***Anchoring among crowds, Med-mooring and shore-tying are daily activities when cruising the Med – you need to be on your game.***

As we sailed into Albania from Montenegro, our minds turned to a familiar set of questions: what do we know about the country? Who are its famous or infamous people? What is it internationally renowned for? For Albania, the answer quickly emerged as the “Taken” movies and the famous line uttered by Liam Neeson’s character: *I don’t have money. What I do have is a particular set of skills.*

With luck, you won’t need any of *those* skills when cruising the Mediterranean, but the sailing conditions are different, and you need to be prepared. Personally, I learned to sail on a racing boat in the English Channel and for several years I had never seen an anchor being used. Med Mooring involves docking the boat, usually stern-to, against a pontoon or seawall, using either laid “lazy lines” or the anchor to hold the bow in place – few sailors have seen or tried this technique outside the Mediterranean. In Croatia and Turkey in particular, it is common to anchor with lines ashore, allowing more boats to fit into a small space where there is no room to swing. Crossed anchor chains are a common occurrence, especially in Greece’s crowded town quays, and every sailor should know how to deal with them.



*Lines ashore are essential in narrow bays*

No matter whether you secure your boat in a wide open anchorage, a town quay, a private marina or tied-up to the rocks, you may need some particular skills which are new.

## Anchoring

Anchoring in the Med follows the same principles as elsewhere: choose the right location with suitable shelter, swing room and depth, and a bottom that your anchor can dig into; lay out sufficient chain while reversing downwind; check the holding by reversing on the anchor; swim over the anchor to visually check that it’s buried; and ensure a good night’s sleep with an anchor alarm. However the Med throws up some special challenges:

- **Posidonia**, the long, dark seagrass which covers many parts of the Med, is a vital habitat for marine life and protected in many areas, most forcefully in the Balearics – and it's terrible holding for an anchor. Best to avoid it, then, by checking satellite photos, some specifics apps such as Donia, and by looking over the side before you drop.
- Many Mediterranean anchorages are intensely **crowded**, with a mix of charter boats (especially in the Ionian and Croatia); day-rental RIBs (in Sardinia, they're like swarms of insects); large gulets in Turkey; and motor yachts which seem to get larger every year. The trend towards catamarans just makes the crowding worse. You will be anchored closer to your neighbours than you would like, but a few mitigating actions can lower the stress: wave and say hello as you approach, and maybe ask where their anchor is lying and how much chain they have out. Enjoying a refreshing swim at the end of the passage, I like to swim over my own anchor but also those of my neighbours, so I can see if any chains are crossed or anyone is at risk of dragging.
- **Wind changes** are common, from sea breezes which pick up in the afternoon to storm cells which bring strong and rotating winds. In theory, all boats swing together, but in practice the rate of swing is affected by many factors including the windage above the water, the hull design and keel shape, the weight of the boat and the weight of chain. If the boat next to you is very different to yours, try to allow a bit more space.
- **Debris**: Anchoring outside one of the many charming fishing villages is one of the delights of Med sailing, but your anchorage will often be shared with mooring buoys (i.e. concrete blocks) and discarded fishing gear including anchors, ropes and nets. Once, in Antiparos, our anchor chain got wrapped around a cluster of three fisherman's anchors, all knotted together – it took a heroic effort, diving to 7m, to unwrap it (that's heroic by my standards). There are several precautions you can take to avoid anchoring in a debris field: read the comments and warnings on the Navily and NoForeignLand apps; drive in circles over your intended anchoring spot (you boat will smooth the surface and give you better visibility of the bottom); and simply anchor further away from the shore.



*Whose anchor is on the posidonia?*

**Med Mooring**

Med mooring involves reversing up to a pontoon or a concrete dock, attaching your stern to the dock and keeping the bow stable using either your anchor or “lazy lines” – and you have to do this, often in a cross-wind, under the watchful gaze of a taverna-full of diners.

