

ALL AT SEA

There's no better way to explore the Mediterranean than by boat – whether it's cruising, aboard a crewed luxury yacht or going it alone

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Imagine waking to the sound of water slapping against a hull, the soft 'ting' of the halyard tapping against the mast. You come out of your cabin, climb the stairs to the deck and find aquamarine waters lapping your sleek yacht, tempting you in for a pre-breakfast swim. There's a tiny Greek island with a little white beach just off your stern. You are either alone or in the company of a few other elegant boats. It sounds like heaven – and it's not just possible, but also surprisingly affordable.

Sailing in the Mediterranean is, quite simply, a joy. A wonderful way to explore off the beaten track, or if you want to sit back and relax, cruise from one iconic city to the next without getting stuck in traffic. The simplest, cheapest and most adventurous way to get out on the water is 'bare boat' – where you hire a yacht and supply and crew it yourself.

One of your party must have an ICC certificate to sail in most European waters, but it's easy to obtain, requiring a five-day practical course. Sailing in the Ionian and Aegean Seas is very straightforward, explains Sunsail's Marion Telsnig: 'The ideal winds and sailing conditions of the Ionian really open up this stunning cruising area for exploration, even by novice sailors. There are relaxing short hops between quiet fishing villages and golden beaches or longer passages between lively Corfu and historical Ithaca. More experienced sailors will enjoy the open coastal sailing of the Northern Ionian.'

For those who don't have the time to get qualified, it's possible to charter a boat with a skipper from organisations like Sunsail. You'll be the crew, but in highly qualified, capable hands. It's a halfway house between bare boat and a fully crewed yacht. ☺

'You have everything – from the glamour of St Tropez to the natural beauty of the Greek islands – in one place'

Mooring up in a little bay by a Greek island – here Zakynthos – is a special Mediterranean pleasure

TOP SPOTS FOR GREAT SAILING



Côte D'Azur, France

The Côte includes gorgeous St Tropez (pictured), Cannes, Nice and Monte Carlo to name a few, separated by stunning coastline and lovely beaches. Join A-listers, aristocrats and the international jet set by sipping a cocktail at sunset, sunning yourself on a private beach or watching the world go by at a chic restaurant. And don't miss some of the best and most expensive shopping in the world.



Greek Islands

Island-hop from one tiny speck of land to another while taking in sandy beaches, sparkling bays, gorgeous white-washed villages and seaside tavernas selling freshly-caught fish. Kea, just 37 miles outside Athens, is an unspoilt paradise. The 24 Sporades islands in the Aegean Sea (pictured), only four of which are inhabited, offer exceptional diving, snorkelling and kayaking. Take a trip to Skopelos to the romantic hilltop church made famous by the film Mamma Mia! Well-populated Ionian islands like Cephalonia and Ithaca offer all the romance of island life plus ancient ruins and fascinating histories.



↑ Beautiful Portofino on the Italian Riviera has attracted visitors since the 1920s

But if you want to do it in style, you need to copy the big Hollywood players arriving at the Cannes Film Festival – in a superyacht complete with highly-trained crew. And if you don't have one of your own, you can hire one.

'All yachts of this calibre,' says Nicolas Benazeth of Charterworld, 'are privately owned with a crew, including captain, chef, engineer, waiter, etc, all hand-picked by the owner, who will probably only use them one or two weeks a year.' Only the very wealthiest own boats of this stature, which means total luxury and flawless service. 'CharterWorld is a broker: we know all the best boats, and we provide a bespoke service matching exactly the right yacht to the client's needs, whether they want shopping, watersports, nannies or the best berths at the hottest locations,' explains Nicolas.

Prices for the most luxurious superyachts start at \$680,000 per week. And where would you go with such a boat? Well, anywhere, says Nicolas: 'The Mediterranean is such an amazing destination because you have everything in one place. There's the Greek islands and Turkey, then only few days' sailing away you've got the glamour of St Tropez.'

Of course you don't have to spend a fortune to enjoy a crewed yacht. Smaller boats start at \$12,000 per week and if you have the money it really is the perfect way to holiday, particularly as the crew will work out all the little details, from the perfect route to finding a good berth in a trendy spot in high season. ➔



↑ A high-end yacht like Annabel II comes complete with high-trained crew and the ultimate in luxury.

↳ Companies like Sunsail offer 'bare boat' chartering for complete freedom



📍 **Es Vedra near Ibiza.** The Balearics have a reputation as party islands offering glamour and fun. They are also very beautiful and a fantastic family destination

Cruising is another extremely popular option, a fantastic way to experience the highlights of the Mediterranean and Levant. There are hundreds of cruise companies offering gentle circular journeys. Royal Caribbean, for example, will take you from Barcelona to Venice in six days via France, Italy and Croatia.

If you have very small children or elderly relatives, and want to see as much Europe as possible, this is the best way to travel. Large cruise ships are like fully serviced hotel resorts: restaurants, night clubs, activities for all ages, pools, tennis courts, crèches for kids and more. You won't have a quiet beach all to yourself, but there's something to be said for getting from the Rock of Gibraltar to the Bosphorus in under two weeks. Not to mention having a massage in the spa as you watch the scenery go by.

Whatever your summer holiday dream, sailing the vivid blue waters of the Med can make it come true.



📍 **Large cruise ships like Imagination of the Seas offer all the comforts of a luxury hotel, from childcare to swimming pools via a choice of restaurants and a well-appointed spa**



Italian Riviera to the Bay of Naples

Sailing round the west coast of Italy offers absolutely everything a Europhile could wish for. Portofino (Riviera) and Capri (Bay of Naples) teem with the smart set, while the rugged Amalfi coast (pictured) and the cliffside villages of the Cinque Terre are both so beautiful that UNESCO has declared them World Heritage sites. Livorno is an access point for Pisa, Florence and the wonders of the Apennines.



Balearics, Spain

Lying off the coast of Spain, Majorca, Minorca (pictured), Ibiza and Formentera have a deserved reputation for being party islands, but all four offer so much more than that. They bear the traces of the many different civilizations that have passed through over the centuries, from the Moors to the Romans via crusading French knights. Come for the peaceful, natural beaches, lively seaside resorts and, in the case of Ibiza, extreme natural beauty combined with high-end luxury. Like St Tropez, Ibiza is one of the must-visit summer spots for the glitterati.

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