The right marina can make a big difference to your liveaboard life during the cool, wet Mediterranean winter

If you’re thinking about liveaboard cruising in the Med, your mental image probably involves plentiful sunshine and swimming in warm, clear water – in other words, summer. Winter might come as a shock.

It is wet everywhere, but particularly in the the Adriatic – Montenegro receives four times more winter rainfall than rainy Manchester.

The daytime temperature hovers around 10-14°C across most of the region, which is pleasant enough, but you will need heating on your boat. Solar power and batteries might allow you to be power-sufficient during the summer, but you are less likely to generate enough during the shorter, cloudier winter days.

Then there are storms, large systems which blow in from the Atlantic: they mostly affect the western and northern areas of the Med, but sometimes reach as far as Turkey. The winter of 2025/26 was exceptionally awful, with a succession of storms causing flooding, landslides and coastal damage.



Porto Montenegro, with snow on the mountains

So how to deal with up to six months of cool, wet and stormy weather? You have several options:

1. Continue to cruise, or remain at anchor, living aboard
2. Leave the boat out of the water in a boatyard, and go somewhere else
3. Spend the winter living aboard in a marina

In this article we'll focus on the third one.

Marinas commonly offer a “winter contract” for six or seven months, or at least have low monthly rates during the off-season. Living aboard in a marina should be comfortable, with a shore-power connection to run electrical appliances and heating/air-conditioning, and hot showers available in a nearby service building. Of course you can leave the boat to go travelling or return home: most marinas will check on the lines to make sure that your boat is secured, but any additional services (like periodically starting the engine or opening up the boat for ventilation) might require a *gardiennage*[1] arrangement – or a friendly neighbour.

How do you go about choosing a marina? Everyone has different criteria and priorities, but here are some factors to consider in your evaluation:

1. **Quality of facilities**: Are pontoons, cleats and lazy lines well maintained? Are the toilet/shower blocks warm, clean, regularly serviced, and close to your boat? Is there a laundry, guest lounge, library, or social/BBQ area?
2. **Cost**: Apart from the winter berthing fee, what are the costs of water and electricity? Does the marina insist on its own technical staff for maintenance, and/or charge a premium for outside contractors?
3. **Shelter from winds and swell**: Some marinas are exposed to winds or swells from a certain direction
4. **Security**: Is the marina entrance secure, and are the pontoons protected by gates, security cameras, or guards? Is the general area safe?
5. **Wi-fi or 4G/5G signal quality** for your internet connection
6. **Availability of gym, pool or spa**, perhaps with yoga classes
7. **Access to a town** with supermarkets, fresh market, restaurants, doctors, etc. Does most or all of the town stay open during winter?
8. **Proximity to transport**: buses, trains and car rental for excursions, and an airport with a regular winter flight schedule
9. **Location and Surroundings**: Some marinas are in town centres, others are isolated. Does the location offer attractive scenery and opportunities for hiking, cycling or winter sports? Do nearby towns and cities offer interesting shopping, dining and culture?
10. **Interesting cruising destinations** within reach
11. **Availability of marine services and chandleries** and ease of importing spare parts and receiving shipments

12. **Residency and visa options:** Unless it’s your home country, you’ll need permission for a longer stay than the typical 90-day tourist visa allows. For non-EU citizens, spending the winter outside the Schengen zone is paramount, unless some long-stay visa arrangement has been made.
13. **Boatyard** nearby for haul-out
14. **Community of liveaboards**: See below
15. **For cruisers with kids**: presence of other “kid boats”

Many marinas have quite a community, and there is often a regular, self-organised social programme which might include drinks and dinners, darts and poker, sightseeing tours, cooking classes and more.

Where are the popular marinas where these communities gather? The following are some of the marinas where liveaboards report having a busy social life:

- Spain: Almerimar, Cartagena
- Italy: Licata, Marina di Ragusa (both in Sicily)
- Tunisia: Cap Monastir, Yasmine Hammamet
- Montenegro: Porto Montenegro, Porto Novi, Marina Lazure
- Greece: Preveza, Lefkas, Kos, Leros, Agios Nikolaos (Crete)
- Turkey: Çeşme, Göcek, Kaş
- Cyprus: Limassol



Winter fun in Kolasin, Montenegro, about 3 hours' drive from the marinas

If you get the opportunity to visit your prospective marina before committing to a long contract, you will feel much safer with your choice. Otherwise you will have to rely on reports and reviews from others. The cruising apps *Navily and NoForeignLand* are excellent resources for this, as are the Facebook groups which focus on sailing in the Med or one of the specific countries. Don't forget to look at the YouTube episodes where crews may have spent a winter in one of your marinas of interest.

The popular marinas tend to get booked up six or even twelve months in advance of the winter season, with the exception of those in Turkey where high prices have driven many liveaboards away. Some operate waitlists and may refuse to confirm any bookings until the second half of the year. This can be frustrating when trying to firm up plans, including visa plans for non-EU citizens. It's often a great relief when the confirmation comes through.

Winter in the Med can pass slowly. Spending the time in a nice marina – with facilities, shops, excursions and community – can make all the difference.

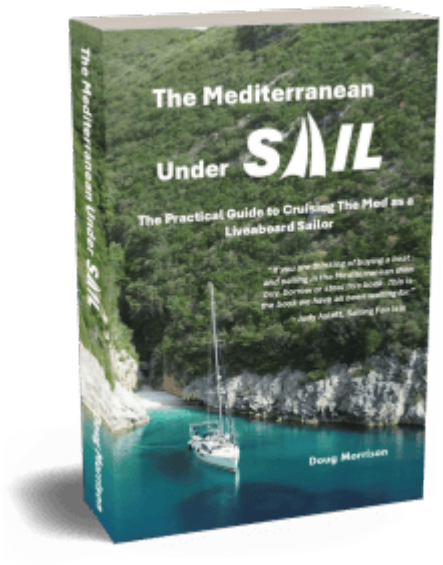
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[1] A service to provide monitoring and maintenance of yachts while the owner is not present

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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