

B.C. sailing: Winter's wild ride

Exploring the B.C. coastline by boat

BY CHRISTOF MARTI, SPECIAL TO THE SUN MARCH 14, 2014



Slipping away from the slip on snowy docks. Vincent Jankunis/Special to The Sun

Winter on the water? Rain, cold and even snow come to mind; and many head south to the land of sun, beaches and tequila. Not so the hardy sailors of Vancouver.

Winds are often stronger and more consistent during the winter months and some of the most exciting sailing can be had between November and March. Some of the most popular regattas are held during the off-season — Snowflakes, Hot Rum and Polar Bear are the telling names of the most popular winter racing series.

However, not only racers and thrill seekers head for the ocean in the winter. Quite a few new sailors take advantage of the low off-season rates most sailing schools offer.

In February, I joined an enthusiastic group of young sailors on their newly acquired sailboat on Vancouver Island. None of them ever sailed before, but they followed their dream of exploring B.C.'s coastline in a sailboat. It was an exciting week, with Poseidon throwing everything he had at us: Rain, calms, heavy winds and a generous dose of sunshine.

The group went from not knowing the basic terms, to jell as a team and finally mastering their new sailboat in five days. This was quite amazing.

A week later, a different group, sailed through a snow storm en route to Silva Bay on Gabriola Island. The experienced sailors managed to find Silva Bay despite the poor conditions, proving their outstanding navigation skills.

The harbour approach was mystical. Dense snow fall muffled all sound. Trees covered in heavy snow stood along the shore. Grey smoke, escaping from boats anchored in the bay, lingered in the air. And the familiar smell of burning wood invited us for a warming drink.

A thick blanket of fresh snow buried the docks. After securing the boat, everybody looked forward to a hot shower, only to discover an island-wide black out had thwarted these hopes. Cranking up a propane heater was the next best thing. We then prepared a hot Thai Curry and washed it down with some rum to keep us warm. The joys of winter sailing.

The next day greeted us with sunshine, the snow on the docks glittering like a million diamonds. Later in the day we stopped for lunch at one of the Gulf Islands' most popular anchorages: Pirates Cove. We were the only sailors around. The snow of the previous day kept even the toughest pirates away and we had this usually crowded cove to ourselves.

With daylight time in effect now, the days of winter sailing are numbered. Let the sunshine, warmer weather and the fresh spring winds inspire you to head out on the water in the coming months.

Christof Marti is the owner of Simply Sailing School in Vancouver (simplysailing.ca) and is a director on the Board of BC Sailing and the Vancouver Rowing Club. 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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