Cruising the Med is safer, cheaper and more enjoyable with the right boat and equipment



When you choose a boat, her design, features and equipment should support the style of sailing that you intend to pursue. Racing, weekend sailing, crossing oceans, and extended cruising all require different capabilities in your boat. For cruising, different locations – say the English coast, Australia's east coast, the Baltic Sea or the Caribbean – offer different conditions. How can liveaboard cruising in the Mediterranean be characterised?

- Frequent short passages: While there are a few crossings which require overnight sailing (Menorca to Sardinia, for example), the vast majority of Med sailing is short-passage, even line-of-sight. You can sail from Venice to Marmaris (about 1,200 nautical miles) without ever needing to put your navigation lights on.
- Constant anchoring, sometimes in deep water: most Med cruisers try to avoid

marinas, where prices often exceed €200 per night for a mid-sized monohull and 50-100% more for a catamaran. Some of the coastline, particularly in Croatia and Turkey, is steep and requires anchoring in depths of 20m or more.

- Frequent Med-mooring: When you do need to visit a town or a marina, reversing up to a dock or pontoon and attaching stern lines is the standard method.
- Frequent dinghy use: While anchored, you will be relying on your dinghy for everything from provisioning to dining, sightseeing to socialising, and maybe shore-based exercise or walking the dog!
- Changeable winds: There’s no steady trade winds here! In many parts of the Med, light morning airs turns into blustery afternoon sea breezes, and the local effects of the land can radically alter the wind as you pass by capes, mountains and valleys.
- Short-handed crew: The vast majority of Mediterranean liveaboards are couples, often retired couples.
- Summer heat: Med summers are getting hotter and heatwaves more frequent. Dealing with the heat, both day and night, is becoming a major consideration.
- Off-grid living: Cruisers can be more successful in avoiding those expensive marinas if they do not constantly need to charge batteries and fill water tanks.



The dinghy is your lifeline – in this case, for shopping at the floating supermarket

Putting these together, we can look at the design features and equipment which make a cruising boat suitable for this kind of sailing. I would say that liveaboard cruising in the Med will be safer, cheaper and more enjoyable if your boat has these seven essential capabilities.

Capability 1: Short-handed Sail Handling

With frequent short passages and changeable, often gusty winds, you will be doing a lot of hoisting, reefing and lowering the sails. As a minimum, all lines should run to the cockpit. A furling mainsail makes it easier to reef, and therefore more likely that you will reduce sail area at an appropriate time (in-mast furling is often criticized as easily jammed, but good technique minimises the risks). An autopilot makes it much easier to make sail-plan changes single-handed.

Capability 2: Safe Anchoring

There is a lot of anchoring to be done, in many different settings – the crowded anchorage crammed with charter boats, Med-mooring with anchor at a Greek town quay, shore-tying in Croatia or Turkey – your ground tackle is a vital part of the boat's equipment and the more trustworthy it is, the better you will sleep. Pay particular attention if buying an ex-charter boat as the anchor and chain are often undersized. You should look for a heavy spade anchor (such as a Rocna, Ultra or Mantus) with at least 80m of chain and a high-quality swivel. Stainless steel chain has several advantages over galvanised chain, and a key one is that it doesn't pile up in the anchor locker and block the windlass – for one friend who often sails solo, this is a major issue.

Capability 3: Seamless Med-mooring

For those unfamiliar with "Med mooring", the technique involves reversing up to a dock or pontoon, attaching port and starboard stern lines to cleats or rings on the dock, and holding the bow in place using either your anchor (common at public town quays in Greece) or "lazy lines" (common at private marinas). A crosswind always makes things more challenging. To Med-moor successfully, usually under the watchful gaze of a taverna full of diners, requires some capabilities of your boat:

- The ability to reverse in a straight line, preferably in the direction you want to go: on a monohull, a fin keel, a single rudder (not twin rudders) and a bow thruster all help you to control the boat in reverse. Catamarans are much easier in this regard.
- The ability to deploy the anchor while reversing the boat: you may have extra crew on the bow, but if you are a couple, your partner will be needed at the stern to throw the lines. Better to have a "chain counter" (remote control for the windlass) in the cockpit or a completely remote windlass control around your neck.
- The ability to throw lines to the dock, receive the return line and attach it to the cleat, all while controlling the throttle, anchor chain and bow-thruster: this is a problem on monohulls with a centre cockpit, and catamarans with a helm station far from the stern (sometimes up a flight of stairs): in either of those

cases, you would repeatedly have to leave the helm to deal with lines, and return to the helm to control the boat.



