

Traveling the surf-and-turf way

www.roadlesstraveled.us

Visit our Website for more information on RVing, cruising and life in Mexico.



RV By Land and By Sea

By Emily Fagan #99408

When my husband, Mark, and I first got together, he captured my heart with his sincere pledge of true love: "I would be happy living with you in a shoebox." Little did we know that in the coming years we would choose to live in several shoeboxes, both on wheels and afloat.



In 2007 we struck off on a life of adventure in a travel trailer. After two-and-a-half years, we decided we wanted to be warmer in the winter than is possible in any of the states, so we moved onto a sailboat to cruise the western Mexican coasts. Now we split our time between our rolling and floating homes.

What We See and Why We Go

The sights and motives for our travels in our RV and in our boat are different. Our RV gives us easy access to all of North America, and the essence of our RV travels has been by driving, riding our bikes and hiking. The spectacular national parks, gorgeous national forests and charming rural towns have all made for exhilarating sightseeing. Finding a pleasant place to camp independently on public lands and then taking day trips in all directions for a few weeks has become a way of life for us.

In contrast, our sailboat gives us access to the entire world, although our sights have been set only on Mexico so far. Our ocean travels have focused on water-based recreation (kayaking, swimming and snorkeling) and immersion in a foreign culture.

Our favorite moments have been when we dropped the anchor in a secluded bay and promptly jumped overboard for a swim. Watching grey whales breaching in the distance, squatting next to blue-footed boobies and their chicks on a remote island and sailing under a full moon are matchless moments. Many times we have been escorted by leaping dolphins that played alongside our boat and rolled over on their sides as they swam to look up at us. A few times their farewell gesture has been a dramatic somersault in the air.

In many parts of Mexico, our experience has been like a resort vacation, as a lot of anchorages are adjacent to exquisite resorts. Often, for the price of a beer at the pool bar, we have joined the other tourists for a day

“Besides all these rare and exotic sights, the richest part of cruising has been getting to know the people: learning a bit of their language, experiencing their world view and listening to their hopes and dreams.”

of poolside lounging and wandering around the beautiful grounds.

Las Hadas Resort in Manzanillo is a stunning whitewashed cascade of beachside fairytale turrets, and we felt like we had anchored somewhere in the Mediterranean.

Zihuatanejo’s waterfront walking streets took us to an open-air fish market where fishermen sell their catch from tarps and coolers on the beach. Staring at fish of all different sizes and colors, we had no idea what any of them were, and the fishermen didn’t know the names in English. But a pat on the tummy and a smiling “yum” sound is universal in every language, and each fish we bought was delicious. Just further on was the lively Central Market, where whole plucked chickens and skinned lambs were displayed alongside fresh fruits and vegetables.

At the opposite end of Mexico, in the Sea of Cortez, we fell in love with Agua Verde, a tiny, picturesque fishing village where life is lived out of reach of electrical plants, under solar power and generators.

Besides all these rare and exotic sights, the richest part of cruising has been getting to know the people: learning a bit of their language, experiencing their world view and listening to their hopes and dreams.

They are extremely welcoming and nonjudgmental; they treasure their families and they are happy. Less concerned with getting ahead, their family values are profound. More than once, our lifestyle has elicited head-scratches: “You have children and grandchildren? Then why are you here and not at home with them?”

Continued on next page ⇒

Groovy at Isla Coronado, Sea of Cortez, Mexico, and boondocking on the outskirts of Sun Valley Idaho. Photos by Emily Fagan #99408.



AM Solar
Incorporated

541-726-1091

Our Customers say it best:

“I just wanted to let you know that your guys did a fantastic job on our installation. The craftsmanship and care is obvious and the walkthrough was thorough. Our system works beautifully! I tell everyone I see that your company is awesome.”

Scott W.

www.amsolar.com

3555 Marcola Road
Springfield, OR 97477

Surf-or-Turf?

Square Footage: The interiors of both the boat and trailer are somewhere between 300 and 400 square feet. Our 44-foot Hunter sailboat is a two-bedroom, two-bathroom model, a typical plan for its size. Sailboat designers assume there will be crew aboard at times to help with sailing, so a second bedroom or bunk is always included, even in smaller models. RV designers know that a pullout sofa-bed will often fit the bill for children or grandchildren, so our 36-foot fifth-wheel is a standard one-bedroom, one-bathroom model. Despite the length difference, the interior living space and storage are about equal because the fifth-wheel is rectangular with three slides while the boat narrows at the bow and stern. Our trailer's outdoor living space is our camp chairs on our patio mat under the awning, and our outdoor storage is the basement under the bedroom. On the boat, our outdoor living area is the cockpit, a roomy U-shaped bench seat around the steering wheel. Outdoor items are stored in large lockers under the cockpit seats.

