



Ron and Jan Inberg live aboard Sisu III, their Kadey-Krogen 48, at Shilshole Bay Marina. They know the liveaboard experience isn't for everyone, but they wouldn't have it any other way.

## DREAMING OF LIVING ABOARD?

Consider these 21 issues before taking the plunge.

All boaters have at least a passing acquaintance with the dream: ditching the shoreside address, wandering from tropical port to tropical port, falling asleep to the ripple of water against the hull, wearing flip-flops every day and living a life free of constraints while humming an assortment of Jimmy Buffett tunes. Living aboard is living the dream. Isn't it?

We caught up with five liveaboard families to find out how that dream compares to reality ... and to learn how boaters can prepare for taking the big plunge.

### ISSUE #1

## How do you imagine using your boat?

**D**o you see yourself based in a particular marina and going on weekend outings, or do you picture "The Big Cruise"? If long-term cruising isn't possible, do you still see yourself on the water constantly? According to Stan Barta, who lives aboard a 45-foot wooden trawler-tug at Washington's Port of Everett Main Marina with his wife, Cathi, and two young children, many people who live aboard don't use their boats as frequently as recreational boaters. "The boat is your home," Barta said. "It takes so long to put everything away, you don't do quick trips." That being said, when you do use your boat, you will have more independence.

"We take our home with us wherever we go," said Ron Inberg, who lives aboard Sisu III, a Kadey-Krogen 48, in Seattle's Shilshole Bay Marina with his wife, Jan. "It's freedom."



or



ISSUE #3

## Consider the climate.

It's tempting to think you'll spend your time in the lower latitudes, but what if you live year-round in a climate with a definite off-season? "We made some modifications, thinking of the days when it's raining and 40 degrees," Inberg said, including enclosing the cockpit with Rainier windows. And thanks to *Sisu III's* pilothouse and hydronic heating system, the Inbergs use their boat every weekend and for multiple-week cruises.

Barta said his decision to move from sailboats to a trawler-style boat was motivated by climate. "When you're a year-round boater up here, you're less of a purist," he said, chuckling. "We wanted an enclosed pilothouse. Our boat has a lengthened cabin with a smaller cockpit, and with kids, we wanted those big, square spaces."

ISSUE #2

### Take a close (and honest) look at your lifestyle.

A boater who is retired, on sabbatical or working from home will have different needs than one who still needs to go to the office. The Inbergs are both insurance executives, and they need space for business attire. So they put a lot of thought into things ahead of time and added more drawers and cabinets to their new boat's interior layout and transformed its guest stateroom into a walk-in closet.

Richard and Donna Gosselin, who live aboard *Mighty Goose*, a Nordhavn 46 at Ventura West Marina in Ventura, Calif., knew they were going to be at the dock most of the time, and as they're both in their 70s, they wanted a user-friendly layout. "It couldn't have too many steps," Donna said. "And we wanted our master stateroom amidships, so there would be less movement."

ISSUE #4

### Everyone needs personal space on board.

How much room you need will determine what type of boat you buy. Given career demands, Inberg said he and his wife needed two heads and that extra stateroom-turned-closet. Richard Gosselin says he wouldn't have chosen anything less than 40 feet, and he appreciates the Nordhavn's three decks.

"You need to have some separation," said Jake Scott, who lives with his wife, Burgandy, and young daughter on *Sassafrass*, a 60-foot schooner, at Thunderbird Marina on Seattle's Lake Union. "We give our daughter her space, and we have ours, and the salon isn't part of that equation. Otherwise, if you're always on top of each other, living aboard will get old quickly."

Gary Curry, who lives on *Fearless*, a Jeanneau 43 DS sailboat, with his wife, Rhonda, and two teenage children at Washington's Port of Everett 12th Street Marina, agreed. "We need at least three cabins to make sure everyone has space and privacy."

ISSUE #5

### What conveniences are must-haves?

What are you willing to do with ... and do without? "We didn't want to camp," Inberg said, "so we have everything on the boat that you'd have in an upscale home, only smaller." Their amenities include a split sink, a Viking stove/oven and a washer/dryer, because as Inberg said, "Walking to the marina's laundry facilities in the rain isn't fun."

