

PLANNING FOR LONG-TERM CRUISING



by James Littlewood

These notes are based on the personal experience of some 60,000 nms of cruising at sea and a further 20,000 nms on inland waterways over the past 43 years – often for up to six months. Suggestions for amendments or updates are welcome and should be sent to eiws-editor@theca.org.uk.

- 1) 'Planning' box.** From around three months before you plan to leave, keep a large box by the front door. Every time you think of something you will need get it and put it in the box or at the very least write a note and put it in the box.
- 2) Lists.** Make lists of food; engine parts; spares; charts and guides; useful contacts etc (obvious really but then you will probably also need a list of lists!).
- 3) Bikes.** Folding bikes are useful for shopping, exercise and sightseeing. The most important thing when buying a bike is weight; the heavier it is the less likely you are to use it. Bikes with derailleur-type gears can get knocked and go out of line but are popular and cheap. Only exception to this is Bromptons, which fold the gears into the middle of the bike. Good security locks are a must - both on and off the boat - otherwise you will lose them. **Sold Secure Gold standard** locks are advisable in any situation where you are leaving the bikes for longer than a few minutes (some insurance companies insist on them).
- 4) Documentation.** Keep one folder of **all** documentation. Usually when the police or customs come aboard and see the large, well-ordered folder of documentation they will assume a well-run ship. It is useful to have one sheet with all the common questions, passport number, SSR etc printed out, together with photographs of the boat and crew. If your boat has had a name change, make sure that there is documentation to cover this, e.g. invoice from a yard or sign writer.
- 5) Visas.** As things stand at present, it is likely that most cruisers will require visas for any travel within the EU lasting more than 90 in any 180 days.
- 6) Arrangements.** You may need to make home arrangements to cover post, garden, insurance, cars etc. Have one nominated home contact whom you can contact easily. Some long-term cruisers give a relative Power of Attorney, who can deal with everything in their absence. However, you need to think carefully about taking this step, and ensure that you all have a clear understanding of what this entails.

- 7) Money.** Check the best rates on credit and debit cards for purchases and cash. Many cards available now, e.g. Monzo, Starling, Revolut, make no charge for overseas cash withdrawals. Some cruisers take a mix of Euros and cards, in case they find themselves in very rural areas with no cashpoints.
- 8) Bills.** Paying all regular bills by direct debit and having internet banking set up and working before leaving home is now routine practice for most long-term cruisers.
- 9) Emergencies.** Have a contingency plan for coming home in an emergency; family or friend's death, family birthdays, house flooded, own illness or accident etc.
- 10) Passage planning.** Do as much as possible whilst still at home with good internet access. However, be prepared to be flexible, as canal closures and weather conditions can affect your ability to travel. Some cruisers prefer to set a destination, do some serious passage making to get there and then come back at leisure. Others prefer a more relaxing schedule, with the flexibility to stop and 'smell the roses' along the way. Either way, it is useful to have all the available information sorted into country files and readily accessible when cruising.
- 11) Shore visits.** Much of your research can be done online both before and during your cruise. Guide books are also useful, though not many of the attractions may be easily reachable from the waterways. On arrival in a new place, it is worth checking for a local tourist office to collect everything relevant.
- 12) Food.** No need to stock up - there are plenty of supermarkets the other side of the Channel and North Sea! The one thing most cruisers complain about is tea, which is never strong enough abroad. Other scarcities include Marmite and less sugary cereals – and J-cloths! **Note:** Certain food stuffs such as meat and milk products are no longer allowed to be taken into the EU.
- 13) Pets.** Since 31 December 2020, the rules for taking pets abroad have changed and UK pet passports are no longer valid in the EU. See <https://www.gov.uk/taking-your-pet-abroad/travelling-to-an-eu-country-or-northern-ireland> for new requirements (**Note:** it could now take up to four months to get the correct paperwork for animals taken into the EU). Any specialist food and medication should be taken with you. For emergencies, most towns have at least one vet, though not in very rural areas. Most cafés and restaurants allow dogs in with well-behaved owners and will provide water (and sometimes treats!) Parks in large towns and cities are often forbidden to dogs, so exercising them can be difficult. Always pick up after your dog (show our European neighbours - particularly the French - the way).
- 14) Breakages.** Weekend sailing and the once-a-year three week cruise are different to a four month cruise. You will do more miles and break more things. You cannot come back on Sunday evening with a fault, ring the engineer on Monday morning and have the boat ready by Friday. Remember that a four month cruise is probably four years of weekend and holiday sailing.
- 15) Boat spares.** Think what spares you need to carry. Just about everything you need is available abroad - it may even have come from there anyway! Consider buying spares locally or sourcing them from your usual chandler and having them sent out by courier. It's advisable to carry enough oil and filters to do all the necessary oil changes and spare fuel filters in the event of contamination. Pump spares and even a complete spare water pump are worth carrying. **Note:** VAT may in future be payable on spares taken into the EU.
- 16) Troubleshooting.** It's important to be able to turn your hand to basic maintenance such as oil and filter changes etc. All the better if you can also change an alternator, remove the complete water pump, change a throttle or gear cable, as 'stuff happens'! If you can remove and refit things like the water pump or alternator then you can take them to an engineer (using the folding bikes) for repair. This provides a quicker turn round than waiting for an engineer to come to you.
- 17) Professional back up.** It's worth researching places along your itinerary where you can call on professionals in the event of more serious problems. HLRs and Captain's Mate can also help.
- 18) Manuals.** Have all the instruction manuals for all the systems on board; if you are missing some then most are available online so you can print them off before you go. Don't bank on having an internet connection when something has broken.
- 19) Flags.** Make sure you have the courtesy flags for all the countries you might visit. And make sure you know which each is. It's embarrassing to arrive in Germany flying the Belgium courtesy flag! **Note:** It is now necessary to fly a yellow flag on entering UK waters from the EU.