The keys to getting it right are, as usual, practice and planning. Firstly, you need to be practiced at reversing the boat, with an intuitive understanding of how well she steers and how quickly she stops. You should practice preparing and throwing stern lines, as getting this wrong (getting them tangled, or dropping them in the water) costs valuable time. The boat needs to be prepared: fenders out on both sides to protect neighbouring boats from your impact; a ball fender on the stern to protect your transom from the dock; stern lines ready for throwing, clear of obstructions such as the lifelines; and either the anchor ready to drop, or if lazy lines are

provided, then the boathook ready to pick them up. If you were towing your dinghy at the stern, it needs to be moved to the bow or hoisted. Finally the crew needs to be ready with roles assigned: someone on the helm, someone throwing the lines and cleating off the end as it is returned; and someone dropping the anchor, or picking up the lazy lines. It's important that everyone knows the sequence for attaching the lines: the windward stern line should be first.

If it goes smoothly, you'll be ready to join those diners in the taverna within 10 minutes; if not, you might be on their YouTube videos!

**Anchoring with Lines Ashore**

This is common in parts of Greece, more so in Croatia and almost universal in Turkey. Wherever the shore slopes steeply, or the channel is narrow, stern-tying allows more boats to anchor in a small space, neatly arranged in a row instead of swinging around. Once moored, you should have two stern lines, at approximately 45° angles from the stern cleats, attached to rocks on the shore (sometimes metal posts or rings are available). The anchor is holding the bow in place. The whole arrangement needs to be under tension, so there is limited opportunity for any movement or swinging.

Again, preparation is key. Your boat should be equipped with floating lines, at least 50m in length, ready to deploy from the stern. One of your crew should be ready to swim ashore with the lines (with beach shoes to scramble up the sharp rocks), or else ready to take the lines ashore with the dinghy or paddleboard.

First, choose your "berth", which is often a space between two other boats. Put your fenders out in case things go wrong. Drop the anchor in the desired spot, reversing towards the shore. Remember, with the chain under tension, and in deep water where you may be unable to see the bottom, you need to err on the side of caution and deploy more chain than usual. On Ambiente, the most dangerous and embarrassing moment we experienced in four years of cruising was when we dragged our anchor while shore-tied, coming to rest against our downwind

neighbour and unable to move without the efforts of two kind sailors in RIBs. We didn’t have enough chain out.

Once the anchor hits the seafloor, reverse into your “berth”.  If there is a crosswind, your boat will drift downwind towards your neighbour. It is therefore important to get the windward shoreline attached quickly while the helmsman attempts to keep the boat in place. But if things get hairy, just drive out, reposition the boat and start again. An initial position on the “upwind” side of the berth will buy you some more time.

