tasks and experience, it can easily go wrong if you loose focus. We crashed the port side when we entered our home marina after a 40 hours sail. We were tired and automatically put fenders on the starboard side only since that is our mooring side. But that morning a wind shift prevented us from turning the boat and we crashed the unfendered port side onto the steel jetty. In fact it often happens that you get into problems because you do things automatically without really paying attention or because you are tired, fighting, unwell or a combination or all of the above at 3 o'clock at night with a weather system approaching. You do not think clearly and this is where teamwork saves the day. One person will make a stupid decision but it is unlikely that two persons arrive at the same not ideal conclusion.

Another difference between Fabio and me is when to communicate. When Fabio is manoeuvring he wants to be talked to. If he doesn't hear 'good', 'ok', 'two meters' he thinks he is doing something wrong or, more likely, that my thoughts are elsewhere so that he cannot rely on me. I on the other hand have to tell him to shut up when I am driving. When I am fully concentrated on my manoeuvrer, hearing him talk makes me doubt what I am doing and if there is one fatal thing to any manoeuvrer it is thinking about changing it half way. My hunch is that this is a standard difference between sexes. Make sure you learn what works best for you, while making sure to respect each other's way of looking at things. It was when we were home for the holidays that I realised how much cruising life had changed our marriage. While Fabio was manoeuvring the car I said something irrelevant for conversational purposes. Fabio hit the breaks and looked at me bewildered: 'What am I supposed to do with that information?' Contrary to pre-cruising he apparently listens to what I say but I may only say relevant things, not sure that's a big improvement.

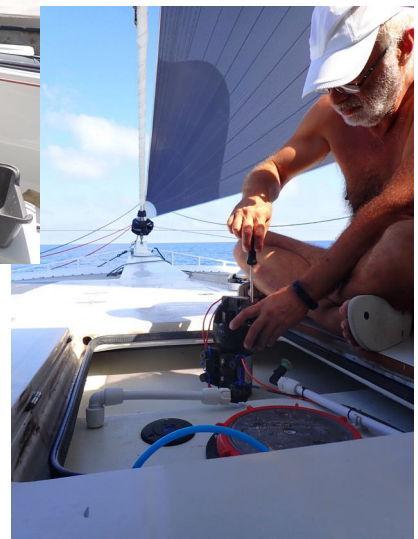
Most of the cruising couples had independent careers on land where teamwork, authority and adaptation is taken for granted. The change from being a professional team player 40 hours a week to cruising with your spouse 24/7 within the confines of your floating home far away from your social and professional network, takes time. On land most spouses live parallel lives that only occasionally overlap. That will change and is an adaptation process that has little to nothing to do with sailing. Unfortunately not all can adapt. While I do not have any kind of statistics, it does appear that when the decision to cruise is mutual, when the steps to realise the dream are taken together, when the worries are discussed and a serious reality check has been made, when both are looking for some kind of adventure and are not too bound by the predictability of land-life, the cards look good. If you both start dreaming about going places with a sailing boat and you set off with every intention of trusting each other's capabilities and adaptability, you will become the team that cruising life requires of you.



Transporting groceries back to the boat



Onboard delivery of diesel and food



Endless maintenance and repairs

# Chores?

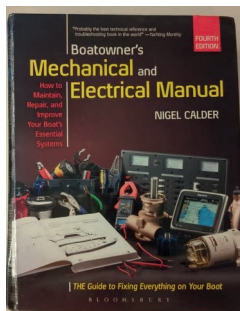
Try to imagine that all the hours you spend on working and other out of the house activities. Then imagine that you do not need to do that anymore. That's the amount of hours that you will have nothing to do. Time takes up another dimension because there are only very very few things that must be done. Having plenty of time at hand is good because the daily chores are far more time consuming than in your land life.

My main chore is the kitchen. On land my household time was spent on shopping, tidying, cleaning and washing with only a relatively small part on cooking. On the boat this is just the opposite, you rarely shop, there is far less surface to clean and cloths to wash so running the kitchen is the task that takes everything you care to give. While on land the family rarely eats all meals together, this of course is very different onboard. You will need to prepare all the meals and wash dishes by hand. You are space restricted and do not have all the time saving appliances. You will have to improvise since it is unlikely that you have all the ordinary ingredients, once you found where you stored them. Shopping for groceries is just as time consuming. At home I used an hour to drive to the supermarket, do the groceries and put it in the fridge and kitchen cabinets. On board this will take you half a day. You are probably at anchor so you need to find a place to land the dinghy from where you walk to the store. With your exceptions as high as your shopping list is long you enter the supermarket that is a minuscular version of what you found on Google maps. Not only doesn't it have the brands you are used to, forcing you to seek alternatives without always being able to read the language, but many of the listed items aren't even there. So you walk to another store to seek the rest of the list and after a few stores decide that several listed items aren't really necessary. At which point you evolve into a donkey to get it all back to the dinghy before storing it away in places you hopefully do not immediately forget. This is why I went from an enthusiastic cook at home to a reluctant cook on board: the value of a car, a familiar supermarket and a dishwasher, can hardly be exaggerated. Living on board will, if nothing else, make your pedometer happy and let you relive the lifestyle of your grandmother.

