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Get Out There

Do you have what it takes to make the jump to the long-range cruising lifestyle?

BY CAPT. NICOLE SOURS LARSON

→ If you've always wanted to try long-range cruising, go for it, according to **ROBERT DEMICHELI**, the semiretired owner/captain of San Francisco-based trawler *Odyssey*. DeMicheli, who has cruised the North American East and West coast plus Mexico and the Caribbean with his wife, Jackie, for more than 10 years, often provides interested recreational boaters with advice about the cruising lifestyle.

"Get up and go. Give it a try. You don't know until you try it. It's not for everyone. Until you do some long-range cruising, how do you know? Only you can make your dream come true," DeMicheli said.

But before you set out to sea, DeMicheli and other experienced cruisers stress the importance of having the right boat for your cruising and comfort needs. Make sure you clearly understand what you're getting into and are fully prepared for almost any eventuality, whether your goal is an ocean crossing, a circumnavigation or long-distance coastal cruising.

Are you resourceful, self-reliant, self-sufficient and handy, and willing and able to undertake your own maintenance and repairs? Do you like to take on unpredictable challenges and believe you can overcome whatever

comes your way? Are you willing to do the research, planning and preparation required for successful long-range cruising? If so, consider these issues while making careful preparations for the adventure of a lifetime.

CHOOSING YOUR BOAT AND EQUIPMENT

Whether you purchase a new boat or select a well-maintained brokerage vessel, do your research and differentiate between your *needs* and *wants*. Numerous books and blogs are available with recommendations on every aspect of buying and equipping your

boat. Be sure you have confidence in your boat and your equipment choices, as your comfort and safety will depend on them. Make sure the boat is well built and reliable. Some boat manufacturers and dealers, including Nordhavn and Selene, which specialize in boats for long-range cruising, offer extensive training and support for new boat owners. Their websites offer links to many owners' blogs filled with advice on choosing and equipping your boat for successful, comfortable cruising.

Most long-range vessels are fuel efficient and configured as trawlers or "passagemakers" with full-displacement hulls capable of speeds of 5 to 10 knots. Many trawlers have a single engine, though others come with twin screws. Both designs have their advocates. Are you comfortable cruising long distances without a backup? Or would a "get-home" or wing engine meet your needs in case of an engine failure?

While a fuel-efficient trawler equipped for long-range cruising can be used for weekend jaunts, a less-efficient high-performance vessel rarely has sufficient range for significant cruising without frequent refueling. It's important to know where and how far you plan to travel to determine whether your boat has adequate fuel capacity for your desired range.

CRUISERS' BOAT CHOICES

DICK BROWN AND HIS WIFE, DOROTHY, cruised from San Diego through the Panama Canal to the U.S. East Coast twice, in different boats, 25 years apart

— once in their 50s and again in their 70s. He said he is often asked what boat to buy.

"My first question is always, 'What are you going to do with it?'" Brown said.

For both voyages Brown, an engineer who performed his own maintenance, chose trawlers with relatively small, fuel-efficient engines. For the 1984–1985 trip, they traveled in an Ocean Alexander 50 carrying 1,200 gallons of fuel, with which they were capable of transiting from San Diego to southern Baja without refueling.

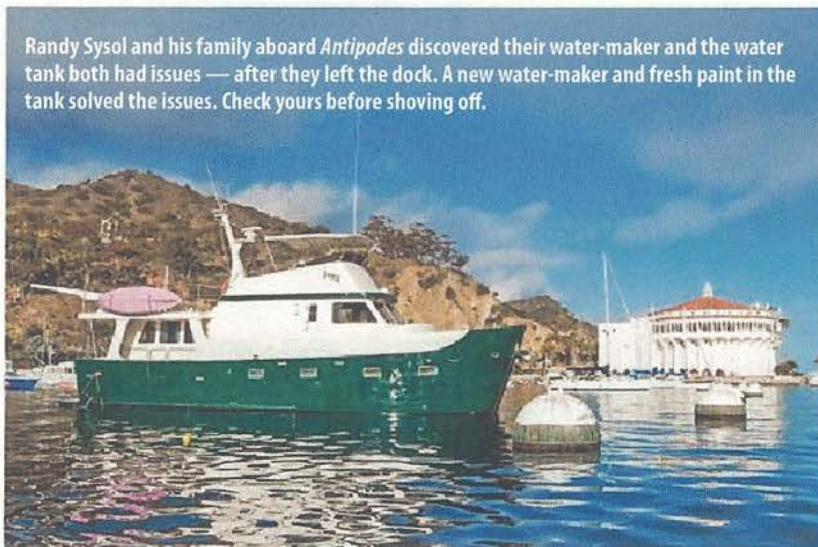
For the 2008–2010 cruise, Brown commissioned a Selene 59 built to his