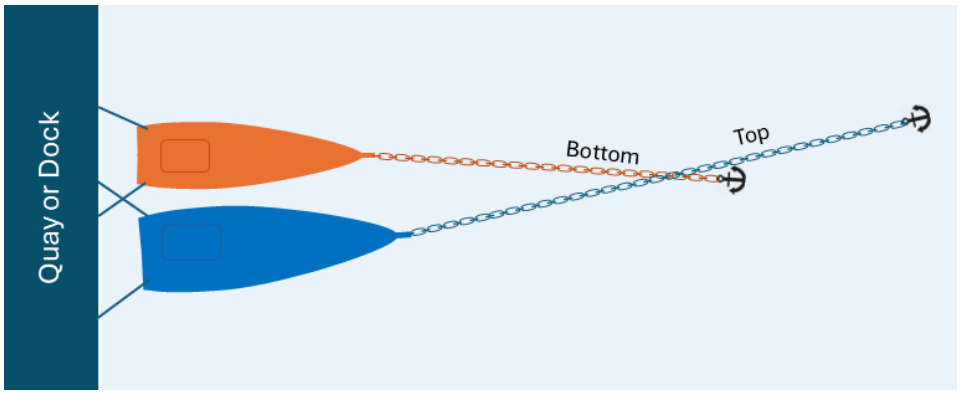


*Shore-tied boats in Mersincik, Turkey*

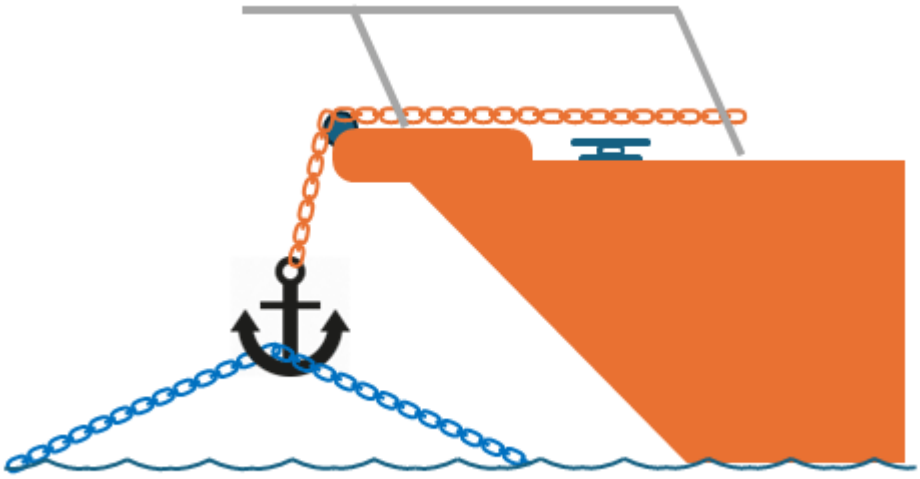
## Untangling Crossed Anchors

This situation occurs very frequently wherever boats are stern-tied with anchor close together – think of Greek town quays in particular – and where boats are

shore-tied in close proximity.

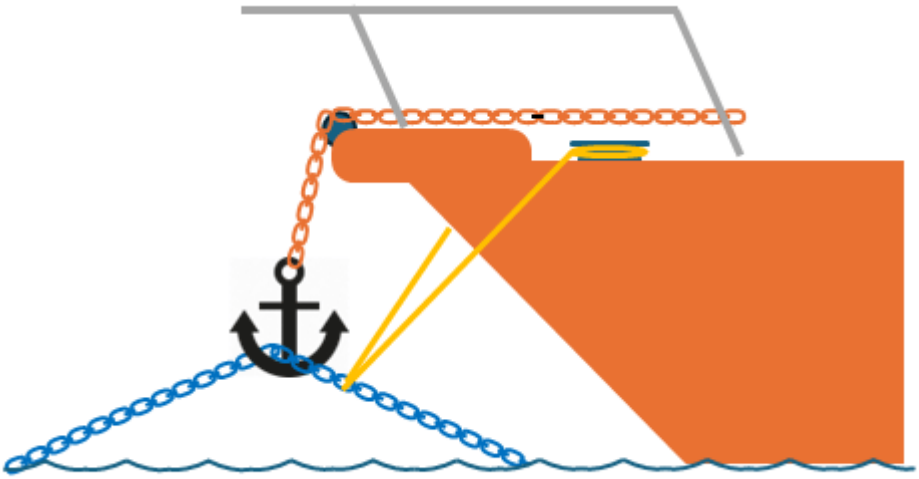



A boat leaving its berth (the orange boat in the diagram) finds that its windlass is struggling to lift the anchor. Sometimes the anchor comes up to the surface with another boat's chain hooked over it; sometimes it won't come up at all because of the extra weight. Blue Boat has laid its chain over the top of Orange Boat's chain. That's not saying that Blue Boat is to blame, as either or both boats could have dropped their anchors off-centre. Ideally, the situation is resolved as follows.