20) Accessing the internet/email. For infrequent users, depending on free (e.g. municipal) wifi or local wifi hotspots may be acceptable for occasional access, but for more reliable ways to access the internet most long-term cruisers use mobile telephone data networks. This generally involves either using data and apps on their mobile phones or using their phones (or a so-called mifi wireless router) as a mobile 'hotspot' to connect several devices. In either situation, for all except heavy data users local Pay As You Go SIM cards or data-only SIMs typically offer best value for money and can usually be topped-up online. **Note:** if using a local SIM in your phone, it's worth keeping your existing SIM in an old phone in order to receive calls when overseas.

21) Boat insurance. Discuss with your insurers where you are going and where you might end up. Get them to adjust your policy accordingly. If you are going north then you do not need cover for Dover to Biscay - that should create a credit against the additional cover needed north of the Elbe. If your renewal comes up in the middle of a cruise, then change it to another date before you leave.

22) Home insurance. Make sure that you understand the rules from your home insurer about un-occupancy and that you abide by them. Confirm any telephone discussions via letter or email.

23) Cruising in company. A matter of personal preference. Some cruisers like to team up with compatible fellow cruisers; for others it's a potential source of conflict if you disagree on timings, side visits etc. If you do team up, have a clear exit strategy in case things don't work out.

24) Crew changes. The same applies to crew changes. Many cruisers love having friends and family to visit; however, lock closures and other disruptions mean that both sides have to be very flexible.

25) Prescription medication. Most pharmacies will only give you a three months supply. With careful planning during the winter it should be possible to stockpile enough for up to six months.

26) Health insurance. Many cruisers do not carry health insurance for trips within the EU, instead relying on the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). The EHIC is to be replaced by the Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC), which should provide the same cover as the EHIC. **Note:** the GHIC is not currently valid in Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

27) Anchoring. Anchoring can sometimes be useful if you do not want to spend every night on a municipal mooring or in a marina. Indeed, anything firmly attached to the bottom or the shore that you can drop anchor and tie up to safely overnight can be used if not expressly forbidden.

28) Fenders. You cannot have enough or big enough. Some cruisers carry a mixture of round, cylinder and flat fenders and use the flat fenders if necessary as fender boards outside the cylinder ones. Some cruisers use fender socks; some don't. Bear in mind that rough lock walls can give them a very short life.

29) Tools. A comprehensive tool kit and socket set is essential, as you will seldom be anywhere near a hardware store when something goes wrong.

30) Hoses. Carry a fold flat food-quality water hose and a complete set of hose-to-tap fitting adaptors (plus an adaptor to join hoses together). Then, if you see anything with a hose on use it - it might be fuel, water or holding tank pump out. You never know when the next one might appear!

31) Electrical connection. In addition to a shore cable, carry a set of plugs and adaptors and a polarity checker for suspect electricity supplies. A long extension cable can also make the difference between being able to plug in and not. A multimeter is also invaluable for checking faults or shore supply voltages.

32) Washing machines. If you see a washing machine - use it. They're often few and far between.

33) Log. Finally, keep a log of your cruise; not just the factual ship's log but a photographic and written record of the trip. It might tell your children where the inheritance went!

© Cruising Association 2025

Updated by Gordon Knight (February 2025)