Water: We usually fill our trailer's water tanks from the potable water spigots at RV dump stations. On the boat, however, we have an elaborate reverse-osmosis system that converts ocean water to drinking water. This system fills several compartments in the boat and includes a high-pressure water pump driven by the boat's engine, two pre-filters that remove organisms and grit from the water, two four-foot-long desalination membranes, several other pumps and filters and lots of hoses. Mark is very handy, but he found this system a real challenge to install. The end result, however, is that we can make 38 gallons of drinking water per hour when we are motoring, and the one-gallon shower is a thing of the past. We are able to rinse off after swimming, rinse out our snorkeling gear, wash the kayak and even wash the decks using fresh water while anchored out. Although dew does form overnight on occasion, we have gone seven months in Mexico without seeing a drop of rain.

The Safety Factor

We have felt safe everywhere we went, except on the worst city streets of Mazatlan, which are probably no worse than the dangerous neighborhoods in any big American city. The highly publicized drug wars are being fought between the Mexican government and the drug lords, far removed from tourist travel on the coast.

We routinely leave our dinghy on the beach while we explore ashore, outboard engine and all, and we almost always leave our sailboat, *Groovy*, unlocked. After watching the panic of several boats dragging their anchor while their owners were ashore (nearby cruisers wrestled the boats into submission), we started leaving *Groovy's* key in the ignition in the cockpit, just in case someone needed to move the boat in our absence.

We have traveled some 3,000 miles along Mexico's coasts but have covered many times more than that in our RV, zig-zagging across the United States. Because our truck and trailer can hustle down the highway at 65 m.p.h., we can cross the entire continent in just a few days, switching from the Rockies to the Everglades in less than a week.

In stark contrast, our average cruising speed aboard *Groovy* is about six to eight m.p.h., vastly limiting the amount of ground we can cover.

This jogging-paced travel often requires that we sail overnight, whereas we never drive the trailer at night. Crossing the Sea of Cortez at its widest point from the Baja peninsula to the mainland requires three days of nonstop sailing, including two full overnights at sea where we take turns sleeping and operating the boat.

Off-the-Grid Systems

Just as we boondock in the trailer, we boondock on the water, too, anchoring in coves and bays rather than staying in marinas. These choices define our travels, as life in either an RV or a boat is different when connected to

shore power and living cheek-by-jowl with RV park or marina neighbors. Although living off the grid requires that we be conscious of our electricity, water and holding tank usage, both the trailer and the boat give us an enormous sense of freedom, independence and astounding views.

Boat-related Maintenance

The salt-water marine environment is very corrosive and hard on equipment, and the constant movement of the boat causes chafe and gear failures in the strangest places. As a result, we've found that a large part of the cruising lifestyle involves boat-related maintenance and repair. On average, each of us spends about 10 hours a week working on the boat and almost as many hours searching local hardware stores for the necessary parts.

Arriving in big cities with Home Depot stores is like striking gold. Shopping for parts is a fun way to meet the locals and practice our Spanish, but the labor involved in working on the boat has been an adjustment.

As RVers, we were accustomed to spending just a few hours a month maintaining the rig. Only a handful of things in either the truck or trailer have ever needed to be repaired, and the repairs have been quick and easy. Sadly, all those hours of devotion to boat upkeep means that in the cruising lifestyle there is less free time available for touring and relaxing.

Life in a Moving Home

These are some of the practical differences between the two homes, but another major difference is the motion of the boat compared to the trailer, a sensation that is at the heart of living in these vehicular homes.

As we move about the trailer, it jiggles a bit here and there, and before we travel we prep the interior with jostling in mind: Things on counters will shimmy their way to the floor.

On the boat, however, the motion is bigger and wilder. We might sail with

Mark and Emily Fagan #99408 sitting on Groovy. Photo by Bill Morrison.



Surf-or-Turf?

Holding Tanks: While we dump our trailer's grey- and black-water holding tanks at RV dump stations, boats are different. Boats don't have grey-water tanks, and the sinks and showers drain directly overboard instead. Their black tanks have to be pumped out from the deck level by suction (rather than dumped by gravity), and in Mexico there are few pump-out stations. So boaters simply dump their black-water tank directly overboard from a valve-controlled hole in the bottom of the boat once they are at least three miles from shore. This may sound alarming, but navy ships and cruise ships are no exception. Try not to be behind one of them when they are dumping their holding tanks! In the trailer, we rely on Unique's RV Digest-It enzyme solution to break down solids in our black and grey tanks, whereas the boat has a macerator on each toilet and another macerator on the outflow of the holding tank.

the boat heeled at 20 degrees for hours on end, pounding over waves. Or we might get tossed about in a frothing sea, endlessly rolling from one side to the other, sending things on the shelves flying.

This can happen at anchor, too. While sitting out a three-day "norther" in the Sea of Cortez, where the wind howled and the sea roared relentlessly through our anchorage, we suddenly noticed our kitchen knife had slipped off the counter and pierced the floor like a javelin, sticking fast on its point.