Since shopping for groceries isn't easy we carry extensive provisions. 'You do know that they also eat on the other side of the world, don't you?' Dutch Claudia on the neighbouring boat said laughingly at the sight of my shopping charts. Fabio has long stopped commenting on my hoarding of provisions, he knows that the alternative is having a stressed out wife. I do probably exaggerate – I think I brought two full shopping charts for a 5 day cruise in 5 persons - but the risk of not being able to feed everyone on board as good and varied as possible, stresses me out. So *Faidapiu* always carries provisions for an ocean crossing. It is a choice. Claudia leaves with the bare minimum and enjoys shopping for local produce when she arrives and in fact she is right. Also because the cooking adapts to the produce available and a long time cruiser often makes a remarkable dinner with new ingredients. Even the Italians learn to substitute olive oil with coconut milk when in the Pacific. If you are (un)lucky to be in the Canaries when the ARC departs you will see firsthand that most cooks are like me: there cannot be enough. Long term cruisers teach us that the only thing we really need to carry across the Atlantic – except half the food we think to consume – are the items not readily available. This depends on your destination of course but generally speaking the only thing not easily available are 'luxury items' such as sun screen, your favourite cereal (we carried 15kg of Jordan's Original Crunchy across the Atlantic), concentrated dishwashing soap or laundry sheets. And of course the things you grew up with. Like olive oil for the Italians cured ham for the Spanish, rye flower for the Danes, soft cheeses for the French, salted licorice for the Dutch etc.

Although I also remember that we asked visiting friends to fly sugar to Venezuela (a main producer but there was a strike) as I needed it to bake Christmas cookies. Or than when I finally found wheat flour in Cuba (payed with Amex in a ‘dollar shop’) I screamed upon opening the 5kg bag, it was moving! Fabio’s comment ‘the animals can’t taste of anything other than flour’ didn’t really reinsure me while kneading the crawling dough. Fabio’s main task in this part of the cruising life is playing donkey and transport the provisions back to the boat. That was the main reason for switching from gas cooking to electrical cooking: he was fed up of carrying the gas cylinders. The fact that I can now only use one pot at a time – given the limited inverter – didn’t really strike him as a problem. And I must admit that after a while one gets used to it, of course it helps that my time is endless. The stress to prepare dinner in 40 minutes after arriving home from work are distant almost forgotten memories.

Fabio’s chore is the boat and each type of boat work has its own adage:	Maintenance ‘is your only shield against failure’ Repair ‘in exotic locations is what cruising is all about’ Upgrade ‘the best way to increase maintenance and failures’
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Before you dream about your boat and voyage, you should pick up a copy of Nigel Calder’s *Boatowner’s mechanical and electrical manual*. There is no better way than this brick to give you the feel of what it means to maintain your boat. It is truly amazing how everything on a boat needs to be maintained in continuation just to prevent failure. And if that is a challenge you do not like, cruising will become difficult. Things break at the most inconvenient moments and if you have to rely on outside help it will impede your cruising plans as you will be sailing from expert to expert.

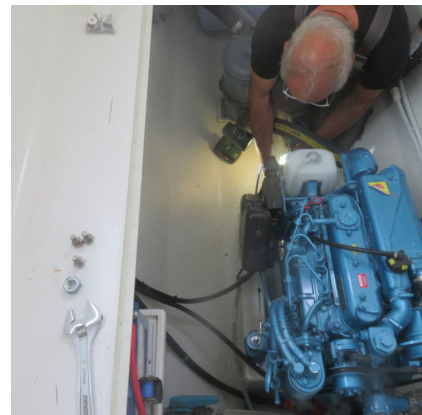
Most boats have an extensive owner manual so make sure you have understood every single word and, unlike us, keep to the maintenance schedule of the different manuals. At this moment Fabio is utterly failing to dismount the windlass because he hasn’t turned and re-greased the bolts regularly as probably indicated in the manual. Maintenance reduces the chance of failure. So perhaps that is the motivator: the more the maintenance work the less the repair work and that should eventually save you both time and money. For me it was a rather hard lesson, for example I didn’t see the need of rinsing the boat with freshwater. It took the handle of an out of control winch almost hitting me during a night watch to admit my mistake. All bearings and stoppers get stuck with salt and sand and need to be rinsed at regular intervals to ensure flawless operation. One plan that never worked in practise is doing maintenance while cruising. There are just so many other enjoyments when waking up in the morning than ticking off that maintenance list. So we regularly end up staying put for at least a week, usually two, somewhere close to a town with a chandlery and postal pick up points for online purchased spare parts. A time we then use, hopefully, also to rent a car and be land tourists.