Med-mooring with anchor in Gaios, Ionian Islands

Capability 4: A Capable Dinghy

Your dinghy needs to be large and powerful enough to take you and your crew to shore, along with any pets, your rubbish and your laundry, and return with provisions, guests and their luggage, bottled drinking water and clean laundry! It needs to be easy to board and easy to unload bags of groceries. It also needs to be easy to raise and stow when underway, and easy to deploy at the next anchorage.

Catamarans are wonderful in this respect, with large, powerful tenders usually suspended from davits between the two hulls, and easily boarded from the stern of the hulls. For monohulls, size and weight are constrained, and stowage arrangements vary: larger and newer boats may have a “garage”, while ex-charter boats may have no solution except for lashing the dinghy to the foredeck, blocking the cabin below. Davits on the stern are useful, and high davits, usually combined with a solar arch, allow you get off the boat via the passerelle when Med-moored. A fold-down swim platform makes boarding the dinghy and unloading cargo much

easier. Conversely, the narrow steps on an older “sugar scoop” style of transom can be quite precarious.



High davits on this monohull allow the crew to walk across the passerelle with only a minor stoop…



… while catamarans allow the outboard to be left on the dinghy, with easy launching

Capability 5: Dealing with Heat

Many larger boats, and most modern catamarans, have air conditioning supported by a generator. While not the friendliest solution to the environment or to your neighbours, it is effective at keeping things cool. For the rest of us, heat can be mitigated with a large bimini over the cockpit, a boom-tent over the cabin and fans in all of the cabins. While many “owner’s version” boats have a palatial double cabin at the stern, the ventilation is usually better in the forward cabin, especially if a wind-scoop is added.



Low-tech heat mitigation: a boom tent

Capability 6: Off-grid Living

A cruising boat needs to be reasonably self-sufficient in electrical power and water. For power, the consumption, storage and generation need to be in balance. Power is consumed by lights and fans, fridges and other appliances, electronics and autopilot, electric pumps and winches, recharging of devices and many more. Storage of power is usually the house bank of batteries, sometimes with supplemental batteries. Generation may be from solar panels, wind turbines, a diesel generator or other solutions. It’s important that your boat can live within its electrical means, otherwise you will need to run the engine or visit marinas on a regular basis.

During the summer cruising season, the Med offers up to 14 hours of daily sunshine, and, apart from the Aegean Sea, only patchy wind, so solar panels are more effective than wind turbines. On a mid-sized monohull, with minimal appliances,

400W of solar is probably a realistic minimum, paired with 300Ah of batteries. A larger boat, with electric toilets and winches, a microwave, washing machine and perhaps some electric scooters to be charged, might require 700-800W of solar with 400-600Ah of battery storage. Large catamarans with electrical appliances, air conditioning and a water-maker are likely to run 1200-2000W of solar and still use a generator for the air-con.

As for water, a cruising couple typically consumes 20-40L per day of tank water, excluding drinking water. That means, allowing some buffer, that a small tank of 400L may only last 1-2 weeks. On our own Jeanneau 45, the 630L tanks keep us going for 4-5 weeks, but we are careful, taking short showers and using mostly saltwater for washing and rinsing dishes.



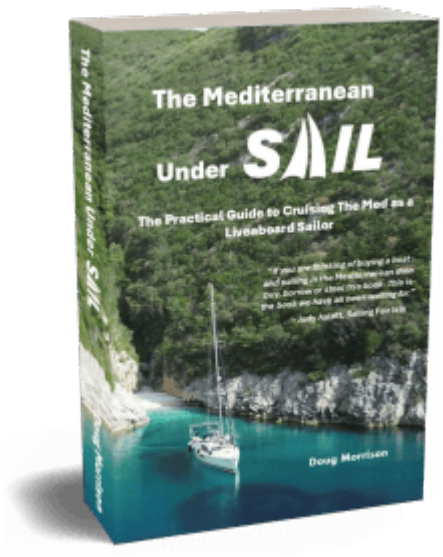
Off-grid in Turkey, and in no hurry to return

So you see, the features of your boat really can make a difference. Taking into account Mediterranean cruising conditions – short passages, lots of anchoring, frequent Med-mooring, constant dinghy use, and heat – and the requirement for many liveaboard sailors to avoid frequent visits to marinas, the right set of boat features can make your cruising life safer, cheaper and more comfortable. Happy Med cruising!

Doug Morrison is a retired IT consultant and RYA Yachtmaster. Since 2022, together with his wife Malini, he has been cruising the Mediterranean aboard their Jeanneau 45 *Ambiente*, covering over 12,000 miles and twelve countries.

This article is extracted from Doug's book, *The Mediterranean Under Sail: The Practical Guide to Cruising the Med as a Liveaboard Sailor.* The 340-page paperback can be delivered worldwide.

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