

Sailing lessons set the course for summer fun

With dozens of clubs and schools, B.C. is the perfect place for adventurous types looking to get their feet wet

BY CHRISTOF MARTI, SPECIAL TO THE SUN MAY 26, 2014



There are numerous sailing options to choose from: From day classes, to excursions for several days, SimplySailing.ca offers lessons for everyone.

Photograph by: Courtesy, Christof Marti

Spring is here, and with that the sailing season is gearing up into full swing.

Boaters across the province get the tarps off their boat, give the deck a good scrub and get that annual oil change done.

The past weekend, you may have strolled along the seawall and longingly looked over English Bay as dozens of sailboats criss-crossed the blue water, their white sails pulling them through the waves.

Sailing in Vancouver is much more accessible than you may think. When I first arrived in Vancouver from Switzerland, it took me three years to realize how easy it is to get involved in boating here without plundering the RRSP.

For many, their first sailing adventure may have been as a kid in summer camp or when a friend with a boat took you along for a ride. For those now wondering how to become their own captain, the next step is often taking sailing classes. There are more than 30 B.C. schools and clubs that offer programs tailored to any sailing needs. BC Sailing (bcsailing.bc.ca) has a list of all clubs and schools offering sailing programs.

The following is a glimpse into what a typical sailing course might look like: A group of sailors joined

us for five days of lessons in the Gulf Islands. We had quite an international team: Colombia, Germany, Canada and Switzerland.

A nice breeze on Day 1 made for great sailing conditions to cross the Strait of Georgia from Vancouver to Gulf Islands. The wind was just perfect and everybody had a good time steering the boat and learning the basic manoeuvres.

The day ended with a lamb barbecue at Pirate's Cove, one of the most serene anchorages in the islands. A nice bottle of Australian Shiraz made it the perfect dinner.

We enjoyed summer-like temperatures for the next few days. The winds were light, but the spectacular scenery of the Gulf Islands made up for it. We all agreed that the showers on Thetis Island are in desperate need of an upgrade. It is, however, a great spot to practise getting the boat on and off the dock, centrally located near many beautiful anchorages - and there is a pub.

The third day was filled with more sailing practice, including crew overboard recovery drills. After a long day we arrived at Kendrick Island (near Silva Bay on Gabriola Island) where we enjoyed a spectacular sunset, a Thai curry and a nice bottle of Californian Zinfandel.

Then it was time to cross the Strait of Georgia again, and we set course for Howe Sound, dropping anchor at Port Graves. The HMCS Annapolis, a decommissioned Royal Canadian Navy destroyer, makes for a dramatic backdrop.

On the second last day, the crew was close to a mutiny after running out of chocolate chip cookies. Only cold beers and gourmet curry stew paired with a bottle of Chilean wine averted the skipper being thrown overboard.

After four days of light winds, a stiff breeze finally filled our sails on our last day on course to Vancouver. The crew applied all they learned in the stronger wind and it was a pleasure to see how far they came in only five days of sail training.

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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