



Live-aboards get together for a dock party.

For Many Americans, Home is a Boat

By STEVE FOX

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Millions of Americans own pleasure boats, and for many thousands their boat is not just a hobby, but a home. All manner of folks, ranging from retired couples on luxury yachts to those who step off their decks on their way to work every morning, live on boats. Some live-aboard boats are small and simple, some are huge and equipped with flat-screen TVs, air conditioning, roving Internet access and elegant dining rooms. Some live-aboards travel around America's coasts, lakes and rivers; some never leave the dock.

There are no official numbers on how many Americans live aboard, but the U.S. Coast Guard estimates that 12.8 million boats were registered in 2007, and marinas often set aside about 10 percent of their rental spaces, which are called slips, for live-aboards.

Those who live aboard generally say they like being close to the water, along with a casual lifestyle that often includes weekend "dock parties" where boaters gather to share food, drinks and stories about recent trips.

For a look at high-end living aboard, meet Chuck and Carolyn Tulloh, who have about \$1.3 million invested in their 18.5-meter, go-anywhere-in-the-world boat "Rising Wolf" and are currently docked in Channel Islands Harbor in California, about 48 kilometers south of Santa Barbara. Their slip fees run about \$1,800 per month. Both Tullohs still work in the financial services industry but have their eyes on retirement and adventures at sea. Meanwhile, they have top-end appliances and granite countertops in the galley, sophisticated navigational equipment on the bridge, two staterooms with their own bathrooms (called heads), and a flat-screen TV and home entertainment center. Outside is fresh air, fellow boaters and pet ducks.

"Living aboard is really fun," Mrs. Tulloh says. "I find that as I get older, I'm more interested in simplifying and downsizing my life. We have drastically reduced our living costs, which is great. We'd rather save our money for adventures to come. In terms of working, living



STEVE FOX

1



JIM FAVORS

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STEVE FOX

3

aboard doesn't make any difference. I just get up in the morning and go, just like I always have."

You don't have to be wealthy to live aboard. Walk 90 meters from the Tullohs' luxurious steel ship and there's Dave Nixon, 77 years old and happily retired on a 9-meter Columbia sailboat he bought nine years ago for \$8,000. Nixon lives on a monthly Social Security check of about \$1,000, with a little under \$600 going for his slip fees and the rest for food and incidentals. He walks to the grocery store, buys his books at thrift shops and places a great value on solitude.

"I think I was born to be a hermit," he says. "For me, living aboard is appealing because there's rarely anybody around. I can sit here and read and think and nothing interrupts my train of thought. I spend about one-quarter of what I did when I was working."

The interior of Nixon's boat is small but well-organized, with a bunk bed near

the bow, a compact galley where he cooks, and two settees. Like most live-aboards, he showers and does laundry at nearby facilities provided by the marina.

Monthly slip rentals are based on the length of the boat, with rates ranging from \$15 to \$35 a foot depending on the location and amenities of the marina. Marinas charge additional fees for living aboard. Showers, laundry, garbage and parking facilities are usually covered by the slip/live-aboard fees, with electricity, water and cable TV also supplied at additional cost. Live-aboards' wastewater is pumped out by special boats that travel from slip to slip.

"This is like camping out," says Nixon. "When it's cold, it's cold on the boat because I just have one little electric heater. When the weather is bad, I'm pretty well trapped on the boat. But for me, it's fine. When I was working, I used to look out the window and think how nice it would be to live on the water. Now I live

on the water and I love it. I get up early because it gives me more time in which to do nothing."

For Ralf and Shirley Guenzel, whose home is "Lucky," a 13-meter powerboat docked in Ventura, California, working full-time while living aboard is not a problem.

"You have to get used to having less space," says Mrs. Guenzel. "You have to plan your grocery shopping more carefully and you don't have as much room for clothes and other things, but we wouldn't go back to living on land. We're close to nature, there are other live-aboard couples we spend time with, and it's just a fun way to live."

The Guenzels paid \$93,000 for their boat and spend about \$950 a month on slip fees. Work keeps them close to the dock, but they sometimes spend weekends at an island about 40 kilometers off the California coast.

Some live-aboards travel around the

1. Chuck and Carolyn Tulloh's steel ship "Rising Wolf."
2. Lisa Favours grows her own herbs on their cruising boat "Kismet."
3. The interior of David Nixon's boat.
4. The main salon of Neil and Peggy King's motoryacht.
5. Carolyn Tulloh's galley on "Rising Wolf" has top-of-the-line appliances and granite countertops.
6. Dave Nixon lives alone on a 9-meter sailboat.