own specs, with a 405 hp Cummins engine and 2,200-gallon diesel tanks, enabling the couple to avoid refueling on their longest leg, from Mexico's Yucatán through the Panama Canal to San Diego. He equipped his boat with an auxiliary engine.

"I didn't feel comfortable without a get-home engine, which runs off the main prop, and I didn't like the wing engine, which runs on the side," Brown said, explaining his choice.

Like many long-range cruisers, DeMicheli started as a sailor, sailing competitively around San Francisco Bay. Initially, he planned cruising by

Randy Sysol and his family aboard *Antipodes* discovered their water-maker and the water tank both had issues — after they left the dock. A new water-maker and fresh paint in the tank solved the issues. Check yours before shoving off.



WATER, WATER NOT EVERYWHERE

Randy Sysol and his crew aboard *Antipodes* found themselves in a water crunch because of some assumptions made pre-cruise.

We planned for several years and did a lot of preparation for this initial cruise of ours. We went through our trawler from bow to stern with a local firm. Unfortunately, we did not fully realize the value of clean water on the boat. In the U.S., we have easy access to relatively good water, and we thought we had a good system in place for our cruise. Our water-maker was pickled for some time; we bought the boat two and a half years prior to the trip and did not need the system, so left it as is. Since we were in a marina in San Diego, the ability to run the unit was limited, so we left it as a final project.

After running the system, we found a series of issues that we had repaired. Sea trials were done, but we only ran the system for a couple of hours to test — our first mistake. We left San Diego with full tanks, which, in our case, was 450 gallons. We didn't need to make water for a couple of weeks. When we started running the system, we found that it shut down after two-plus hours of running, because the high-pressure pump was overheating. We dealt with that by only running the system for 90-minute intervals. Of course, now we're in Mexico with limited access to support for our system.

Later in the trip, we found our water turning rusty. Our second mistake was not opening the water tank for inspection prior to leaving San Diego. I opened the tank only to find a good deal of rust. We immediately switched to bottled drinking water for the remainder of the cruise, using the tank water for cleaning and showers only.

We ended up replacing the water maker in La Paz and getting the tank repainted in Ensenada. Between the two projects, we spent three weeks sitting in marinas and on the hard — not the way we wanted to end our fantastic cruise to Mexico.

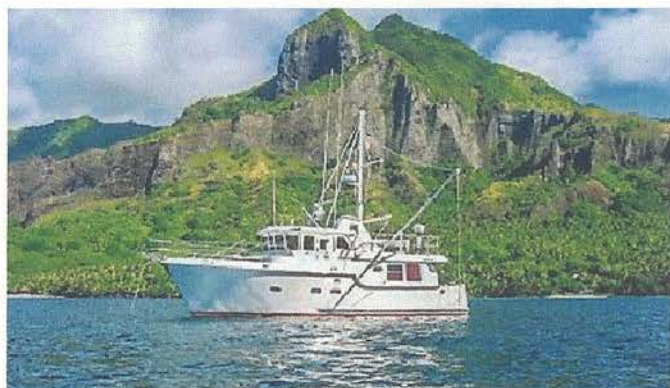
We're much more diligent about our water now, careful to filter all water going in and testing what comes out. Hopefully this will provide us with many years of cruising water.



LONG-RANGE CRUISERS' CHECKLIST

BE SURE TO ASK YOURSELF ALL OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, AND BE COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR ANSWERS AND DECISIONS.

