

Getting started sailing as easy as signing up for classes

Lower Mainland offers a wealth of options

BY CHRISTOF MARTI, SPECIAL TO THE SUN JULY 31, 2013



The thrill of sailing doesn't have to cost the family fortune. OPB (Other People's Boats) are the way to go.

Vancouver is nestled between mountains and the ocean and offers world-class opportunities for sailing.

Not only are some of the world's best cruising grounds right at our doorstep, there are also more than three dozens of sailing schools, as many clubs and a handful of sailing co-ops offering easy and affordable access to boating.

How do you get on the water if you don't already own a boat, or have a friend who takes you out? You may think boating must be expensive, but it doesn't have to be tough:

Here are a few ideas on how to get involved with sailing this summer and become your own captain:

- If you are interested in dinghy sailing, Mike Cotter, manager of Jericho Sailing Centre, says: "The Jericho Sailing Centre is based on the model of a Vancouver Community Centre and we are all about providing safe, low cost, highly accessible, naturally powered ocean recreation to the people of Metro

Vancouver, including our flagship sport-dinghy sailing.”

MacSailing, the dinghy sailing school at Jericho, will introduce 3,000 landlubbers to sailing this year. Discovery Sailing Club and Viking Sailing Club, in addition to offering dinghy fleets, each operate a small yacht for cruising in English Bay and beyond. Other clubs such as Locarno Sailing Club not only offer sailing but also have a fleet of sea kayaks, windsurfers, row boats and standup paddle boards. These clubs are all conveniently located at the Jericho Sailing Centre. It's worth a visit — even if you only end up enjoying watching over the bay from Vancouver's top patio located at the sailing centre.

As much fun as it is to zip across English Bay in a small sail boat, spray in your face, water rushing past the hull, not everybody wants to put on a wet suit and may prefer a ride with some creature comfort.

If cruising beyond English Bay into the Gulf Islands or venturing north along B.C.'s pristine coastline is your dream, then taking sailing lessons on a larger yacht may be your first step. With so many schools offering their different programs, choosing the right one may be daunting. A good starting point is to go to one of the schools registered with a recognized sailing association.

In Canada, there are two sailing associations providing sail training through their associated schools: The first one is Sail Canada (formerly the Canadian Yachting Association), represented at the provincial level by BC Sailing (<http://www.bcsailing.bc.ca>). The second association is the International Sail & Power Association (ISPA, <http://www.ispassociation.ca>). You can go to their respective websites and find a school near you that provides the sailing course which is right for you.

Most schools offer introductions to sailing, weekend classes and live-aboard sailing courses exploring the Gulf Islands and the Sunshine Coast, or venture beyond into Desolation Sound and around Vancouver Island for more advanced sail training. You can get a good idea about what a school offers online. Choose a few that pique your interest and call them.

Get a feel for if they are a good fit for you. Find out about the instructors you may get and what their experience level is. The cost for a basic sail training course leading to a certification starts around \$600 for day-sailing classes (three days on the water complemented by classroom sessions) and are about double for a five-day, live-aboard course. Discounts for groups and families are often available.

Once you have your basic training, you may wonder how to stay involved and keep going on the water without having to buy a boat. A sailing club or sailing co-op — such as Barnet Sailing co-op, Discovery Sailing Club, Jib Set sailing club or Viking Sailing Club to name just a few — are all excellent starting points. They range from small one-boat clubs to larger clubs with half a dozen or more cruising boats and locations throughout the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island and up the coast. The cost, depending on the club, can be as low as \$350/year for a family membership.

Those who don't want to commit to a membership and pay monthly or annual dues, you can always charter a boat. You will need more than just the basic training, however, to take out those shiny and expensive cruising yachts. Some more sail training either through a club or a school will get you

there.

For the performance-oriented sailor, there is the racing scene. Whether you are into the casual evening races or the more competitive race series, you will get on the water. A smile, some basic sail training and being willing to show up on time for the race will secure you a crew spot. Guaranteed! A good starting point are the Wednesday night races organized by the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club, Thursday night races through the False Creek Yacht Club or in the winter the Polar Bear series organized by the Vancouver Rowing Club.

If you have any questions with regards to the options listed here, feel free to contact the author directly at chris@simplysailing.ca.

Of course, there is always the option to buy a boat. The current market conditions are great if you are looking for your dream boat. Prices are very low compared to the past and you will find good deals. Bear in mind though: Buying the boat is only half the story. Moorage, insurance and maintenance can quickly eat a substantial hole into the cruising kitty and maybe chartering a boat or joining a sailing club looks attractive after all. Remember: The best boats to sail on are "OPBs" (other people's boats)!

I hope I sparked some interested and showed a few ways on how to get sea legs. Check out the next blog entry about cruising destinations in the Gulf Islands and Desolation Sound.

Christof Marti is the owner of Simply Sailing School in Vancouver (simplysailing.ca) and is a director on the Board of BC Sailing. Trained as an engineer and with an MBA in finance, Christof is also a qualified sailing instructor and a certified Yachtmaster. He will be filing reports from B.C.'s coastal waters over the season.

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