However good your maintenance at some point everything breaks. Unfortunately repairs are often carried out in exotic locations where you do not have the exact matching ‘thing’ and use something else as a make do (promising yourself to change this at the first occasion but of course you forget). When we installed a fresh water manifold in *Faidate* and missed a plug for one of the manifold’s outlets we used a champagne cork and duck tape. It caused no problem until at least ten years later when my parents were cruising *Faidate* and woke up in a flooding boat. It took my parents a while

to realise that the water pump was going in continuation by which time *Faidate's* fresh water tanks were pretty empty. Apparently even a champagne cork and duck tape do not last forever. This is just an example of what we forgot when building the boat and I am quite sure that professionals cut corners as well and that you will find them one by one. Even in the utopian case that everything has been installed according to the book, the continuous motion and the salt water environment ruins it. Therefore it makes sense to check every electricity cable (than you also know how they are run for the day that you will need to fix something), every connection and fuse as well as all underwater openings and adjoining hoses and, finally, the whole steering system including the autopilot. These three areas, that you do not see unless you look, are the crux of running a safe ship: it should steer and it should't burn nor sink.

As far as spare parts for the repairs are concerned there are two schools, the first one is to carry as many as possible spares, tools and a proper work bench. That's Fabio, but since I prioritize my provisioning and kitchen appliances, I managed to move him to the other school. Spend money on flying in spares when you need them and only have the absolute minimum on board to be able to arrive at a harbour (not only does the dock make a perfect workbench it also gives him the opportunity to complain about his wife to fellow cruisers). Murphy's law dictates that whatever you need is precisely the thing you don't have. We had a nice conversation with the distributor of NKE instruments. He told us that he had outfitted his daughter's boat for an Atlantic crossing to the very best of his capabilities and in particular with all possible spares for the autopilot system. Well except the one thing that broke: the rudder feedback, leaving his daughter hand steering for several days before she reached the Azores. In fact his new idea was to only carry spares that have an electrical component because that's the first to go in the corrosive cruising environment.

To avoid failure at inopportune moments you need to share your thoughts about anything out of the common. A nut that you find on the floor, an odd noise, hampering deck hardware or a little pool of water. The nut, we realised after several weeks when suddenly the port engine didn't engage, locked the gear cable to the engine. An odd noise came from the bolts connecting the propellor shaft to the gear box, they had rattled free. A faulty connector on the watermaker had created a little pool in an unlikely place.



A cruising boats is an extremely complex living space subject to constant movement in corrosive seawater environment. It is when you start to cruise and use the boat full time that you realise almost nothing on board is built for this: boat things are not made for 24/7 usage and non-boat things are not made for a saltwater environment. Italian Ricardo, a professional captain of a 65-footer Solaris, is full time employed. During summer he sails with the owners in the Mediterranean and from October to May he maintains the boat. It takes him more than half a year to ensure that the boat is tip-top for the next season. It took us a year to iron out the teething problems onboard *Faidapiu* and as an experienced Australian/Swiss cruising couple of a new Lagoon 400 told us: irrespectively of the boat and whether it is new or second hand, it takes two years before you have been in every corner and understood (and often replaced or repaired) everything on board. A shipyard like Outremer tells you to sail for a few months and then come back to the yard to get everything repaired. Imagine if something like this was recommended for cars! Boats are like houses, with new builds having punch lists longer than the shopping list for an Atlantic crossing.



Tobago



Italy



Brazil



French Guiana



Denmark



Malta

# Social life?

The boat is a man's world. Male cruisers spend their time on board in fixing what's broken, installing an upgrade or discussing boat stuff with fellow male cruisers. I think it is fair to say that husbands cruise to be captain of a ship, to be omnipotent in their own little world. It is like Fabio has his own little kingdom to which he invites other rulers to talk about their reign: gadgets, voyaging plans, diesel prices etc. For us women it is different, it is not the boat that is important but social interaction, meeting new people, seeing different ways of life and nature, hearing different languages and experiencing new food.

Fellow cruisers are your primary social interaction because you belong to the same group. While you usually have insufficient in common with locals to really interact, the opposite is true for the cruising community. It takes but a drink together to bond and by your second dinner you will have shared more personal information than with your former work colleagues. The community is knit differently on the sea than on land too. All the factors that create our social bubble on land are thrown overboard. It becomes irrelevant who your new cruising friends were in their land life, where and how they lived, what they did for a living, what their political or religious beliefs are, they might even be flat-earthers. Of course new social bubbles arise. If you cruise in sparsely 'populated' areas you interact with all the boats around you. But if you cruise in places like the Caribbean or the Mediterranean, you automatically make a selection. We interact with cruisers who speak our language, cruise on a similar boat or have similar cruising plans. If you cruise with kids then other cruising families are of course at the very top of your list, irrespectively anything else.