- ▶ Is it the right boat for long-range cruising needs?
- ▶ Do you understand your current boat and its many systems?
- ▶ Does it carry enough fuel/water to reach your next port, plus 50 percent if delayed?
- ▶ Do you have a reliable water-maker?
- ▶ Should you add extra fuel tanks/fuel bladders for longer range?
- ▶ Are the systems sturdy, reliable and stable enough for the length of a projected voyage?
- ▶ Do you have backups for essential systems and equipment?
- ▶ Do you have up-to-date safety/communications equipment? AIS? EPIRB? Fire-suppression equipment? Fully-equipped life raft adequate for crew and pets?
- ▶ Do you understand the boat's capabilities/limitations, condition of its mechanical, electrical, plumbing and electronic systems?
- ▶ Are you competent in troubleshooting mechanical/other problems?
- ▶ Are you able to make most repairs? Carry sufficient spare parts, supplies, essential tools for critical component repairs?
- ▶ Are you able to patch sudden dangerous hull leaks?
- ▶ Do you have electronic navigation tools/paper charts for the entire route?
- ▶ How are your weather monitoring systems? Do you have access to historic and current weather data? Have you factored weather into trip plans?
- ▶ Is there adequate refrigerator/freezer/dry storage for provisioning for longest leg, plus 50 percent if delayed?
- ▶ Have you practiced overnight/longer cruises with family/crew?
- ▶ Is the family/crew supportive of living aboard for long-term cruising?
- ▶ Is the family/crew mentally/emotionally prepared for self-sufficiency and relative isolation from family/friends?
- ▶ Are the crewmembers compatible, able to work as a team? Any unresolved conflicts/personality clashes sowing discord?
- ▶ Is the crew in good health, knowledgeable about the boat's systems, able to operate the boat and stand regular watches?
- ▶ Is there adequate crew if anyone is sick/injured? Trained in man-overboard situations?
- ▶ Have you developed a cruising budget? Are there adequate resources available for cruising expenses, unanticipated major repairs?
- ▶ Have you designated a trustworthy agent to oversee personal affairs while away?
- ▶ Do you have access to cash if needed for fuel/supplies abroad?
- ▶ Do you have insurance to cover boat and medical costs and evacuation if needed?



Part of being a long-range cruiser is being handy. Christi and Eric Grab discovered this fact on their circumnavigation. She cleaned the hull bottom and he fashioned a gasket in a pinch.

sailboat but switched his focus to a fuel-efficient powerboat after reading Capt. Robert Beebe's "Voyaging Under Power." Beebe's seminal work also inspired Jim Leishman, cofounder of Nordhavn, to develop the firm's first powerboat design capable of transoceanic crossing.

DeMicheli's first long-range powerboat was an Ocean

Long-range cruisers need to understand their boats and all their systems and be able make their own repairs, especially in an emergency.

Alexander 49, carrying 950 gallons of fuel, which he cruised to Alaska. The DeMichelis decided to upgrade to a larger boat, a twin-engine 60-foot trawler custom designed by Alabama-based Rodríguez Shipbuilders and equipped with fuel tanks holding 4,200 gallons, which is ideal for long-range coastal or transoceanic cruising.

Recently married **CHRISTI AND ERIC GRAB** had owned only one other boat, a 28-foot Bayliner, before planning a circumnavigation by boat. Unlike most long-range cruisers, who wait until they retire to cruise, the Grabs took a two-year sabbatical from their high-pressure careers — he as a software engineer and she as a mortgage broker — in their early to mid-30s. What they lacked in extensive boating experience they made up for with intense study and training, including careful examination of their boat options. They spent four

CRUISER MUST-HAVES

While there are countless items that make long-distance cruising possible, safe and comfortable, among the most important are a generator, such as one from Kohler; a water-maker, such as the Sea Recovery Aqua Whisper DX; a get-home engine (some cruisers see this as optional), such as the Volvo Penta D2 40 hp; and a life raft, such as the Revere Elite.



Kohler Power Systems



Sea Recovery Aqua Whisper



Volvo Penta D2 40 hp



Revere Life Raft canister

years educating themselves, researching, planning, budgeting and preparing for their 2007-2009 circumnavigation, with both even taking a diesel mechanic's class.

