

In the July/August 2012 issue of *Escapees* magazine, I compared life on the road in an RV in North America with life afloat in a sailboat in Mexico. Not only have we gained a deeper appreciation of our homeland and that of our southern neighbor, but we have learned how to live off-the-grid, operating our own in-house power, water and sewer utilities. Besides jiggling down the road in an RV and pitching in the high seas in a boat, we have found other elements that both unite and differentiate voyaging by RV and sailboat.

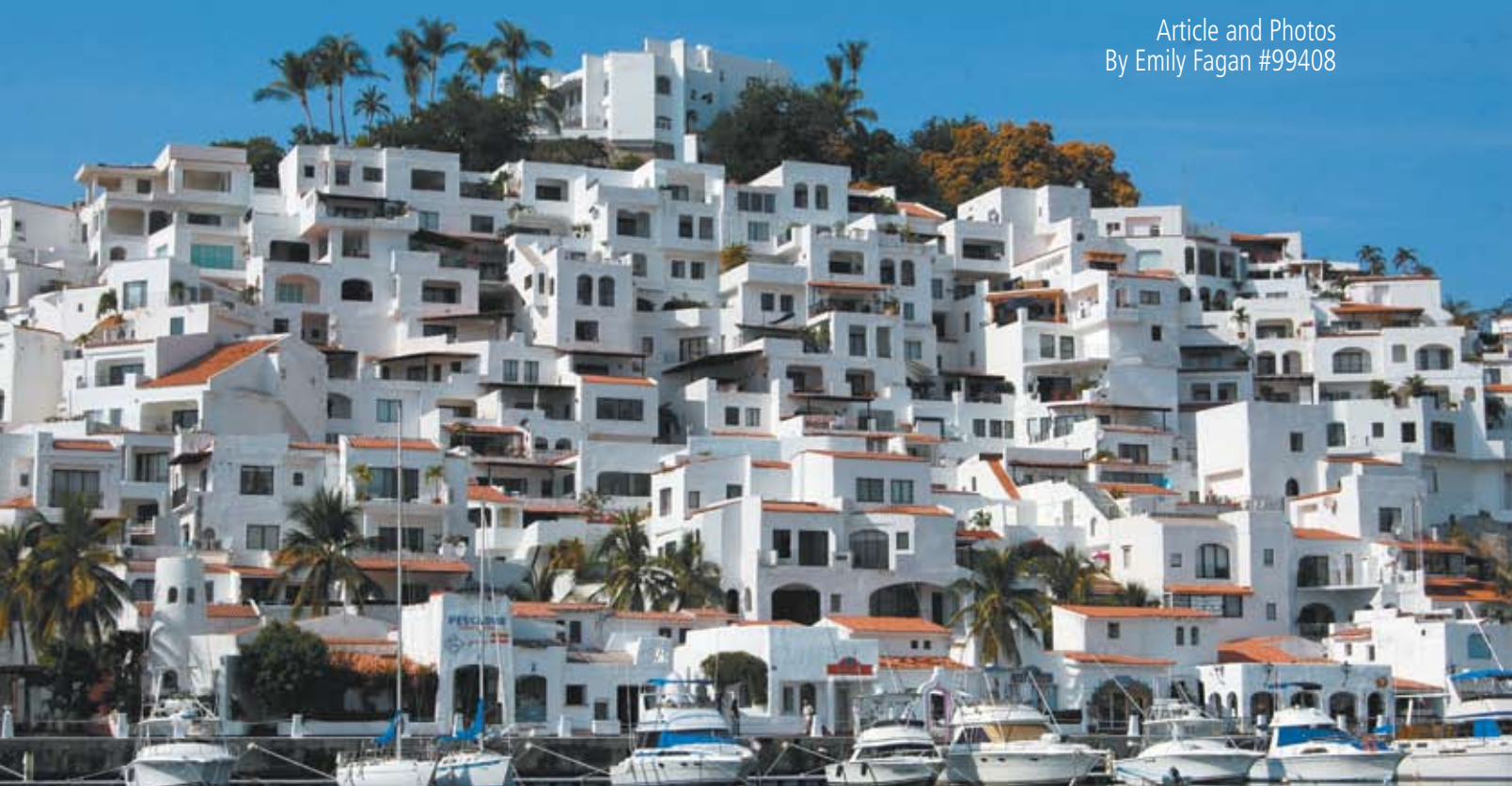
Getting laundry to the laundromat or bringing groceries home to the boat is done either on foot, by bus or by cab, in addition to the dinghy ride between boat and shore.

Folding bikes are too big to lug ashore in a dinghy. At times we long for the supreme ease of parking the fifth-wheel in a supermarket parking lot and loading our groceries directly from the cart into the fridge.

However, we found most laundromats in Mexico will wash and fold your laundry for nearly the same price as doing it yourself (odds, most Mexican laundromats charge nearly double their counterparts in the United States). It sure is easy to become used to having your laundry delivered back to you already folded and smelling good.