For Curry, the most important thing was a separate, fully enclosed, stand-up shower. Barta agreed: "No wet heads, particularly with children. You don't want to deal every day with hand-holds and moving all the paper products." Barta also chose a Dickenson Adriatic diesel marine stove for both cooking and heat. "In the Pacific Northwest, you'll want some form of flame-based heat to keep your living space and clothing drier," he said.





#### ISSUE #6

## Don't be afraid to ask for what you want.

If you're buying a new boat rather than a used one, don't be afraid to ask for the features you want. "If they say no, push a little," Inberg advised. "Have them talk to engineering to see what can be done. It's going to be your home, after all. And honestly, their best ideas come from customers." In fact, some of the galley amenities and storage features the Inbergs requested are now Kadey-Krogen standards.

#### ISSUE #7

### Find the right home community.

All marinas aren't equal. "You'll definitely want to be in a community that you're comfortable with," Donna Goselin said.

Curry said the best part of his home marina is the sense of community. "It's a close-knit group, and we all have similar interests," he said. "We hang out on the dock and on the back of the boat, and we get to know our neighbors in a way you don't when you live in a house."

#### ISSUE #9

### Are you prepared to downsize?

"Moving from a house to a yacht, you have to downsize dramatically," Curry said. "You have to cut way back on stuff, and some people find that very difficult. You need a minimalist attitude toward possessions."

"Small things have a magnified impact on a boat," Scott said. "You need to do more planning and organizing, and you can't just acquire stuff." Yet, once you've made the transition, you might just find that simplicity is a happy thing. "I discovered that I don't need to be around all my things," Donna Goselin said. "I just love this life."

#### ISSUE #10

## Make sure you like close spaces.

Family members have to like being together to live on a boat. And from the beginning, you need to be completely honest with each other about your willingness to embark on this lifestyle. "You have to ask: Do you have the flexibility to try something new?" Curry explained. "Discuss every aspect of living aboard, and be realistic. Otherwise little things will become big things."

Barta added, "You need to gently discourage the idea that living aboard will be pure romance."

#### ISSUE #11

## Have an open attitude.

The liveaboard lifestyle must be approached with an attitude of openness and adventure; otherwise, it will not work. "There are parts of this that are miserable, where you wonder, 'Why am I doing this?'" Barta said. "Like when your life gets centered around the Laundromat. Or when your first winter starts, and you're trudging a quarter-mile up icy docks to the showers at 5 a.m."

"You have to look at life as an adventure," Inberg said. "This is reality. You'll be dragging groceries down the ramp and onto the boat in bad weather."



#### ISSUE #8

**Determine your motivation.** Are you hoping to live aboard because you love boating, or are you doing it to save money? Be careful of the latter. "If you intend to be out on your boat all the time, or if you want to simplify your life, that's one thing," Curry said. "But if you're primarily doing it to save money, you're going to be disappointed." Barta agreed. "With mooring costs, a boat payment, insurance and fuel costs, you're looking at the equivalent of a modest house," he said. (As Inberg pointed out, however, your boat will be a small house with a very big backyard — and you won't have to mow the lawn.)



## 5 TIPS FOR LIVEBOARD PETS

Like families living ashore, liveaboard families love their pets. Although some bring birds, guinea pigs and even iguanas aboard, the majority of boating pet owners adopt dogs and cats. Known for being easygoing and adaptable (yes, even cats), these beloved pets will become welcome members of the liveaboard crew, provided their families keep a few things in mind:

1. Young animals adapt quickly. Although it's not impossible for an older pet to adapt to life on the water, a younger animal will take to it much more quickly. Consider adopting a puppy or a kitten and training the animal to live on the boat from day one.
2. They need their space, too. A liveaboard pet needs space, and you can make sure he gets it by setting aside his own cozy bed, a regular place for feeding and a private place for elimination.
3. Plan for potty training. For a cat, you'll need to find an out-of-the-way place for a litter box. For a dog, many liveaboard boaters will have a piece of AstroTurf or something similar for onboard duties. "You really have to think about cleanliness," said Jake Scott, who lives aboard a 60-foot schooner on Seattle's Lake Union with his wife, daughter and family cat. With a laugh, he added, "Our goal is to teach the cat to use the head."
4. Think about shore access. Dog owners certainly will take their pets for walks ashore when possible, and cat owners might think about doing the same. Some cats might be amenable to leash walks. Others ... well, not so much. "You could turn a portlight into a pet door," Scott suggested. You also can install a real pet door into the companionway hatch or the sliding glass door to the cockpit, which works for a free-range cat or an AstroTurf-bound dog.
5. Remember: There's no Fancy Feast in the islands. If you're planning to do any extended cruising, you'll want to make sure your pet eats a variety of different foods — or that you've stocked up with enough of his favorite cuisine. As Scott noted, it's no different with pets than it is with people. You need to plan ahead.



### ISSUE #12

#### Assess children's needs.

If you have children, you'll need to consider their needs, interests and ages. Younger children might find it easier to adapt than teenagers, who need more space and may have stronger ties to shore-based activities. The Bartas' children are 11 and 8, and according to Stan they're simply running out of room. "The kids have more energy and need more space," he said. "When you're not actively cruising, that becomes more of an issue." Yet Barta also noted that living aboard has been a tremendous learning experience for the kids, who are home-schooled through the Washington Virtual Academy. "It's given us the flexibility to cast off and not lose ground in school," he said. "Living aboard is an awesome way for kids to grow up, because it's so easy to weave lessons into life on the water."

The Currys home-schooled their children, now 18 and 15, for a couple of years, but they found that shore-based schools suited them better. "The kids have adjusted very well to living on board," Curry said. "Their biggest challenge is that their friends have stuff that they can't have." He added that his and Rhonda's plan for long-term cruising will wait until they're empty-nesters.

### ISSUE #13

#### How will you manage all the work?

"If you don't have deep pockets, you'd better have a deep skill set," Barta said, "because everything that can break down will." If you can't afford to hire someone to do the work, take inexpensive, short-term courses that teach valuable skills such as electrical repairs, plumbing and engine maintenance. "You'll learn fast through experience," he said. "Especially if your boat isn't right off the showroom floor."

Scott agreed that experience is an unparalleled teacher. "For us, so much of this has been trial and error," he said. "Our previous boat gave us a pretty precise list of what we wanted, so we stripped this boat down to the bare hull and refitted it, doing most of the work ourselves."



#### ISSUE #14

##### **Do lots of homework.**

Check out books, magazines and on-line cruising forums, and talk to current liveaboards.

#### ISSUE #15

##### **Take baby steps.**

If you don't have a boat, spend time on other people's boats. "See what types of boats you think you could live on," Richard Gosselin said. "Spend the night, and get adjusted." Attend boat shows, tour as many different models as possible and consider taking a few charter cruises. "Get out there for two or three weeks at a time," Curry said. "Do anything you can to get out on the water."

#### ISSUE #16

## **Ask yourself: Can I really do this?**

After all the research, spending time on various boats and considering all the other issues, it boils down to this: Are you the sort of person who can live in a small space on the water? "We like keeping things simple, so this was right for us," Barta said. "I always tell people who are on the fence to consider that you can't match this experience. Try it for a year. See it through all the seasons before making a decision."

"We had no idea what we were getting into," Scott said, "and you have to know that you won't get it right from the beginning. Remember that you're just starting here." And you have to accept the negatives, as real life is not a Jimmy Buffett song.

"There are plusses and minuses," Richard Gosselin said. "But after some surprises, you'll adapt and reconsider, and you'll find things that you didn't even realize would be a plus."

Perhaps most importantly, you need to know yourself very well. "We were two people who had big-home lifestyles, but this was our dream," Inberg said. "Is this lifestyle living the dream? Yes, it is, but it has to be your dream."