"We didn't have a lot of experience, but we were book smart," Christi said.

They chose a new Nordhavn 43 they named *Kosmos*, equipped with a 105 hp Lugger main engine and 27 hp wing, or emergency, engine. The boat came equipped with 1,250-gallon fuel tanks, giving them a range of about 3,000 n.m. at a cruising speed of 5 to 7 knots. They encountered few boat-related problems on their voyage and remain happy with their chosen equipment and boat, which Eric describes as a "smaller boat with amazing capabilities." They hope to take it on another circumnavigation.

Throughout their planning and travels, the Grabs documented everything on their blog at kosmos.liveflux.net/blog. They've also published the first two parts of their adventures in "The Unexpected Circumnavigation." The blog and books are rich in useful advice and resources that include lists of equipment, training classes, recommended books and online links.

RANDY SYSOL, HIS WIFE, NANCY, AND THEIR 12-YEAR-OLD SON ADAM are spending a three-year sabbatical cruising aboard *Antipodes*, a 55-foot custom YachtSmith trawler, while schooling Adam aboard. They opted for a boat the previous owner had outfitted for a circumnavigation. Before going cruising, however, they updated its electronics and many of its systems while adapting it for the fami-

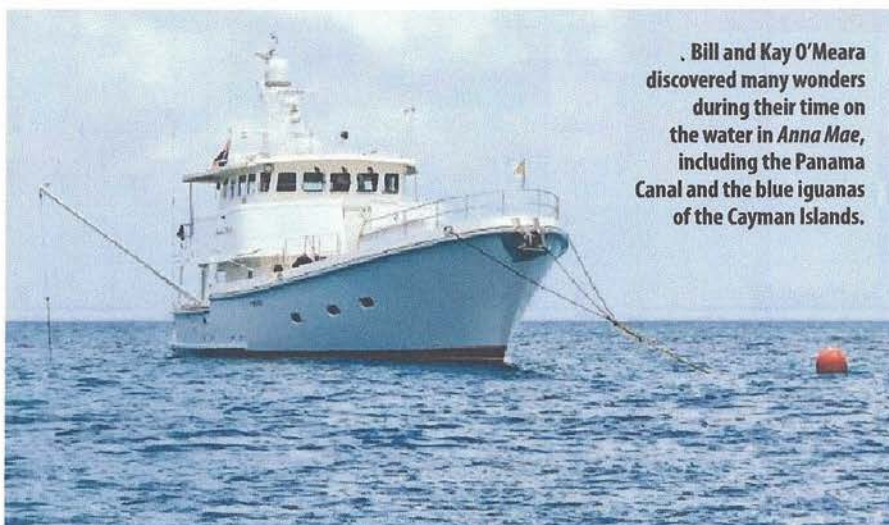
ly's comfort. Sysol's one regret is that it did not come with a backup get-home or wing engine.

KNOW YOUR BOAT AND ITS SYSTEMS

Eric Grab is a staunch advocate of routine and preventive maintenance and multiple redundant systems, as are Nordhavn owners GALE AND MARY PLUMMER of 50-foot *Worknot* and BILL AND KAY O'MEARA of 62-foot *Anna Mae*.

"Almost nothing should break. There's a lot of (essential) preventive maintenance. A lot of people try to stretch the life of their equipment," Eric Grab said.

Yet breakdowns occur, even with routine maintenance and appropriately timed equipment replacement. Long-range cruisers need to understand their boats and all their systems and be able make their own repairs, especially in an emergency.



Bill and Kay O'Meara discovered many wonders during their time on the water in *Anna Mae*, including the Panama Canal and the blue iguanas of the Cayman Islands.



Many cruisers come from engineering or mechanical backgrounds or are handy at repairs. Both Gale Plummer and Sysol maintain spreadsheets of their extensive spare parts and supplies.

"You shouldn't be there [cruising offshore] if you are not mechanically inclined or don't have someone on board who is. You can't call a mechanic on a long-range cruise," Brown said.

