



# adventure sailing

BY AMY FERRARA SMITH

**W**hen Ryan Mayer joined a crew of four to sail a 42-foot Hunter sailboat from New Orleans to Little Cayman Island in the Caribbean nearly 10 years ago, he embarked on a 13-day trip through exotic landscapes.

“The big thing is to connect with the size of the world,” said Mayer. “You really feel small when you’re out there.... It makes you look at the world differently.”

Because of its geographic location, New Orleans provides a convenient starting point for boating enthusiasts to experience the world through adventure sailing. Whether it’s under the guidance of a professional captain or a trip organized with family and friends, adventure sailing can reveal a world only seen from a boat.

## UNIQUE VIEW

Traveling along the water, sailors have a unique view of the land along their routes and the life that thrives under the water’s surface. When Mayer sailed to Little Cayman Island, he spotted a baby whale shark, which National Geographic describes as the largest fish in the world.

“It was about as big as the boat,” said Mayer. “I think it thought we were its mom.”

Joe Sullivan, a former commodore who has been sailing out of the Southern Yacht Club for 72 years, remembers waking up on a sailboat one morning and seeing the boat sail right through a group of Man O’ War jellyfish.

“Those things are as poisonous as rattlesnakes,” said Sullivan.

In 1957, R.P. Farnsworth and Company, Inc. sent Sullivan and his family to the Azores

Archipelago of Portugal to work on a \$55 million Cold War project. Although he didn’t sail to far-off places from Portugal, his sailing experiences with the locals were adventurous. Each day, whalers set up watch from the shore. When they spotted the whales migrating, the whalers shot skyrockets into the air to inform others that it was time to set sail. They would then set out in sailboats to harpoon the whales. Sullivan asked one whaler, Oscar, if he could sail with him the next time he spotted a migration of whales. He said no.

“His main excuse was that Americans were too soft and didn’t know how to sail like the Portuguese,” said the 82-year-old Sullivan.

Eventually, Oscar gave him a chance. While Sullivan was on the boat, he “worked the lines on the sails” to make them more aerodynamic against the wind. He told the crew to move

from the bottom rail to the top rail, and he advised that they put the center board all the way down. After they were a half-mile in front of the other boats, Oscar said to Sullivan, "You're OK. You're going to be a sailor one day. But, not strong like the Portuguese."

Sullivan laughed. "He always had to add that."

For the next seven years, Oscar sent a cab to Sullivan's office whenever he spotted whales.

Whether a sailor like Sullivan is living in a distant country or just passing through on a sailing adventure, the sport provides an intimate way to know the locals. On extended adventure sailing trips, most travelers stop at islands along the way to replenish their supplies. "You have the same needs as the locals," said Michael Mayer. "You aren't buying souvenirs. You go to the hardware store to get your stove fixed." Adventure sailing, he continued, affords travelers the luxury of living closer to the way island locals live. "When you get off a cruise ship, one of first things you're going to do is find a restaurant to eat. When you get off a boat, you're going to go to the grocery store or fish market. You're going to meet the grocer, fisherman and you're going to meet his children," he said.

## ADVENTURE TURNED PROFIT

For experienced sailors, adventure sailing can become a profitable business.

Cal Herman, Jr., a 20-year-old University of New Orleans sophomore who grew up sailing at the Southern Yacht Club, participated in a race from Pensacola to Isla Mujeres on a Cal 48 last summer. After the race, he returned home by "delivering" a sailboat for the boat's owner from the island to New Orleans.

"It's really peaceful," Herman said. "It's a fun trip, and it's great to hang out with your buddies."

Last summer, Herman also partnered with his father to win the Regatta de Amigos on a F32 Trimaran. Father and son set a new course record on the trip from Galveston to Vera Cruz.

Ryan Mayer's adventure sailing experience occurred after his uncle Michael sold the 42-foot Hunter sailboat to a local client who owned a condominium on Little Cayman Island. Ryan was one of the crew members the client hired to deliver the boat from New Orleans to the Caribbean.

"The sailing part is still the part I like," said Ryan. "You get to a new destination you've never been before because of your own work."

## BE READY

For experienced sailors such as the Mayers, Sullivan and Herman, sailing from New Orleans to a distant location is reasonable. For sailing enthusiasts who are new to the sport, adventure sailing could pose challenges that a few more years of experience – or a professional guide – would make less harrowing.

At the start of one long-distance sailing race, Herman said the sailors ran into a line squall, or a brief, violent storm of wind and rain. He noticed one boat's mast was down and numerous boats had their sails torn. Because of his experience, Herman knew how to shorten the sails faster. When he saw water spouts, he readied himself to drop them completely.

"Spend time with the experienced," advised Michael Mayer.

To Michael, putting time constraints on a sailing trip can get the sailors into some dangerous situations. Twice in his life, he quit his job to sail for half of the year.

"When you have that kind of time, you're less likely to get in trouble," he said. "You don't have to get back at a certain time. When you're driven by other deadlines, you make choices that you might regret later."

"The solution is to really limit your geographic expectations," continued Michael. "If you want to go 100 miles a day, set your goal for half of that."

## SHORT ADVENTURES

Some sailors consider the sport to be adventurous enough in Lake Pontchartrain. David Burke not only teaches clients how to set sail on an extended trip, but also offers charters on the lake.

"We help those who want to learn to sail to go around the world all the way up to those who want to go out for a glass of wine and propose to their girlfriend," said Burke.

One particular client hired him to charter a sailboat on Lake Pontchartrain to do just that. When the evening arrived, the weather was stormy. But, Burke knew how much effort this client had put into planning the occasion.

"I usually won't sail if the National Weather Service says it's bad weather," he said. "But we went."

The soon-to-be-groom and his best man arrived in tuxedos; the soon-to-be-bride and her maid-of-honor arrived in evening gowns. They opened umbrellas, climbed aboard and set sail.

"The guy wanted to propose on the bow after dark," said Burke. "I knew he had the ring in his vest pocket. I was afraid he was going to fumble it... I didn't take a breath until the ring was on her finger. I'm good with hats in the water, but I don't think I could find a ring."

