

Preparing to Go Cruising

You and your co-captain have read *Chasing Sunsets* and both are now convinced that ordinary people just like you can go cruising in comfort and safety. Then you read *Steering You Straight* and got all the real practical information you needed to prepare, but now let's take a little time to make sure that you have the critical matters well in hand.

Be very careful about choosing a boat name. Names that are cute in the U.S. marinas lose a little luster in the real world of cruising. Think of the effect on Immigration and Customs officials when you tell them that your boat name is *No Money or Runnin' Away*.

Cruisers become known by their boat name and then by their first name, seldom, if ever by their surname. For example, we, on *Dolphin Spirit* became "the Dolphins," and the couples on *Pilgrim* and *Osprey* had the obvious applied. Skating close to the edge were the people on *Gigolo*.

Boat registration papers and passports are essential for those of us who like to cruise in a legal way. As a condition of entry, almost every country in the world requires a country, not a state, registration. U.S. flagged cruisers must be Federally registered if they are going to cruise beyond Mexico. Every person on board must have a valid passport, with an expiration date more than three months past the date of entry to any country. Check this before you leave, not one hour before landfall.

Be sure to take Medicine At Sea classes, as we did, and learn how to suture wounds, set bones, give injections, take blood pressure and perform heart transplants. Luckily, we never had to use these skills on ourselves, and the offer to use them on others resulted in miraculous recoveries before we even got to see the patient.

Your cruising boat is your home, where all the essentials and hopefully some of the luxuries of everyday living must be stored. The problem with storage on a boat, is that if you don't have enough, it is very difficult and expensive to add more. If you can't, that leads to the related problem of a very unhappy co-captain, a shortened cruise and a premature boat sale. Adequate storage that gets wet, or even damp, generally has the same result.

After learning the hard way, we developed a simple rule: load on board all the clothes, provisions and spare parts you think you need, then throw out half the clothes and half the food, and fill the spaces created with more spare parts. Food and clothes can always be purchased.

Remember that whatever spare parts you carry will always not include one very important item, and the only way to sure you have enough is to tow a clone of your boat along with you. I had finished rebuilding one of the toilets and was tightening the last of the hold-down bolts, when the toilet bowl cracked, right up the middle. Who carries a spare toilet bowl?

The world is littered with alcohol deserts. Because they exist, and because yachts have only limited storage areas, some of which have to be allocated to food and spares, it is as important to know where these are, as it is to know the hurricane and cyclone prone areas.

According to most of the cruising books and articles we read before sailing, self-steering mechanisms and pressure cookers were the most important pieces of equipment on board a boat. What a load of crap, but a great segue to what is truly the critical item in every cruising boat – toilet paper.

More hours of anchorage cocktail time are spent discussing toilet paper than almost any other subject, apart from the clear leader, "Crazy cruisers we have met who are not in the cockpit this evening." Everyone has their own theory about how many rolls should be carried, and the obvious pre-requisite of how many sheets per flush is acceptable.

There is nothing more desperate than the cruiser who has run out of reading material, approaching every new boat in an anchorage with the melancholy cry of, "Got any books to swap?" He is the one who quotes interesting paragraphs from the Furuno Radar Users Manual at cocktail time, and can be seen openly reading his wife's Danielle Steele novels. The one thing we added to *Dolphin Spirit* that paid for itself over and over, was bookshelves, approximately 30 feet of bookshelves, and we filled them to overflowing.

Medicine, booze, spare parts, toilet paper, books, boat papers, boat names – who said all you needed to go cruising was to know which direction is it towards the sunset?

About the Author

Lawrence Pane circumnavigated with his wife and young son, and his expertise in the areas of sailing, cruising and travel, expressed through two books, numerous magazine articles and very popular seminars, has informed, assisted and entertained a wide audience of sailors and non-sailors. Visit [Chasing Sunsets](#) to enjoy the photos, buy the books, and check up on coming seminars.

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