



DEPARTMENTS

- 12 Under Sail**
A harrowing scene from the 2013 Rolex Sydney-Hobart Race
- 14 Cruising**
Exploring Great Inagua Island; "Why I'm a Part-Timer"; the latest on Matt Rutherford
- 22 Racecourse**
Still racing Lasers in their 70s and 80s; Rolex Yachting Awards announced; Sally Barkow joins Volvo Ocean Race team
- 28 New Boats**
28 JUST LAUNCHED
First look at the Gunboat G4, Neel 60, Nautitech Open 40, Flying Phantom
30 NEW BOATS
Catalina 275 Sport, Fareast 18
- 34 New Gear**
Hot and helpful new items for you and your boat
- 66 On Deck**
66 VOICE OF EXPERIENCE
A crew of New Mexico racers learn tough lessons when a squall beats down on their inland-lake regatta
68 SEAMANSHIP
Sculling the waves, and other tips for helming in heavy weather
71 CRUISING TIPS
How to best stow a rode on deck and a DIY weather cloth to keep your cockpit dry
- 72 Boatworks**
72 TECH NOTES
Nigel Calder compares the merits of AC and DC generators
74 PROJECT
Not all battery chargers are created equal. Here's how to select and install the best for your boat
78 SKETCHBOOK
Saws to cut things in tight spaces

March 2014 Volume 45, Issue 3



6 Great Adventure Charters

36 Go kayaking in Russia, take a hike in the fjords of Norway, and explore Alaskan glaciers on an aluminum sailing dinghy: these are just a few of the adventurous options in our list of extreme summer charter vacations. Pack a bag and bring your camera—you're not going to want to miss a moment. By **Christine Hayes**

PLUS

- 42 Setting Sail in the Saronic**
The picturesque hillside towns and bustling marina villages have long attracted vacationing sailors to Greece and its isles. **Zuzana Prochazka** explores the Saronic Gulf with a twist: sailing in flotilla with circumnavigators Woody Henderson and Tania Aebi. Here's how pro cruisers do Greece.
- 46 2014 Charter Directory**
From Alaska to Athens, here are our most up-to-date listings of charter companies around the world, including where they sail, how to reach them and how many boats are in their fleets



IN EVERY ISSUE

- 8 SETTING SAIL** From the editor
- 10 FEEDBACK** Readers write
- 79 ASK SAIL** Tips from our experts
- 98 WATERLINES** Paul VanDevelde

This month on
sailmagazine.com

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Follow SAIL





- NORWAY
- THE SHETLANDS
- ICELAND
- GREENLAND



Passengers gather in the cockpit as they sail past one of Iceland's massive glaciers

CHARTERS OFF THE CHARTS

THE NORTHERN LATITUDES EDITION

BY CHRISTINE HAYES

For sailors living in the northern United States, summer is the season to stay local and enjoy the precious few months of good weather. But every now and again, it's good to branch out, book a flight and seek other adventures. This summer, for example, you might consider going north—way north—and participating in one of these wild charters. They're all untraditional in the best sense of the word.

ICELAND

Iceland is geographically smaller than Cuba, but its terrain is vast, ranging from mountainous lava deserts to massive glaciers. Iceland's extreme climate limits sailing to a small window of opportunity each summer.

Chartering around Iceland is a distinctive experience because the anchorages are so close together. This, in turn, allows you to make shorter passages and see much of the country's coastline in a single trip. Though there aren't any major bareboat fleets in Iceland, companies like Armstrong Global Charters (armstrongglobal.com) act as brokers for privately owned crewed yachts in the area.

The fleet managed by this London-based company is varied, and the average boat ac-

commodates six to 10 passengers, plus a crew. Accommodations are basic, but the cabins are heated, and the cooks can prepare a variety of menus—anything from gourmet cuisine to traditional European fare. Armstrong welcomes sailors of all skill levels and especially enjoys introducing new sailors to the sport in such an extreme location.

Armstrong charters last seven, 10 or 14 days, depending on the route (a circumnavigation takes two weeks). An average day begins with two or three hours of sailing, followed by a day of exploration. "The idea is to explore the island from shore, but also get to specific and almost unreachable places with the boat," says Sandra Lovric, a senior broker for Armstrong Global. According to Lovric, hiking in the west Fjords is often the highlight of these trips, as is interacting with Iceland's unique flora and fauna.

Cell service is scarce, so be ready to unplug while you're on this trip. Trust us, that shouldn't be too tough.

BOATS Various
PASSENGERS 6-10
COST Starting around \$4,000
CONTACT Sandra@ArmstrongGlobal.com

An ancient *broch* along the coast of the Shetlands



THE SHETLANDS

The Shetlands are a group of over 100 islands located 125 miles off the northern coast of Scotland, where Scottish and Scandinavian cultures intertwine, thanks to the archipelago's proximity to Norway. The scenery varies from farmland to secluded beaches dotted with sea caves. Today, only 15 islands are inhabited, and the Nordic influence is pervasive: Lerwick, where sailing charters begin, features a Viking history museum, and Jarlshof, a prehistoric Norse settlement, welcomes visitors to the southern region of Sumburgh.