There are few cruisers who cruise with friends, in fact a Swedish cruiser told me that they intended to remove their third bedroom. They had bought a boat with three nice bedrooms in order to have friends cruising with them. After the first summer and two broken friendships they decided to put the spare bedrooms to some other use. Because while we are used to be around family 24h a day, we never experienced the morning mood of even our closest friends nor their interaction with each other outside dinner parties. Add to this the by nature claustrophobic living conditions, taking all the meals together and the lack of privacy and physical exercise and you have the perfect ingredients for a time bomb that is set to explode within a week. Even if by some chance of fate you actually do well together, the stress remains.

While without visitors the chores are generally shared between Fabio and me, visitors create an inequality because on top of my ordinary 'sailing' duties I have 'hospitality' duties. Fabio relaxes whenever we are not moving whereas this is where the food needs to be made, the toilet needs to be cleaned and the guests need to be entertained. Not only are there far more things to be done, there is also a lot to be planned. So whenever I am not actively doing something, I am planning so as to make sure they see interesting things and wake up to a morning coffee and a swim in a perfectly flat anchorage. Their time, contrary to ours, is limited and I feel responsible that they make the most of it (although nobody forces me, Fabio's words ringing in my ears).

Guests are notorious consumers of electricity (Starlink 24/7), water (daily shower), gas (except if they are seasick but then there's washing to do) and diesel (you'll be on a schedule). So a few hours before new arrivals I need to remind Fabio to suck it up quietly, it is the price to pay for company which even he appreciates after being stuck with only me for months.



While cruising *Faidate* in 2002-2004 we had the incredible luck to have my parents on *Dino* cruising with us. First in the Mediterranean, then in the Canary Islands, Haiti and finally (seen arriving together in) Cuba. It enabled Fabio and me to have some alone time, which otherwise isn't obvious with three small children on board.



While family and friends on board create stress, it also makes you see your reality through their eyes and makes you remember those first months of marvel. Remember how amazing it is to wake up in the morning and jump into the sea, to see the sun set every night, not to feel the stress of work. You almost forget how difficult it was to be at an exact place at an exact time to pick them up. Every time we decided to bite the bullet and sail in difficult situations it was because we needed to be somewhere for someone. And once they are on board you want them to have a nice time and show them as much as possible, so you move every day.

Our sons  
arriving in Rio  
de Janeiro on  
*Faidate* &  
*Faidapiu*



When I woke up the other morning and complained about the stress of not knowing where I was, our working daughter who joined us for a week's holiday looked at me in disbelief: 'Honestly, don't you dare complaining about stress!' I realised a bit too late that indeed it wasn't fair but not knowing where I awoke after five days of moving from one anchorage to the next, was a stressful feeling indeed!



# Cruising with children?

Cruising is great and cruising with children is spectacular. Experiencing the blue world through the eyes of your child is literally eye opening. Of course it adds responsibilities: young kids need to be kept safe and fed, whereas the older children need to be schooled.

I think that the main difference between boating kids and land kids is the time they spend with their peers. It was one of the most inspiring cruising women I met, Kiwi Bridget, who suggested the benefits of this. It is only at school that your child is part of a group based solely on age. So logic suggests that the earlier they take part in real life – a group based on anything other than age – the more time they have to develop social skills.



Another core difference between boat and land kids is of course the physical constriction to the family. There is no school, there are no sport activities, there is no clubbing with friends. When you leave the boat (for dinner or tourism) you do it together, you are together 24/7. I think that these two things combined: always with the family and never with your peers, creates a unique ‘bottom line’ for a child’s development. People consider us a particular close family and I would argue this is the consequence of our sabbatical on *Faidate*.

When everything is done together some tunnel vision is inevitable. But here comes the ‘Bridget’ factor: your family nucleus is subjected to all kind of influences. Another climate, another language, other history, costumes, education, social standing and wealth. And that opens the tunnel! As in any group of people, this constant change will be liked more by some family members than others. A danger that you should be aware off.

When we cruised with the kids in 2002-2004 I interviewed the children we met to get a feeling for their lives and what they thought of it. Without pretending any statistical value, I noticed a difference between boyish and girlish teens. The former liked the freedom of cruising life and not having to sit in a classroom whereas the latter longed for freedom in the form of friends, cloths and clubs. With much of our lives having moved to the virtual space in the most recent past this discrepancy between what teens seek and what boating life offers might well have diminished considerably. I recently asked a 13 year old Aussie whether he didn’t miss his peers and social life. He didn’t, boat schooling reminded the ‘Covid’ lessons and his friends were mainly fellow gamers anyway. So with a good internet connection (Starlink) he didn’t see a big difference between his boating life and land life. With regards to schooling, most children I spoke to preferred boat schooling to the classroom, because it is shorter and generally they did not even mind the teaching role that the parents assume. Another reason that was occasionally given for the preference for boat schooling is the absence of peer pressure. Some children feel pressed for results and are nervous every time a test comes up; on board where there is no comparison with peers, they felt much more relaxed and confident.