Life Afloat and on the Road

Article and Photos
By Emily Fagan #99408



Mexican supermarkets have much the same food offerings as American ones, but they are smaller and not every favorite American brand can be found.

The big cities have large American-style supermarkets as well as familiar chains, including Walmart, Sam's Club and Costco. These places are filled with slap-happy Americans pushing carts laden with Skippy peanut butter, Chips Ahoy cookies, Ritz Crackers, Raisin Bran and precious cheddar cheese. Sometimes these specialty items are cheaper than in the United States, and sometimes they are as much as 50 percent more, but the craving for familiar food outweighs all price considerations.

Smaller "tiendas," or corner stores, often have some of these things but never all at once.

When we first set foot in a supermarket on our return to the States, we just stood and stared in awe. We had forgotten what incredible abundance we live with in the United States. The shelves of brightly colored, unblemished fruits and vegetables seemed to go on for acres.

Communication

Perhaps the biggest difference between RVing and cruising is the method of communication between the travelers. If we see another RV boondocking nearby, we walk over to say "hi," and in campgrounds we regularly walk the loop and talk with whomever's outside. It is very casual and loose.

The cruising community, however, is held tightly together by the VHF radio. Every boat is equipped with a radio, and while under way all sailors stay tuned to channel 16 for safety purposes. Boats use this channel to hail each other by boat name, whether asking for help or just looking for a friend to chat with.

Once two boats have established communication on channel 16, they switch to another channel to talk further. All boats can listen to all



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channels, so it is a common cruiser pastime to switch channels along with the folks who are talking and listen to their conversation. It is something like an old telephone party line.

The radio is used at anchor, too, and at busy anchorages the radio buzzes with chatter all day long. Many anchorages have a morning "cruisers' net" in which all the boats in the area check in, and then a moderator provides a weather report and guides a general discussion that may range from people asking for help with boat projects to announcements of local events to political discussions.

It is a lively form of communication, and it draws the entire boating community together. People become known primarily by their boat name and then by their first names. Because the anchorages are not obstructed by trees or mountains, all the boats are easily visible, too. In the end, it is unavoidable: everyone knows everyone else's business.

This closeness can lead to some awkward situations, however. Amazingly, just like high school, boat cliques form, and cocktail party hosts will often invite certain boats and ex-

clude others while everyone for miles around knows who is bringing what munchies to the party.

Keeping an ear peeled for your boat name being hailed is distracting, and sometimes finding privacy and solitude can be a challenge. There are not that many anchorages on the Pacific coast of Mexico, so they can become crowded, and because weather often dictates boaters' movements, the cruising fleet frequently travels as a group: When the wind and waves say it's time to go, everyone leaves at once.

Ironically, for all the peace and tranquility that one might expect from living on a sailboat in beautiful tropical locales, we have found that boondocking in an RV is infinitely more relaxing and serene.

The flip side is that the radio makes contact easy. Once, while we were busy below decks, a neighbor hailed us to tell us that a school of leaping manta rays was heading toward our boat.

Dashing on deck, we saw the most amazing spectacle: A huge school of large rays was repeatedly jumping out of the water, flipping and flying in the

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“Our traveling lives afloat and on land have enriched our souls immensely and given us a lifetime of vivid memories.”

air and landing on the surface with splashy belly smacks. Wings flapping and glossy black backs flashing in the sun, their widely set protruding eyes made them look like aliens from outer space as they came towards us doing somersaults in the air.

The VHF radio is also invaluable in any kind of emergency situation, so keeping it turned on all the time is a must.

On the day of the 2011 earthquake in Japan and subsequent tsunami, we awoke to a warning report from another cruiser announcing the tsunami (he had heard of it on a single side-band radio broadcast, another more sophisticated long-distance form of communication many boaters and RVers use).

We hurried to get out to safe deep water before the waves arrived and were able to warn some Mexican fishermen as we were leaving.

Likewise, when a cruising boat was rammed by a whale and started taking on water, everyone in the nearby anchorage heard their mayday call on the radio and instantly mobilized to lend assistance.

Scary moments like those are rare, however, and the worst weather we have ever lived through in our travels was actually in Chanute, Kansas.

First, a police officer knocked on our trailer door to evacuate us during a tornado that ended up devastating a nearby town, and then, a few days later, a hailstorm mercilessly pelted our fifth-wheel with hard objects falling from the sky. By comparison, the weather we have seen at sea has been relatively benign.

Who Lives These Crazy Lifestyles?

In summertime in our RV, we see many of families vacationing, while in wintertime we are swept along with all the retired snowbird RVers who wander south for some sunshine and to avoid shoveling snow.

RVers hail from every state and province, and one of the great joys for us has been getting to know people whose lives have been different from ours, shaped by hometowns and home states that are not at all like our own.

Cruisers on the West Coast of Mexico are predominantly retired

snowbirds, too, but we have found them to be a much more homogenous group. All but a rare few come from the three West Coast states and the one West Coast province. The Sea of Cortez attracts a lot of Arizonans as well because San Carlos on Mexico's mainland is just a day's drive away, and it boasts two marinas where boats can be stored for hurricane season.