Shetland Yachting, a member of the Association of Scottish Yacht Charterers, offers three different charter trips in the Shetlands. The mildest is a three-day 85-mile cruise to Fair Isle, the most remote island in the UK and the southernmost island in the Shetlands. The charter begins in Lerwick, the capital of the Shetlands, and sails to North Haven, Fair Isle, home to just 70 inhabitants. Day two is spent exploring Fair Isle on foot, including a view of its breathtaking cliff-strewn coastline. The trip ends near the Broch of Mousa, the best preserved *broch* (round tower) in Scotland and the tallest still standing in the world, before heading back to Lerwick.

For those with a little more time, there is also a seven-day circumnavigation that covers 246 nautical miles around the Shetlands. The itinerary starts and ends in Lerwick and

stretches from Fair Isle to the northernmost point in the UK. Most days involve passages between 20 and 45 nautical miles, with one 60-mile leg. From the hub of culture in Lerwick to the fishing and farming community of the Out Skerries, the trip features an array of overnight anchorages scattered around the archipelago.

If that seems like too much hustle and bustle for one week, Shetlands Yachting offers a seven-day cruise along the east coast that covers between 135 and 150 nautical miles, depending on your preferred route. Though you won't travel as far, you'll still hit many of the best anchorages, including Fetlar (the Garden of Shetland), and Symbister Whalsay, a fertile area where the traditional crofting agricultural industry still reigns.

The weather throughout the Shetlands is mild in the summer, with temperatures around the mid-50s. Be warned, though, that sunny skies can rapidly give way to an overcast mist. Mid-summer is the perfect time to visit, when the sky never completely darkens and twilight lingers through the night.

BOAT Reach North, Bavaria 37 Cruiser
PASSENGERS 2-8
COST \$1,530 (3 days), \$3,130 (7 days)
CONTACT info@shetland-yachting.co.uk

GREENLAND

Though Greenland is the world's largest island, it's also the world's least densely populated country, with just 56,370 residents stretched across its icy face. Three quarters of the country is covered in ice, and many towns aren't even connected by roads, so sea travel has long been an integral part of its culture.

North Sailing, owned by Capt. Heimir Harðarson, charts two schooners in Greenland. The 108ft *Opal* has six double cabins, three heads and two showers. She comfortably fits 12 passengers, plus her crew. The 85ft *Hildur* is arranged similarly, but with space for 10. Voyages run from Wednesday to Wednesday, with seven days and seven nights on board.

"We've had sisters and brothers, couples young and old, nature lovers and single travelers of all ages," says Birna Lind Björnsdóttir, sales and marketing managers at North Sailing.

"It's a strange mixture of travelers, but somehow being together on a boat for eight days unites them in a beautiful way."

Throughout each cruise, an expert in sailing and wildlife serves as a guide, providing a narrative as arctic whales swim by through the iceberg-filled seas. The crew, in addition to helping passengers participate in the sailing, also typically goes ashore with its travelers as they visit various small villages along the coast, all of which are rich with the genuine culture of Greenland.

"The trip is for everyone that loves nature, silence, the sea, icebergs and a unique adventure," says Björnsdóttir.

Travel with cash, as the bar tab is not included in the overall price of the trip. Pre or post-trip tours of Iceland are also available for an extra charge (\$80 and \$170).

BOAT Schooners *Hildur* (10 passenger) and *Opal* (12 passengers)
COST \$5,775 (includes round-trip flight from the Reykjavik Domestic Airport to Constable Point; meals on board; hiking excursions; soft drinks; dinner out in lttogqortoormiit)
CONTACT birna@northsailing.is

Charter guests taking in the beauty of Scoresbysund Sound, Greenland



An aerial view of Norway's rocky coastline

NORWAY

Norway's coast is renowned for its fjords, deep waterways running between regal mountains formed during the Ice Age. It's also a landscape that lends itself perfectly to a trip that combines sailing and hiking, which is precisely what Butesail's Sail Trails offer.

Butesail's charters last three or five days. The three-day trip begins in either Askvoll or Flore, where passengers choose between an evening sail to Fjell or dinner and relaxation on board. The next day begins with a picnic lunch on shore and continues with time to explore Fjell before sailing back on day three.

The five-day trip includes daily hikes on a range of coastal trails. One three-hour hike out of Lihesten follows the sea cliff of Stire Batalden, while another medium-level hike takes you up the island of Alden, also known as the Norwegian horse.

The hike up Hornelen, Northern Europe's highest sea cliff, is a challenging eight-hour trek from sea level to an altitude of 2,821 feet. An expert hike up Blegja in Askvoll, the highest peak in Fjord Kysten, lasts ten hours.

The weather in Norway is quite warm in the summer, reaching temperatures of nearly 70°F. Unfortunately, the high peaks often trap rain clouds, so there tends to be a bit of rain.

On board, foul weather gear is available for passengers upon request. The menu is flexible and may include dishes like captain/owner Ray Dalton's Thai curry or freshly caught cod. Everything is prepared fresh.