Your cruising life is mainly spent in anchorages and with young kids on board the most natural day time activity is for one parent to bring them to the beach. It requires some training to arrive with one or more young children alone on the beach and I found it easiest to drop the anchor and carry everything ashore. This included a portable VHF, drinks, snacks, books and for the baby a washing tub and a beach tent.



For the parent left on the boat those morning hours alone feel like paradise and although usually filled with repairs or cleaning there is always a slot for a quiet cup of coffee. When the children become teens they fill their own day but do influence your way of sailing. Our Dutch friends on *Lotus* sailing in the Med where day trips are common left well before sunrise. In that way by the time the kids got up and had breakfast there were only some hours left before they reached the new destination. Contrary, boats with morning school move in the afternoons as school in transit is difficult. Boats with teenagers seek out popular cruising hubs and buddy boats. So that in stead of you deciding where to sail next it will be a common decision depending on the cruising plans of other cruising families.

### ***The danger***

Water being omnipresent drowning is the biggest danger young children face. Before setting out we focus on safety precautions taken while sailing but in practise that is not where the danger is. We have not heard a story about anyone falling overboard while sailing nor have we heard about someone falling overboard from their own boat while at anchor. That's not to say it hasn't happened, but the boat becomes their home and they easily learn the limits. The problem is when they are not on board, there are many stories about kids falling out of dinghies and off jetties. Our boys fell into the water many times, both from the dinghy as they were watching fish and from the jetty when a play got violent or they leaned out too far with their fishing rods. Basically all cruisers have, and enforce, the rule that a life jacket must be worn when playing on the jetty or on the beach until the child has shown sufficiently skill in keeping afloat with its cloths on. Yet there will be times when the circumstances do not require particular attention and these are precisely the occasions to look out for. *Akka* sailed for more than a year before reaching French Guyana with their, by then, 5 and 3 year olds. They decided to live onboard in the small marina of Cayenne while working for a year or two to replenish their funds (and enjoy childcare!). They had been two months in the harbour, so the children were well familiar with the circumstances, when disaster almost struck. The mother was walking back from the carpark after having picked up the children from their day care centres when she stopped to chat with her friend on the neighbouring boat. Mothers always talk too much according to their kids (and partners?) and the five year old son got tired of waiting so climbed on board *Akka*. He is an active little boy, a good swimmer and the mother does not think about it. Yet she fails to see that his three year old sister, who isn't quite as good a climber, decides to follow him. The mother hears the 'splash', spins around and immediately grasps that the child has fallen in between the boat and the jetty. She jumps straight after. Cayenne is on a muddy river and at that time of day the current was outgoing at about two knots and the depth about six meters. The neighbour realises this and runs ten meter downstream, dives into the water and manages to scoop up the child. A few minutes later everyone is back on the dry with tears of relief.

Harbour situations are often like that: the water is murky, there is some kind of current, the attention of the parent looking after the children is for an instant diverted, children run and trip over mooring lines or walk backwards to follow a fish. So while very few cruisers put life jackets on the children when on board, all of them put life jackets (with their name and the boat name) on non-capable swimmers on jetties.

Our daughter of six seemed aware of the danger and used floating devices until she felt that it was time to learn to swim properly. That time presented itself in the form of a little pool of a yacht club in Salvador, Brazil. Suddenly, in the clear water with a wall all around she decided she could do it and learned it from one day to the next. Sometimes children are afraid of swimming in the sea, because they don't see their feet or because they see fish. Or perhaps it is just an age thing. Around the age of 3 our son refused to go into the water for a period of about six months, yet he was quite happy to paddle around with his floating devices both before and after. We never figured out why. If you have babies on board you should experiment and find out how they float and how they react. Our baby went go straight down, only slightly delayed as the nappy inflated and turned the head down and feet up. It isn't easy to pull a slippery baby out of the water, best to practice.

### ***Babies & toddlers***

The adage “small kids small problems big kids big problems” also applies to cruising. Many cruisers who set out with very young children find that it is much easier than they thought and when they afterwards go cruising with (pre)teens find it more difficult than anticipated. There is really no age that is too young to go cruising. Some babies have literally been born on board, others started their cruise when they were one month old. If the mother is up to it both mentally and physically and if you believe your baby is ready as a liveaboard well then trust your judgement.



You will find people who disagree with your decision to go cruising with a very young child. Statistically the first year is risky and it is also a year with regular check-ups and vaccinations. So I suppose it makes sense to start at the baby's first year birthday at which point they are also physically stronger (and you are less nervous). There are also arguments favouring an earlier start. If you delay until the baby is one year old you will have a crawling, possibly walking, curious baby menacing every knob and trowing Lego down the toilet (that blocks the pump as Fabio experienced). And on the mental development side: nowhere than on a boat with two parents constantly present can a baby be more touched and cuddled! This was why we, and many like us, decided to go cruising as soon as the possibility presented itself, which was when the youngest was 6 months old.

