



HOW TO GO 'COMMUTER CRUISING'

YOU CAN GET AWAY WITHOUT HAVING TO COMPLETELY DISCONNECT.



Ensenada is one of the closest hubs for commuter cruising, thanks to several full-service marinas and good connections to the U.S. border. Marina Coral also has the only dedicated fuel dock in the Ensenada area.

Most of us love the idea of cruising in the balmy tropics aboard our own boat, enjoying the luxury of going as slow as we wish, stopping where we please, soaking up tranquility. That's also my idea of paradise on Earth.

But for those of us who are still just dreaming, the notion of suddenly having to unplug 100 percent from our busy careers, of severing our strong family ties can be daunting — downright frightening.

Fortunately, "commuter cruisers" to Mexico aren't exiled from their stateside home, their work or their family.

Commuter cruising has been popular in Mexico for at least 10 years, thanks to:

- More marinas spread along the 3,500-mile Pacific coastline.
- Faster and more secure Internet access from boats in and near those marinas.
- The Temporary Import Permit (MTIP), which allows



foreigners to leave their boats in Mexico for up to 10 years without paying duty.

The single-entry tourist cards designed for 180-day pleasure cruising.

Today, thousands of U.S. and Canadian boaters in Mexico have turned their dreams into a reality by commuter cruising back and forth.

COMMUTER STEPS

First, you'll enter Mexico (presumably at Ensenada*) and get the boat's 10-year MTIP (less than \$75) and your 180-day tourist cards (about \$25 each). For six months, cruise Mexico at a leisurely pace, but before your 180-day tourist card expires, use your MTIP to leave your boat in a marina while you travel back to the U.S. When you reenter Mexico, pick up a fresh 180-day tourist card.

Tourist buses now link Pacific coast travelers to all U.S. border crossings at Tijuana and Mexicali, and also Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. If you look hard, you might still find one of the historical "chicken buses," but most Mexican bus lines today have air-conditioning, comfy seats, safe lavatories and free movies.

For example, if Mary flies home from Puerto Vallarta, George might move the boat to Manzanillo and wait there for Mary to return with her new tourist card. Then George flies home — even one hour on the U.S. side — gets his new tourist card and rejoins Mary to

Los Cabos at the tip of Baja has two commuter cruising hubs, at Cabo San Lucas (IGY Marina seen here) and at San Jose del Cabo. Los Cabos is world famous for sportfishing, so it's a pleasant destination for boat owners who commute to and from the U.S.

share the next leg of their Gold Coast cruising adventure. What if George and Mary both fly home, and they let their adult son Bob fly down to use the boat? Bob needs a notarized Letter of Authorization from George or Mary, permitting him to operate the boat — when and where — in their absence.

**Ensenada's CIS port clearance office is the easiest place to enter Mexico and get all your paperwork in one stop. But if you enter Mexico at a different port of entry, be sure to get your boat's MTIP from the Aduana before leaving your boat in a marina without staying on board.*

KEEP HOME FIRES BURNING

"We didn't give up our day jobs," said Cheryl Bonarowski, "because we need that income. Oh no, quite the opposite, we use our laptop every day for email, to stay in touch with [my boss, his employees] to keep the income flowing while we're off cruising."

Bonarowski attended a recent seminar I gave about commuter cruising, and she shared her personal experiences. She said she and her husband owned their boat for years and dreamed of cruising Mexico, but they

didn't know how they could afford to give up their regular income to be out of town for months at a time. Using their computer, they can continue to work from the boat. They've been happily commuter cruising for more than five years now. Bonarowski said when an occasional work-related problem pops up that can't be solved long distance, either she or her husband flies home and handles it in person.

Elaine Bowers is another veteran commuter cruiser who contributed to the seminar discussion.

"My mom," Bowers said, "would have gone totally [bonkers] if we didn't have the ability to stay in touch with her on email every single day — sometimes on the cellphone, too." Her husband used to use the Ham radio mainly for her to call her mother, but she became confused when she had to say "Over."

"We've had reliable email through SSB radio," Bowers said, "even out at some really distant anchorage." SSB email helps them limit more expensive cellphone usage.

THEN VS. NOW

Long ago, if you went foreign cruising, you needed to shut down your business, sell your home and appoint a power of attorney to manage any financial and familial problems for as long as you were out of touch — maybe years. Now, commuter cruising is much more practical. In fact, the need to get a new 180-day tourist card compels cruisers to make a trip home every five or six months. With the MTIP, you can bring back or ship new or replacement parts for the boat in Mexico without paying duty fees (as high as 100 percent in some cases).

Resident visas are another change that could help cruisers keep their savings topped off. Although more complex to obtain than a simple tourist card, a new resident visa allows multiple entries for four to 10 years, and you can earn money from Mexican sources.

For example, if you sewed canvas boat covers at home, a resident working visa allows you to get paid

for work performed in Mexico, such as sewing canvas covers. Advertise your services? No problema. You'll pay Mexican income tax, but you're legal to maintain a healthy income flow.

COMMUTER HUBS

Anywhere with a full-service marina and an easy air or land link to the U.S.-Mexican border could function as your next commuter hub. But some of the best spots for year-round commuter cruising have been at Ensenada, Los Cabos, La Paz, Puerto Peñasco, San Carlos, Guaymas, Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta, and during the winter at Manzanillo and Acapulco.

All the full-service marinas in Mexico have shore power and offer varying levels of boat-sitting services. That may range from walking by to check your dock lines to going aboard to run bilge pumps, battery chargers, generators, etc. Commuter cruisers can leave their boats behind and not worry — too much. ☺