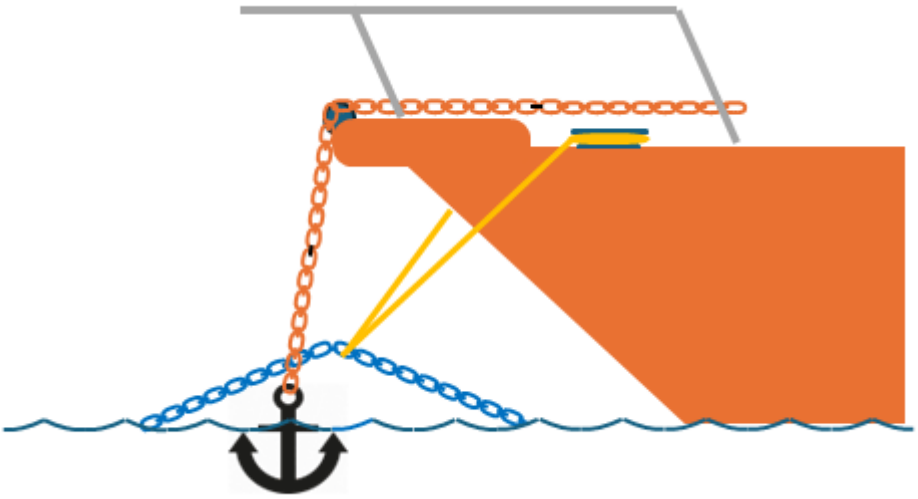


The orange boat has lifted the blue boat's chain and is stuck. If you're the skipper of the orange boat, it's tempting to rush, but the following steps can be taken slowly:

the boat is held in place and will not drift anywhere. If the wind is strong, motoring gently forwards will relieve the pressure on the blue boat's anchor and chain.



Take a length of rope, 6-10m long, and attach one end to a bow cleat (I keep a suitable rope in the anchor locker to avoid a round trip to the cockpit). Pass the other end underneath the fouled chain (using a boathook to fish it through), pull it tight and make it fast to the opposite cleat.



Release the anchor a metre or two and it should swing free, maybe with some help from the boathook, and the windlass can be used to finish raising it. The rope is holding the weight of the blue boat's chain and still keeping the orange boat in place.

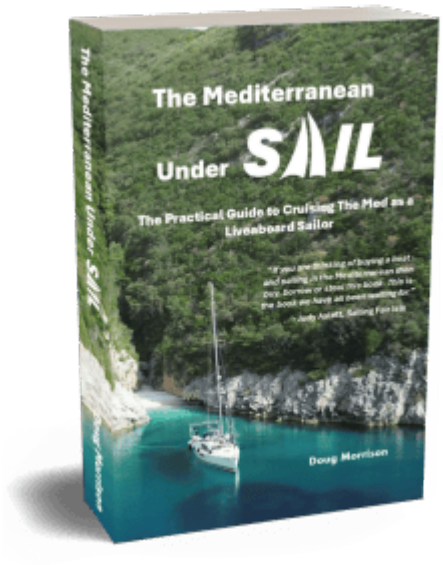
This is all much easier if assisted by someone in a dinghy at the bow of the boat, especially if the Blue Boat's chain is not just hooked but tangled around Orange Boat's anchor. It is all much harder if Blue Boat is unattended and the chain cannot be eased, or if Blue Boat is not another yacht but a large power boat or a Turkish gulet with a heavy chain. In those cases, diving may be required, or Blue Boat may need to leave its berth to lift its own chain.

With these skills, you will be able to confidently take on any anchoring or berthing challenge that the Med holds in store for you. If you're not yet proficient, you can find plenty of training material on YouTube but there's so substitute for hands-on practice. Find a place to rehearse these manoeuvres and get your crew familiar with their roles and the sequence of events. Even the small details, like tying a cleat hitch or preparing a mooring line for throwing, need to be performed reliably and will benefit from practice. Consider hiring an instructor or a skipper for a day or two. Above all, don't miss out on some of the best Mediterranean experiences because you don't have the particular set of skills.

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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