One of the nice things about very young kids is that they cannot talk, hence cannot complain! They don't demand a separate bedroom, a laptop or glamorous clothes. So without caring for their preferences one only has to make sure they are safe.

As the baby starts to sit properly several boats secure an ordinary car seat outside in the cockpit to allow the child to take part in the family life while being safe from violent movements and its own imprudence. Unfortunately our baby didn't agreed to being strapped down and the only seat he liked was the plastic seat tied to the back arch. Baby Sergio liked swinging around at eye hight and we fixed some shock cords to prevent too violent swinging when underway.



As far as food is concerned artificial milk is available world wide, brand names often change and as some milks have a different flavour it might be wise to stock up as much as you think you need. Once solid food is introduced the picture becomes a little more complex. Due to cultural differences on when to introduce what, the composition of ready made baby meals differs from one country to another. Our baby liked the ready made meals in the Canary Islands so I stocked up for an Atlantic crossing and for the first two months in Brazil. On the second day out of the Cape Verde Islands he spit everything back. I still recall the tears of gratitude of the boatsman who took our lines in Rio de Janeiro when I presented him with three months of baby food. The baby obviously did not want to die of hunger but he wanted to be treated no different from the rest. So only when he saw that it was our food that was put first into a food processor and then onto his plate did he eat it.

### **School**

In our 2002-2004 trip I also interviewed the parents and included a question about the problems on board, both those anticipated beforehand and those actually experiencing while underway. While the most frequent anticipated worry related to the health of the child, the actually experienced problems mostly related to school.

If you embark on boat schooling you can opt for a 'correspondence' course. But you can also decide to do it yourself as an Australian mother told me: school programmes expect kids to spend full days, Monday to Friday, in teaching schedules that do not take into account that we are not in a house in a street downtown but are literally subjects to the ever changing environment. Whichever way you go it is a difficult issue and we haven't met a boat arguing that they found 'the way', all boats struggle.



School in Cape Verde

There are some ideas about schooling that comes to mind. First of all don't start at the age of six just because this might be when you would send them to school had you been living on land. Start whenever the kid seems in a learning mode. Then don't start right after moving on board. Chances are that the parents will need somewhere between 3 and 6 months to adjust to their new style of living and there is no reason to believe that kids are different. Allow them to adapt a little to this new life style before starting to school them. That delay gives you the possibility to observe your children. Try to look at them as laboratory mice and make mental notes on how they appear to pick things up, what comes natural to them, what they seem to dislike, their strength and weaknesses for intellectual and abstract thought. This information will be very valuable when you decide on how

best to teach your child and, if there is more than one, accept and adapt that they may be very different. Perhaps sometimes accept that it simply doesn't work, give up your 'high' goals and destress everyone on board by concentrating on the basic language and maths.

Given the adaptation time it is not uncommon for families who set out for one year only to skip schooling all together and discuss upon return in what class they should go. Even if you did not institutionalise school for your relatively short cruise you will notice automatic improvements. Geography and history benefit from the traveling. Spelling and language conception improve as the child is surrounded by other languages. Mental arithmetic benefits from calculating with exchange rates. The main problem with schooling is motivation because there is always some excuse. Sometimes peer pressures works. One boat with two boys of 7 and 12 invited the 8 year old girl from a neighbouring boat over and suddenly the boys did their school work in half of the time.

Also worth a try is a 'grandparent boat'. A cruiser with kids attracts other boats, in particular those with grandparents who miss their grandchildren and with a little bit of luck they might want to be involved in schooling.



Our kids on their way to Canadian grandparents *Calabar*

Everyone we spoke to on our previous cruise around the Atlantic was convinced of the positive effect cruising has on children also with respect to their academic performance. They are more independent can organise themselves, keep themselves busy and motivated and understand the reason for school. Other reasons we have often heard for the preference for boat schooling is the additional control you have over your children, in particular peer pressure for doing drugs, harassing the less able, playing violent computer games, etc. Your children do not form part of a school class, they have no one to measure with so they develop themselves instead of adapting to group behaviour. At one point we started wondering whether the fact that the parents believe the cruising life is good for children and their education is a self sustained belief, in the sense that they do not want to believe that they force the children to take part in their chosen life style. So we started talking to children that had been cruising and were back on land or back on the boat again after having spent some years as landlubbers. None of those children believed that their academic performances suffered because of their cruising life and although they admitted that they sacrificed some of their youth by not hanging around with stable friends, they all found that their cruising experience more than made up for that. They realised that they were found interesting upon return and being interesting is probably one of the most sought after qualities in teens. They also realised that what they had experienced was unique and awesome, no one we talked to was unhappy to have been out on the blue. Their boat years taught them why certain things need to be done, they get to appreciate being part of a group and to have responsibilities on their own. While children are usually not consulted about school nor the reason for learning, the time on board teaches them the value of knowledge.