BOAT Scanyacht 391
PASSENGERS 4-5
COST \$490 (weekend), \$980 (five days)
CONTACT butesail.com

Photo courtesy of **North Sailing** (left); and courtesy of **Butesail** (right)

sailmagazine.com - March 2014 39



Seal at anchor in Prince William Sound, Alaska

KAMCHATSKY, RUSSIA
PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND, ALASKA

ALASKA

After spending time sailing the Antarctic with Pelagic Expeditions, a specialty fleet for high-latitude charters, Kate and Hamish Laird designed and built *Seal*, a 56-foot aluminum cutter that was constructed specifically with high-latitude sailing in mind. Since launching the boat nine years ago they've logged about 65,000 miles on board, many of them with guests. Both hold Ocean Yachtmaster Commercial Certificates.

These days the Lairds mainly host expeditions around Alaska, where guests can visit remote areas accessible only by sailboat and enjoy close-up views of some amazing wildlife: bears, moose, otters, seals, whales, bald eagles and more.

A typical summer charter lasts 10 days to three weeks. In late May, *Seal* embarks on a 10-day Coastal Adventure Cruising excursion in Prince William Sound, sailing in protected waters with spectacular views. For something more intense, *Seal* offers a Coastal/Offshore Adventure Cruising trip which lasts 10-14 days and includes an overnight passage across the Gulf of Alaska, with the potential for rougher weather. For the most expeditious, the Lairds offer a three-week remote expe-

dition around Kodiak Island and along the Alaskan Peninsula.

Seal keeps two tenders on board—one sailing dinghy and one inflatable with an outboard—to further enhance your wildlife observation, while her swing keel permits access into even the most challenging anchorages. All charters feature glacier observation and hiking opportunities. The crew can also coordinate kayak and scuba expeditions if requested.

Kate Laird says she is captivated by Alaska's vastness and remoteness. "We've been impressed by how clean it is. On the outer islands, there aren't great anchorages and there's some tsunami rubble, but inside the bays and harbors, we see no signs of other people having been there before us. It's pristine."

No sailing experience is required to cruise aboard *Seal*. Past passengers have ranged from landlubbing scientists to veteran singlehanded sailors.

BOAT *Seal*, 56-foot aluminum cutter
PASSENGERS 1-4
COST \$5,000 (10-14 days), \$10,000 (21 days)
CONTACT expeditionssail.com



Klyuchevskaya Sopka is the highest mountain on the Kamchatka Peninsula and the tallest volcano in Asia

RUSSIAN PENINSULA

The Kamchatsky Peninsula in eastern Russia is so remote it barely appears on Google Maps. Just north of Japan, the peninsula is known as “the land of fire and ice,” because of the way its volcanic terrain is surrounded by frigid water, including the Sea of Okhotsk. It’s in this sea that 56th Parallel offers 11-day charter trips.

56th Parallel, named for its travel services in Russia and Siberia, has been guiding adventure charters through these mysterious northern regions for more than 10 years. A typical trip runs from Petropavlosk-Kamchatsky to Cape Lopatka, the southernmost tip of the peninsula, and back. Passengers fly into the Yelizovo Airport in the southeast of the peninsula and enjoy a short city tour before heading to the seaport for boarding. Sea kayak practice takes place the next morning in a nearby bay before the charter catamaran heads to sea for an overnight passage to Cape Lopatka. The rest of the trip is jam-packed with kayaking, hiking and exploration.

Along the way, guests see several natural wonders, including Slonil, a waterfall where brown bears roam and wild berries grow. Kayak excursions also take you to the mouth of the Zhirovaya River, around the Island Starichkov, and to

Tamorine, an island created from freezing volcanic tubes that form narrow channels. Hiking treks include a route from the Zhirovaya River, down the forest road and across shallow rivers, ending at the Nizhne-Zhirovskie hot springs to relax in the baths. You’ll even climb to the top of Starichkov, where it’s possible to see seven volcanoes when skies are clear.

The itinerary has an extra day built in for bad weather, but that day can also be used to stay an extra night in any of the destinations along the way, for a relaxing night at the hotel, or for a tour to Mutovsky, one of the peninsula’s active volcanoes.

All guests receive a brief sailing lesson and are encouraged to help work the boat while underway. Best of all, the boat comes with a professional diver who catches fresh seafood throughout the cruise. Expect mild temperatures in the summer, with highs around 60°F. The peninsula is on the same latitude as Great Britain, but arctic winds from Siberia keep the land covered in snow from October to May.

BOAT 50ft sailing catamaran
PASSENGERS 10
COST \$4,5000
CONTACT 56thparallel.com

Photo courtesy of 56th Parallel

sailmagazine.com - March 2014 41

SAIL 6 GREAT SUMMER ADVENTURES | CHARTER VACATIONS WORLDWIDE | HOW TO STEER IN BIG SEAS | BATTERY CHARGERS | AC VS DC GENERATORS | BOAT REVIEWS: CATALINA 275 SPORT, FAREAST 18 VOLUME 45 | NUMBER 3 | MARCH 2014

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