

Cruising Conversation #1

Preparing You and Your Boat for Cruising

Use this checklist as a good starting point to prepare yourself, your crew, and your boat before taking any trip on the boat. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and reflects what works for me, but can be used as a starting point. Others may have other ideas and preferences; these are mine. Following this checklist is by no means a guarantee that nothing “bad” will ever happen to you or the boat when out and about, but it’s a good way to give yourself peace of mind and help reduce the chances of something untoward happening that will spoil the fun.

For You:

- Ensure you have all necessary provisions on board – we’ll cover this in more detail in talk #2
- Chargers for your electronic devices
- Foul weather gear
- A sweater – you *can* be freezing cold on the water in the middle of summer
- Gloves for line handling
- Sunscreen
- A hat with something to keep it on your head in the wind
- A Leatherman or rigging knife
- A headlamp and spare batteries
- Entertainment for when not sailing, such as a musical instrument, deck of cards, Uno, books, magazine, Kindle, etc. – whatever you enjoy
- A bathing suit – even if you don’t plan to swim, you may need to get in the water at some point
- Water shoes or an old pair of shoes you don’t mind wearing in the water
- Sunglasses – a cheap spare pair is nice to have
- Croakies (devices to keep your sunglasses on your head and out of the water)
- If you have any significant health issues, make sure your doctor is OK with your being away from shore for a while; make sure your crew knows what your medical issues are, and that you know theirs; bring your medications and store them in a zip lock bag if they aren’t in a waterproof container

For the Boat:

- General inspection topsides:
 - Look over your rigging, both running and standing (turnbuckles, blocks, shrouds, halyards, sheets, etc.) – it doesn’t hurt to have a qualified rigger inspect before you take your first long trip.
 - Ensure your winches, lifelines, and stanchions are in good condition.
 - Check for chafe on all lines and replace as necessary.
 - Check cleats and backing plates.

- Tape up any chafe points that can impact sails or running rigging.
- Ensure you have several good dock lines aboard and plenty of fenders (you can never have too many of either).
- Give your wheel/tiller a full turn in each direction to ensure free movement.
- Ensure you can start the engine without trouble and without doing a rain dance of some sort – if not, have a capable mechanic give it a once-over before taking any long trips. It's a sailboat, but you'll wish you had a working engine if you run into trouble, bad weather, or are trying to navigate an unfamiliar mooring field or a narrow channel.
- Test your radio – both send and receive – before you leave port. Do not assume you can get a radio check while under way.
- Confirm any electronics are functioning normally.
- Make sure your batteries have a good charge, and can hold a charge. If not, consider replacing.
- If you have one, make sure your dinghy is in good shape (no leaks!) and that you have a way to inflate it that doesn't involve your lungs. A patch kit is also a good idea. And don't forget the oars – even if you have a motor. Bring fuel in a small separate can for the dink motor.
- General inspection below decks:
 - Make sure anything that could fly around in rough seas, or in the case of an unexpected set of big wakes, is secure.
 - Know where all your through-hull fittings are, and make sure seacocks move freely – if they don't or you can't budge them, consider having them replaced.
 - Does your head work? Get a fresh pump-out before leaving home if possible.
 - Ensure you have a good supply of potable water in the tanks.
 - Ensure hatches close and can be secured.
 - Stow provisions before getting under way; or at least have them low (not on counters) when under way.
 - Has the oil and coolant ever been changed in your engine? Make it a habit to do this regularly (annually is ideal). Check the oil and coolant levels before you head out.
- Emergency supplies to have aboard at all times:
 - USCG-approved life jackets for every person on board
 - A couple spare life jackets should you need to help a fellow boater in need
 - Flares that are not expired
 - Spare halyard(s) or a way to rig one
 - Emergency tiller
 - Non-electric/manual bilge pump
 - A way to climb the mast (bosun's chair, etc.)
 - Wooden bungs and 100mph tape
 - A complete first aid kit with medications that are not woefully expired
 - Seasick pills (Dramamine, Bonine, etc.)
 - A set of paper charts for your route and destination (Note: In my opinion, this is not just for emergencies, but is a must-have. Even if you are using your brand-new zillion-dollar

moving map GPS with satellite overlay of weather, you should still “follow along” on your paper charts. Should something unexpected happen to your electrical system or the device, you don’t want to have to find the chart in a compartment below-deck and then try to locate yourself on it. It’s always good to stay in practice!).

- An extra jug of fresh water to hold you over in case your water tank gets contaminated
- Granola bars or other high calorie “in hand” food, stored in a zip lock bag
- A strong flashlight, rechargeable (keep it charged!)
- Lots of spare batteries of various sizes
- A whistle and a larger noise maker (e.g. a hand-held air horn)
- Basic set of hand tools
- Spray lubricant (aka WD-40), tube of grease, etc.
- Spare impeller, oil filter, fuel filter
- Engine oil
- Coolant and a funnel
- Recommended but not absolutely necessary:
 - Handheld VHF radio
 - EPIRB
 - Cruising Guide book and/or Active Captain-type app
 - AIS
 - Small dry bags (to tote your cell phone and other water sensitive stuff ashore)
 - Water resistant binoculars
 - Snorkel gear (mask, fins, etc.)
 - Wet suit
- Fun stuff:
 - Camera
 - Fishing rod
 - GoPro
 - Collapsible shopping bag for trips to shore
 - Inflatable water toys/rafts/tubes