HANDLING BREAKDOWNS

ADE SALZER, owner and captain of *The Wandering Star*, had recently transited the Panama Canal with two buddy boats headed eastbound in heavy seas off the coast of Colombia when the engine on his 43-foot single-screw Selene suddenly quit. Salzer could not restart the engine or repair it while rolling beam to beam. Lacking a get-home engine, Salzer didn't panic but gratefully accepted the offer of a tow from a buddy boat. Anchored in a quiet cove after the six-hour tow, the mechanically inclined Salzer quickly diagnosed a clogged fuel line, cleared it easily and resolved the problem.

On a cruise along the Baja coast near Cedros Island, Bill O'Meara lost the water pump for his main engine. The experienced O'Meara was able to "replumb and wire the air conditioning pump to allow water flow into the heat exchanger so we could continue down to Cabo. We had parts flown in to repair the water pump, which we did ourselves," he explained.

Sysol's one major failure on *Antipodes'* initial long cruise was the radar he had not replaced. He and his family, like many other cruisers interviewed, also had recurring problems

with the water-maker.

GETTING ON BOARD WITH CRUISING

Both Ade and Jo Salzer, who share their expertise and describe their three-year experience cruising the Americas in the book "Cruising the Big U," commented on the importance of working through any personal issues and concerns before embarking on a long cruise. Like many other couples, they preferred cruising without crew.

"It better be a good marriage. It's important that a couple works as a team. We shared everything we could," he said.

"Make sure you both *really* want to [go cruising]. It's sad to see how

outing, such as the biennial Fleet Underway to Baja Rally (FUBAR), renamed CUBAR (Cruise Underway to Baja Rally) by 2015's sponsoring organization, the San Diego Yacht Club.

This escorted, organized cruise, which starts in Southern California, is limited to 50 powerboats with a minimum range of 450 n.m. and speed of about 7 to 8 knots; it offers guidance and oversight as well as vessel inspections to ensure a safe journey. Cruise organizers assemble support staff, including a mechanic and a physician, to accompany the fleet and arrange for social events and fueling, if available, at each stop.

First-time cruisers and experienced explorers use this two-week event as the first leg of a longer voyage, continuing on



If you have the time, money, health and inclination to go cruising, take the plunge.

many people are out there under protest," Jo added. "Often it's one person's fantasy. My advice is to get on board. Learn — the more you know, the more comfortable you'll be. It's a wonderful life."

EASING INTO CRUISING

If you'd like to try long-range cruising but don't want to head out alone the first time, consider joining a group

to the Sea of Cortez, mainland Mexico, the Panama Canal or elsewhere after the fleet disperses in La Paz.

If you have the time, money, health and inclination to go cruising, take the plunge. "Prepare yourselves as best you can, but you can always think of another reason to stay tied to the dock. Get out there and experience the cruising life, be it for a week, month or season. Don't wait!" Sysol said. 🐾

Selected Cruisers' Resources

BOOKS

Capt. Robert Beebe and Denis Umstot, "Voyaging under Power," 4th edition
Christi Grab, "The Unexpected Circumnavigation," Parts I and II
Ade & Jo Salzer, "Cruising the Big U"

REFERENCED WEBSITES

FUBAR/CUBAR 2015 (San Diego Yacht Club, sponsoring organization), sdy.org/events/cubar/
Nordhavn, nordhavn.com/ (visit Community & Resources)
Selene Owners Site, seleneowners.org/home.php

BLOGS

Christi & Eric Grab, *Kosmos Travel Log*, kosmos.liveflux.net/blog/ (Kosmos, Nordhavn 43)
Kay & Bill O'Meara, *bkomeara Travel Blog*, bkomeara-travelblog.blogspot.com/ (Anna Mae, Nordhavn 62)
Gale Plummer, *Worknot*, worknotatlast.blogspot.com/ (Worknot, Nordhavn 50)
Randy Sysol, *Adam @ Sea*, <http://sysolfamily.blogspot.com/> (Antipodes, Travelsmith 55)
Ken & Roberta Williams, *Ken's Blog*, kensblog.com/ (Sans Souci, Nordhavn 68)