Perhaps the craziest thing is trying to take a shower in these conditions. There's nothing like being sudsed up with your eyes closed and suddenly being thrown into the wall while the boat rolls out from under you. If the ocean swell continues into the night, the noise and motion can make sleeping impossible. Rough anchorages are less common in other parts of the world, but the Pacific Ocean has a violent soul, and its Mexican shore has almost no truly protected harbors, so trying to sleep on a pitching bed is a common occurrence.

If this doesn't sound appealing, the tradeoff is often a vibrant sunrise over silky water followed by a kayak ride past silent, statuesque rock formations where frigate birds and pelicans

gather in the morning light. Almost as if to mock the night's turbulence, the morning's earliest hours are often ethereal and still.

Continued on next page =>

WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE THE PERFECT FIT?

You're in luck. Blue Ox® has it.

When you're traveling, you want to take every winding curve, coast down every descend, and leave no bit of countryside untouched.

We have thousands of specially designed baseplates with removable tabs to keep things clean. Each baseplate has safety cables, convenience links, and breakaway brackets that come standard. We do this so you can spend less time shopping and more time exploring.

We also have tow bars that range from 5,000 pounds to 20,000 pounds allowing you to bring along whatever vehicle you wish.

Now you can spend more time enjoying the ride, and let us handle the rest.



Strong As An Ox™



800-228-9289 • www.BlueOx.com

Surf-or-Turf?

Propane: One of the surprising differences between the RV and the boat is the reliance on propane versus DC for major systems. While the refrigerator and water heater operate on propane in our trailer, the fridge and freezer on the boat run on 12 volts DC, and the water is heated by a heat exchanger on the engine when we are motoring. This means that we use a lot less propane on the boat, about 2.5 gallons every eight weeks rather than 7 gallons every three weeks. However, it also means that we use a lot more DC electricity. Where 490 watts of solar power with a 440 amp-hour battery bank is more than enough in the trailer, 555 watts of solar power charging a 640 amp-hour battery bank on the boat barely squeaks by. We are grateful for the 100-amp alternator on the boat's engine that provides supplemental battery charging whenever we are motoring. It is also surprising that, because our boat's hot water is heated only when we run the engine underway, we have to resort to using a solar shower bag after a few days at anchor. We place the shower bag on deck outside the bathroom window and run the nozzle through the window to the shower!

Solar Panels: Like the trailer, we outfitted the boat with solar panels. The roof space on a fifth-wheel easily allows for mounting many large panels, whereas we had to have a stainless steel support structure fabricated to support the panels on the boat above the cockpit. The only shadows that ever threaten the fifth-wheel's panels come from trees, while the boat's sails cast enormous shadows underway and the mast and boom sometimes create shadows at anchor. The boat also swings around when anchored, so any shadows that exist are constantly moving back and forth across the panels. For these reasons, we made sure to wire the boat's panels in parallel so that, if one panel was incapacitated by shade, the other panels would still be active.

“For us, the purpose of RV travel and cruising is to explore new worlds, and getting out to see the sights is at the heart of every day.”

Exploring New Worlds

For us, the purpose of RV travel and cruising is to explore new worlds, and getting out to see the sights is at the heart of every day.

Leaving the trailer for a day of sightseeing is as easy as hopping on the bicycles or jumping in the truck. The boat is a little trickier, as a dinghy ride from boat to shore is necessary first. The entire Pacific Coast of the Americas is known for its crashing surf and outstanding surf breaks, and landing a dinghy on the beach can be a wet affair. Dry bags for cameras and clothing that dries quickly are a must. Getting back through the surf can be even more challenging, and we've watched seasoned sailors get thrown out of their dinghies like rag dolls when the dink suddenly rocketed skyward and landed upside down from an errant wave.

Once ashore, land-based travel for cruisers is limited to what can be seen on foot or by bus. Bus travel can be an exotic cultural experience in itself, but cab fares quickly become expensive.

I have found myself envious of RVers in Mexico who know the inland roads and sights far better than

the cruisers. Mexico's famed Copper Canyon, the archaeological wonder of Chichen Itza and the country's historic colonial cities are all inland treks that require finding a safe home for the boat first and then boarding a bus for a long trip.

Sadly, the North American media has frightened people from traveling to Mexico. We were shocked to wander through nearly empty RV parks and see beautiful \$400/month beachfront RV sites that used to be booked all winter standing vacant. Ironically, RVers told us they felt safer on the Mexican roads now than in years past because there are so many police on patrol. Like us, they had not seen or experienced anything but a warm welcome while in Mexico.

These are just some of the similarities and differences we have found between traveling through North America in an RV and cruising the Mexican coast in a sailboat. We have gained a much greater appreciation of our own country and our southern neighbor, all while grappling with the day-to-day processes of providing our own power, water and sewer utilities in moveable homes. 🏠



Photo by Emily Fagan #99408

Look for more on this topic in an upcoming issue of *Escapees Magazine!*

Boats anchored out in Bahía Concepción in the Sea of Cortez.