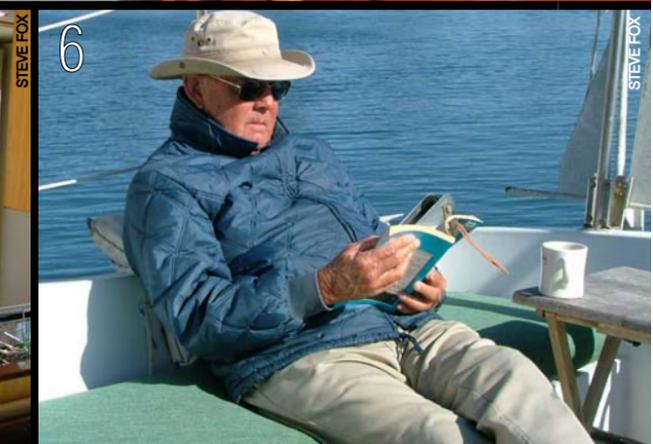


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STEVE FOX

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This live-aboard boat in Berkeley, California is simply a house that floats.

United States on their boats, visiting northern portions of the country in the summer and retreating south when the temperatures drop. These boaters, known as “cruisers,” move from one marina to the next and also spend time at anchor. Their boats are usually bigger and better equipped, with Neil and Peggy King’s 17-meter motoryacht being a good example.

“We live on the boat about seven months a year and at home in St. Augustine, Florida, the rest of the time,” says King, a licensed captain who has cruised with his wife to the Bahamas and around the eastern United States. “For us, one of the big attractions is the unpredictability of the experiences. You never know what might happen next, which sort of charges us up. Second are the people we meet along the way. Third is the freedom you experience while cruising. You see things from a new perspective on the water, in ways you never would if you were traveling on land.”

If there is a “guru” of the cruising lifestyle, it might be Tom Neale, who with his wife, Melanie, raised two daughters during the 30 years the family has lived aboard and cruised the U.S. East Coast and

the Bahamas. He is the author of a book on cruising called *All in the Same Boat* and a columnist for the 600,000-member Boat Owners Association of The United States whose blog can be found at www.boatus.com/cruising/TomNeale/. He cautions that cruising isn’t for everyone.

“There are a lot more retirees and folks on sabbaticals who are cruising, but some of them don’t prepare well, put up a lot of money, convince their spouse it’s going to be great and find out otherwise,” he said from Virginia, where the Neales were wintering.

“People sometimes go into cruising thinking it’s all about sitting on deck with a piña colada. The reality is that it’s extremely hard work. You have to be very self-reliant. You have to be a plumber, an electrician, a diesel mechanic, clean the boat’s bottom. You have to wear a whole lot of hats. But if you love the sea, it’s great. Our lifestyle has been cruising, going places, and we probably travel between 4,000 to 8,000 kilometers a year. We’ve experienced independence and an intimacy with nature that you could never imagine living in a house.”



Steve Fox is a freelance writer, former newspaper publisher and reporter based in Ventura, California.



“Loopers” Travel America’s Waterways

A very popular cruise for many live-aboards is a circular journey around the eastern half of the United States known as the “Great Loop.” Those who undertake the 9,600-kilometer trip, which includes the intracoastal waterways of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River and various canals and other rivers, call themselves “Loopers.”

“Part of the appeal of this particular trip was the history, because the United States was largely settled through its waterways,” says Bruce Melchert, who looped with his wife, Jeanne, in their 12-meter motoryacht appropriately named “Adventure.” “We stopped in a lot of historic towns and got a car and saw American history first-hand,” he says.

Cruising couples stress that it only works if both husband and wife want to go.

“It was more his passion than mine, but it was a great experience for both of us,” says Mrs. Melchert. “It’s not something you’d want to do with someone you’re not really close to, though. I never got the feeling from any of the women of ‘Oh, this is miserable.’ Most of the women doing it were having a good time.”

Jim and Lisa Favors, who live on a 12-meter motoryacht named “Kismet,” are doing the “Loop” for a second time. They interviewed 27 couples who also made the trip and produced a book, *When the Water Calls, We Follow*. They also write about their adventures on www.favorsgreatloopblog.com.

“We did the Loop in nine and a half months and it wasn’t nearly enough time to see everything, so now we’re at it again, this time for two years,” Favors says from Key West, Florida.

“We have a different backyard every day and we’ve seen so many incredible places,” says Mrs. Favors. “It’s changed my thinking about living ashore. Originally our plan was to cruise for a while and then buy a cottage somewhere. Now I don’t know how easy it would be to go back to land.”

—S.F.