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The Airbnb of Boats Is Making Your Private Yacht Dreams Attainable

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Photographed by Patrick Demarchelier, *Vogue*, May 1992



A mega-cruise, with its round-the-clock dining, crowds, and magic shows, might not hold much appeal for a certain kind of traveler. But a sojourn on a small river cruise? Or, better yet, a private sailboat? It's not difficult to agree to trade in the mega-ship/mega-amenities for calm, quiet, privacy, and access to places a giant ship could just never manage.

Dreaming of a sail down the Nile in a *dahabiya* or a private yacht excursion along the Croatian coast? Thankfully, new peer-to-peer sailing platforms are offering some seriously enticing itineraries and destinations, while democratizing the rather intimidating and once somewhat elitist idea of a sailing holiday. Here are a few of the best.

Sailing Collective

The company has garnered a reputation for catering to a Williamsburg-style crowd—in-the-moment hipsters set a-sea. The mood board-like photos on Sailing Collective's website and Instagram account showing glamorous getaways, hip beauties sunning on the deck in Marysia or Ward Whillas swimsuits, as well as black-and-white photos of inspirations like Leonard Cohen, have helped to cement this feel. "That was secondary. We let the social media build naturally," says cofounder Dayyan Armstrong. "We didn't use influencers to get our following. We want the word-of-mouth business."

Sailing Collective sails catamarans that are between 45 and 60 feet, leased from a roster of boat owners who are trusted, worldwide partners. Most of the boats have between four and six cabins, and most of the guests don't know the people they'll be sharing the boat with for a week. While the idea of sharing close quarters with strangers for a week sounds daunting, quite a few guests have become friends, "and then gone on new sailing trips together," Armstrong says.

Cabins are pretty minimal, usually a queen bed and some cupboards. "They're like a small NYC bedroom," says Armstrong. "You use it for sleeping because you'll be outside for the week." The crew is more often referred to as "our gang" and includes some serious chefs. Days on the boat are spent taking tutorials and a try at helming. Otherwise, activities can range from chilling on the deck to impromptu yoga on intimate white sand beaches, or swimming through gardens of colorful marine life.

The company's itineraries worldwide include their popular trips to Sardinia, Costa Smeralda, the Croatian and Dalmatian Coasts, and Phuket. In the Caribbean they sail to islands like St. Martin, St. Barth's, and the Grenadines. Sometimes the company sets off on an itinerary in a small flotilla of three or four of their boats.

Sailing Collective's cultural engagement, Armstrong says, is a hugely important part of the picture. "It's very personalized and hands on. When we go to shore we engage in culture as much as possible, usually by food," he says. Meals on the boat are also determined by what they find locally. "We've become really good friends with a winemaker in Ischia, who takes us around his vineyard, Casa d'Ambra. His mom cooks for us, and the family takes us to hidden swimming spots they know about."

Sailo

Much like the Airbnb of boats, Sailo offers both experienced and inexperienced boaters the opportunity to rent sailboats and hire captains based on date, location, price, size, and user reviews. The idea of Sailo is to take the intimidation out of boating, and make the process of renting one less cumbersome. “The appeal is already there,” says cofounder Adrian Gradinaru. “We didn’t have to work on that. One of the things people do is walk around a harbor and see all these boats. It’s very seductive. We give easy access to that world.”

Don’t have any experience on the water? Not a problem. “Over 90 percent of our bookings are with a captain,” says Gradinaru. Customers can also access real-time customer service via phone and live-chat to help them customize an itinerary around the Greek Islands or just for a few hours around the Statue of Liberty. And even an elaborate getaway might cost a lot less than you’d imagine. “We did six boats at once on a trip to Thailand,” recalls Gradinaru. “And the cost of a 10-day trip was \$800 per person.”

TradeWinds

TradeWinds offers time-share-like memberships on its fleet of catamarans that allow priority access to vessels and routes, starting at \$10,000. But nonmembers can book berths on the boats like you would a room at a small hotel. Once onboard, everything is taken care of, from the well-stocked bar to the sashimi, made from fish you may have caught off the boat. The feel of TradeWinds is a little less laissez-faire, perhaps, than Sailo or Sailing Collective. It’s somewhere between a traditional cruise and the other companies’ boho-chic vibe.

TradeWinds’s two flagship boats are 70-foot catamarans, but there are several 40 to 60 footers in their fleet as well, with between four and 10 rooms. Destination options include the Caribbean, French Polynesia, Greece, and Turkey, or the fantastic archipelago of Las Perlas in Panama. One of the company’s newer catamarans, the *Wanderlust*, is currently circumnavigating the globe on a journey scheduled to end in 2019. You can hook up with the boat for a spell while it sails to places like Zanzibar, Fiji, Seychelles, Cape Town, the Maldives, Australia, the Balearics, or Sardinia.