Like the RV snowbirds, most cruisers in Mexico travel in their boats for the winter months and then return home for the summer, and for many of them their summer home is an RV.

How About Costs?

Because the marine environment is more corrosive and more prone to gear failure and violent conditions while in transit, boats are more costly than RVs both at the outset and to maintain. My very rough estimate is that, for the same approximate age and quality within its sphere of use, a full RV setup (motorhome/toad or trailer/truck) is about half the cost of a comparable sailboat.

In order to set up an RV for comfortable boondocking, there might be an outlay of \$2,500 to \$5,000 beyond the initial purchase, largely to beef up the power plant with batteries, solar panels, charge controller and inverters and perhaps add a vent-free propane heater.

To set up a sailboat for long-term cruising, that figure might be closer to \$20,000 to \$40,000 and would likely include the solar setup, an ocean water desalination “watermaker,” life raft and other safety gear, shade/awning system for the cockpit and rugged anchoring gear. Luxuries like heating or air conditioning would drive the cost higher.

Annual insurance premiums correspond to the cost of the boat and RV. If the boat is worth about twice the RV/tow vehicle, the insurance premiums will be nearly double as well. In addition, maintenance and repair of a sailboat is generally estimated as an annual expense of two

Leaping manta ray near Loreto in the Sea of Cortez.



to five percent of the purchase price of the boat (10 percent if you include the capital costs of systems upgrades and improvements).

Day-to-day living expenses in the two lifestyles are much closer to each other, however. We found food in Mexican markets is roughly 90 percent of the cost of food in the United States, and eating out can be about half as much. The further south you go in Mexico, the cheaper the food is.

Diesel fuel is similar in cost to the United States, because the marinas usually charge an additional 10 to 25 percent surcharge for the use of the docks to fill the boat's tanks.

Even though our boat can be powered by the wind, the wind is often nonexistent or in the wrong direction, and we found we use about half as much diesel fuel cruising as we do RVing. Overnight costs in Mexican marinas are similar to overnight costs in United States RV parks and campgrounds (\$25 to \$60 per night).

Of course, all these costs are highly subjective and entirely dependent on lifestyle choices.

Living a Double Life

When living a double life on the road and on the water, one home must be in storage at all times. We store our truck and trailer near our old homestead in Phoenix, Arizona, for about \$120 a month. This gives us a chance to see friends and family each time we change lifestyles. We have stored our boat in a marina in San Carlos, Mexico, for \$565 a month. Sailors who are off their boats for six months at a time often take their boat out of the water. Storage fees in that case are closer to \$250 per month, although hauling and relaunching the boat runs about \$250 to \$400.

Accessible to Everyone

Our traveling lives afloat and on land have enriched our souls immensely and given us a lifetime of vivid memories. What's best is that these lifestyles

are accessible to anyone who has the passion to give them a try.

A fancy RV or boat isn't necessary, and whether sitting in a cockpit or on camp chairs, the same beautiful sunsets are available to all of us. In our RV travels, we met a couple in their 60s who had been traveling full-time for four years in a pop-up tent trailer. Their bumper sticker said, "Life is better outdoors."

In our cruising travels, we met a married couple, also in their 60s, who have circumnavigated the world nearly twice on two small 50-year-old wooden sailboats (one is plywood!).

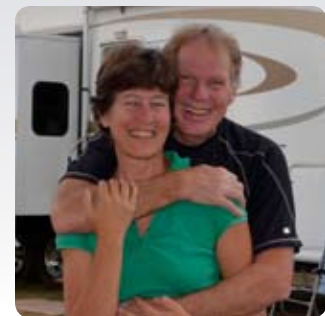
Starting separately as single-handers 20 years ago, they met and married and quickly discovered that two captains aboard one boat didn't work for them. So they each sail their own boat, and they get together once they arrive in port.

It is priceless encounters like these that refresh our souls and remind us that there are many ways to live life. Like all Escapees, whether living in shoeboxes on wheels or on water, we find ourselves continually drawn toward new sights and adventures, forever curious to discover what lies around the next bend. 🏠

References

- www.roadlesstraveled.us
Visit our Website for more information on RVing, cruising and life in Mexico.
- www.rollinghomes.com
Mike and Terri Church #50477 have RVed extensively in Mexico, and their books and Website offer a wealth of information. They often give seminars at Escapades.
- www.ontheroadin.com
Bill and Dorothy Bell offer seminars about RVing in Mexico, and their Website covers taking your RV south of the border.

Emily and Mark Fagan #99408 have traveled full-time since 2007. Starting out in a 27-foot travel trailer, they moved up to a 36-foot fifth-wheel, and for two-and-a-half years, boondocked their way across most of the Western and Southern states. Seeking warmer winter destinations, they took their voyaging lifestyle to the sea and now alternate between sailing and RVing. You can follow their adventures at roadlesstraveled.us.





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