# Finances?

A central concept to cruising life is compromise and it also applies to the budget. How to compromise and what to prioritise is a personal matter. The cruising lifestyle will cost you what you decide to spend on it. There is undoubtedly a tenfold difference between cruisers enjoying the same anchorage. I am not a believer in the adage that the money you spend is a percentage of your boat's value but there is an indirect link since people with more money tend to have more expensive boats and more expensive lifestyles. Rather similar to landlubbers: how and where you live is mostly determined by what you can afford. We know people who became vegetarians to save money and we know people who cruised from harbour to harbour because they always ate out. It is also of little use to discuss the boat's costs since they depend primarily on your boat (size and age), where in the world you sail and what type of sailor you are (see my chapter on 'Why go cruising?'). My 'part time' cruising parents hauled *Faidate* out twice a year to travel home. Brazilian 'sell up and sail' cruisers on *Luiza* baked bread in the morning for the anchorage to make money to buy anti-fouling paint. After a month they then found a sandy beach with enough tide to be able to apply it to their monohull.



Some of the boats we interviewed about boat life



Generally speaking cruising is of course relatively expensive because you do need a boat. So that is the first compromise. How much you are willing to spend on the boat itself? And remember that the boat price you see – whether new or used – is the pre-cruising price. You will need to outfit the new boat or repair/upgrade the old boat before you move onboard.

For some unknown reason a guideline circulates particularly in the pre-cruisers online world that the annual maintenance cost is 10% of the boat's value. It is absurd to relate maintenance costs to the boat's value as that would imply that the newer (thus more expensive) boat the higher the maintenance costs. It is not the boat's value but its age that is the prime indicator of the maintenance costs: the older the higher. There is no direct relationship either between the boat's value and its running cost. Bigger boats pay more in harbour fees but a 1mln multihull pays 5 times not 10 times the fee of a 1k monohull. When you upgrade, yes, expensive boats are usually bigger and bigger costs more but the washing machine or Starlink costs the same and the man labour to repair an engine hardly depends on the engine's size.



If we look at our total running costs (so maintenance, some upgrading, repair, harbours, diesel) we spend 1,5% of the new boat value annually. And that is for a boat a few years old being cruised part time. So while there is little real maintenance, harbour dues are high for the months that we leave the boat to travel home. So more than the type of boat you end up buying and outfitting, your budget is influenced by 'where' and 'how' you cruise. Exactly the same parameters as your choice of boat in the first place. By 'where' I mean in the geographical sense and by 'how' the type of cruiser you are. The 'where' and 'how' are connected. If you intend to use the boat as an additional source of income you are likely to cruise in traditional, expensive, areas like the Caribbean. Just as if you sail with family or guests you are likely to be in more expensive places due to the availability of international flights (and kids expecting you to pay those). If you are a 'part-time cruiser' you are likely to stay in areas with good harbours. So not only will you need a house (and car) when you are on land, your cruising destination will also be relatively expensive. Whereas if you are a 'sell-up and sail' cruiser you will probably want to experience cheap scarcely populated areas and won't need harbours for months at a time. The financial bill also depends on 'how' you cruise. If you are the 'sell-up and sail' cruiser chances are you are capable and willing to do many things yourself so you will need fewer contractors. If you are cruising for a year or two, time is of more value than money, so you get things done in stead of letting them be broken or repairing them yourself. If you are interested in performance, you will not want to compromise on sails, increasing the running costs (by now we blew two spinnakers).

Another budget line that relates to the type of cruiser you are is 'tourism & entertainment'. Depending where and why you cruise you might want to explore the inland, adding harbour fees, rental cars and hotels to your expenses. You might decide that when in view of a restaurant you do not cook (that's me!) You might use the opportunity to learn new (water)sports or go to local festivals. It is a budget line that easily varies a 100-fold between one cruiser and another. Safety equipment is also a very personal budget line. Not only is the list of safety equipment almost endless and expensive, many need annual checks.

An important budget line that we hardly had 20 years ago is connectivity. Connectivity costs a lot if you want anything similar to your home setup. On top of your connection you will have to add the annual or monthly subscriptions for things like charts, weather forecast and routing. It is a distant memory that we navigated with paper charts and listened to radio weather forecasts.

There is only one running cost that truly depends on the boat value is the (facultative) insurance premium. The insurance premium is sold as a percentage of your boat value – just like cars – but it varies between 0,5 to 5 %, a tenfold depending on the company, cruising area and your own risk. It is not uncommon for long term cruisers only to have (the in some countries obligatory) third party insurance and live with the risk of losing their home.

A tentative conclusion on finances is after the initial investment in the boat you will adapt your cruising life to what you can or wish to spend on it. Some will adapt their cruising destination to their financial situation, others will adapt their cruising style but in the end compromises become natural. Except for the ones who left with a lump sum and decided beforehand to stop when it ran out, I have never known cruisers who stopped because they ran out of money. They just decide to avoid the (in their eyes) undue expenses or to stop for a limited period of time to earn some money. If you are willing to try the cruising life, let it not be imagined financial reasons stopping you.



Saying goodbye to *Faidate*  
and cruising with the kids

Cuba 2004



*DINO*

FAIDATE

# Leaving the blue

Stopping your cruising life is probably the most difficult decision you will make or at least the hardest since casting off. For some cruisers, in particular the 'Sabbatical' it is a given since they cruise for fixed period of time. For the rest it is the consequence of changing circumstances and that can be anything. Perhaps it just didn't work out in the way you dreamt, perhaps you fell ill or the boat got seriously damaged, perhaps you are needed back home, perhaps you long for a working career, perhaps it's time for the kids to go to college or perhaps you just got bored and felt you had seen enough. I have heard many reasons but not a single one that the money ran out which is interesting as finances is one of the main worries people have before they cast off. Actually it works opposite, as with time boats devalue and house prices rise some 'sell up and sail' cruisers cannot afford to stop.

During our cruise we discussed the difficulty of returning to our careers with Kiwi Glenn who was travelling around the world with Bridget and their daughters. They cruised for a couple of years and then stayed put for several years to work, in Asia, in Europe, wherever they wanted to explore. His experience was that you need to find the right employer, the one who understands the knowledge cruising brings you. And sees your enthusiasm because you will experience, as we did in fact, a surge of energy to take up work again. It is new and exiting and while you might lack some factual knowledge of recent developments, you bring unheard energy to any kind of working place. Aside from the fascinating lifestyle to share at the coffee breaks.

Not only is it difficult to throw in the towel – because that is how it feels like every time you need to explain your decision to stop – it is also difficult to become a landlubber again. A reason for this is financial since few people have a house to return to and are burdened by the emotional stress of selling the boat. Then there is the odd feeling of moving back home but feeling alienated. You are foreign to the ways of living that were your own before you left. Even if you have only been out on the blue for a few years the society has changed on every level. Your friends and family will not have registered this change since it occurs at baby steps, but you will feel out of sync for probably the same six months that it took you to adapt to the cruising lifestyle.

Something else that you will notice, similar to when you moved to another country for a few years, is that 'home time' hardly create experiences. We live in a very organised world where every week is similar to the one before, where the world around us evolves together with us and time passes without us actually experiencing anything new. Only when we go on holiday do we interact with foreigners, eat different food or see natural wonders. But those are holidays and do not effect our life with work, school, sports and social gatherings with family and friends. When you come home from an extensive cruise you will have changed because the inputs that are normally restricted to the holidays have been there for years and some of them are there to stay. You will have evolved outside your home base and that, in today's world, might mean trouble: you do no longer fit the mould. It will take effort to readjust, to remember that your dear old friends did not have your experiences while you were away and that you must accept that to find your way back into the flock.

While you are readjusting to your home flock you are letting go of your cruising friends. We exchanged emails with almost all the boats we met in our 2002-2004 trip some of which became very dear friends during the trip. Yet once back home it didn't take many months for them to completely disappear from our lives. In fact the opposite occurrence to when we set out and got

cruising friends along the way because our old friends had no place in our new way of life. And just as our cruising friends disappeared so did our cruising ways. While in the beginning the office felt awfully claustrophobic, airless and the days endless, it only took a few months to feel as normal as before. By six months the family was back to ordinary with the kids, school, friends and us in the rat's race.

The thing I probably enjoyed most when we became landlubbers again was that nothing disturbs my sleep. There are no night watches anymore, I don't have a stopwatch ringing every 15 minutes to awake me from an accidental sleep. I don't care about whether the anchor holds, I don't even have one anymore! A downpour doesn't force me out of bed to close all the hatches left open to let in the night breeze. On the contrary I feel super happy hearing the hauling wind from my comfortable big and immobile bed.

Since I am married to an Italian it seems fit to quote Dante's canto on Ulysses '*fatti non foste a viver come bruti, ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza*'. Pass the pillars of Hercules (so: exit the known world being the Mediterranean) and seek virtue and knowledge. But once the world is explored one shouldn't keep reliving the adventurous past as it seems Marco Polo did when he returned home to Genova. You will need to let go, even forget your cruising time in order to successfully reintegrate on land. But rest assured it will have changed you forever and for the better, of that I am quite convinced.

Happy Cruising!

*Katja Giannini  
sailing Faidapiu*

*Salvador da Bahia, December 2024*



The pillars of Hercules

# A blonde's thoughts on cruising

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