

LIVING ABOARD UNDER LOCKDOWN

Making your home on a boat offers enormous benefits, but also unique challenges. We chat to four liveaboard sailors to find out how Coronavirus restrictions have changed their life on the water.

INTERVIEWS: HAZEL PLUSH



Batel Magen

BRISTOL, ENGLAND

Every so often I have to remind myself why I love living here, because the tight space can be a challenge. How do you squeeze a family of four onto a river boat?

By communicating with each other, keeping clutter to a minimum, and – every so often – biting your tongue.

I live with my partner, Dave, and our two sons, aged four and eight, on a widebeam boat in central Bristol. It's 60ft by 13.5ft: that's relatively big, but we're still in very close quarters.

I'm really tidy, and find it soothing to be in control of my environment – there's no room for clutter, and everything has its place. We're always transparent about how we're feeling, and it's even more essential during lockdown: when I need a break, I say so. I'll lose myself in a book, scroll on my phone, or go for a walk with the boys.

You also need to do whatever works for you: we've been homeschooling, and were just getting into the swing of things when the Easter holidays started, so we decided to work straight through the break. That stability, that routine, is really important for everybody right now.

FINDING TIME AND SPACE FOR THE FAMILY

We usually spend a lot of time outdoors, so we're having to be quite creative at the moment. We've been hanging out on the roof of the boat, and paddling around in our kayak. The river is our garden. With so few cars around, Dave has also been taking the boys for games and scooter sessions in the marina car park. They always manage to have an adventure.

Dave and I have lived here since 2003. When we first moved in together, it was into a boat on this very spot. We're now in a bigger boat, which we built ourselves, and we're proud that we live a life less ordinary. And in testing times like this, we're more grateful than ever. We don't have a mortgage, we don't have rent, and our outgoings are far lower than they could be.

The marina has around 60 residents, and we're a very close-knit and friendly community. There are some well-known musicians here, and one is a DJ, so they've been doing little private concerts for us all. We're up dancing on our roofs, finding a little joy in this strange situation. Boat life – and lockdown life – calls for a good sense of humour. ▶



DIARY
of a
Wendy
Kia
THE
TIME
MACHINE

Queen
Bees

Mary and Scott's home, *Red Moon*, was built in 1945 as a war boat, and is now seeing the couple through the current global crisis.

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Scott Atkinson & Mary Waller

ARGYLL AND BUTE, SCOTLAND

From our years as yacht crew, we're used to spending long spells of downtime in close confines. The key is to keep busy, but also to pace yourself so the tasks don't feel like chores. Lockdown has given many of us the gift of time: there's no rush, no scramble to get things done. From that point of view, it's been quite relaxing for us. The tough part is hearing what's happening in the world.

Establishing some kind of routine helps, too. That can just be sitting down at 10.30am to have a coffee and listen to PopMaster, or making mid-afternoon the time for a walk. But don't set a strict schedule – if that walk becomes clearing out a cupboard or playing a board game, it doesn't really matter. Just do what feels right. And make meals a focal point – as all crew know, good food is essential for morale.

WORKING TOGETHER, HELPING EACH OTHER

In normal times, we'd be well into our sailing season right now. We run charter cruise holidays on Scotland's beautiful west coast, around Skye and the Hebrides, but this year we've had to stay put. It feels like our winter season has been extended. We're moored in Dunstaffnage Marina, near Oban, and don't know when we'll set sail again. All the ports and harbours are closed, and the islands have asked people to stay away. So we're spending the time catching up on all those niggling little jobs, and Mary has volunteered to help locally.

We've lived on *Red Moon* for five years, and have been working on boats for almost 20 years, including all of our time together as a couple. We started in the Caribbean on 50ft sailboats, and then moved to the Mediterranean on superyachts. Crew dynamics are fascinating, and perhaps a comparison can be made with families that find themselves thrown together 24/7 now. We have to work as a team, whatever the job, and help each other wherever we can. It's a challenge, but we'll come out on the other side even stronger. www.redmooncruises.co.uk

“LOCKDOWN HAS GIVEN MANY OF US THE GIFT OF TIME. THERE'S NO RUSH, NO SCRABBLE TO GET THINGS DONE”



Towpaths have felt uncomfortably crowded for narrowboat residents.

Photo: Keith Donovan

Keith Donovan

STAFFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND

Social distancing is tricky on a narrowboat – the towpath suddenly feels crowded, with no room to keep that two-metre distance. I feel like a sitting duck, so I've just been staying inside.

In many ways, living solo on a boat was good training for lockdown: I'm happy in my own company, and have everything I need to entertain myself: a music room with a full-size electric piano, my guitar, a couple of drum machines, my new ukulele. But just before the outbreak happened, my 17-year-old son moved in with me, so we've been tackling this together. Actually, I love that he's here. He lived on a boat for the first few years of his life, but moved off when he was seven. Having him back has been brilliant.

You need patience and resilience to live on the water. My regular diesel and coal supplier shut down, but a few days ago a fuel boat came by unexpectedly, and now we're pretty much self-sufficient. It's important to remember that you're not trapped inside, you're safe.

A RETURN TO NATURE

At the moment we're moored in Staffordshire, in a beautiful remote spot, but I've spent the last few years moving around the Birmingham canal network. I love that you can swap the city buzz for tranquil countryside in just a couple of hours.

When you're sharing with other people, you learn how to avoid each other physically – narrowboats are long, so you can always go to opposite ends! But I find the water calming, and take comfort from our independence too. Some of my friends are stuck in flats in Birmingham, but we have so much more freedom. When I went for a walk yesterday I came across 30 fallow deer standing in the woods, without a care in the world. It was amazing.

At the moment, boaters are giving each other a thumbs-up when they pass. It's like saying, 'Are you okay?'. We're checking in on each other. It can be quite emotional: there are lots of older people on the river who are at risk, and the community really cares. It's been a difficult time, with many ups and downs, but we're helping each other through.

"THERE'S A GOOD SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG THE LIVEBOARDS IN THE MARINA"

Wayne Stevens

PEMBROKESHIRE, WALES

Living on a yacht hasn't made me more prepared for lockdown, but it's always a pleasure to hunker down here. That's the joy of loving where you live. It's actually been quite a productive time for me: I live alone, so I'm catching up with maintenance jobs, and might take an RYA Yachtmaster course by distance learning.

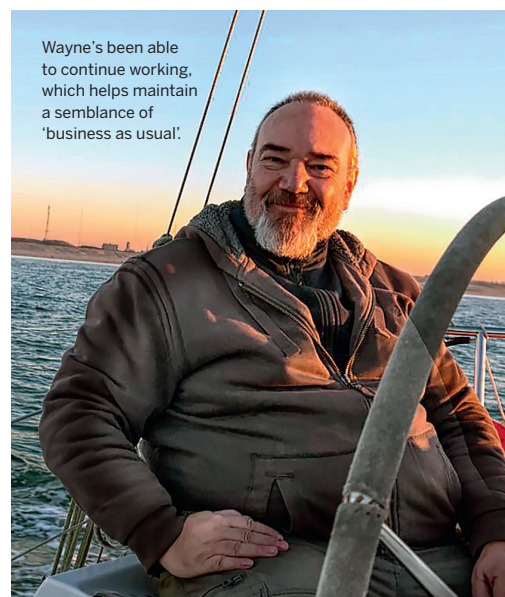
There was something very life-affirming about moving onto the boat five years ago. You have to thin out your possessions, and it declutters your life in more ways than one. It also keeps you in touch with the natural world far more than living in a house does, which is a tonic in lockdown or not.

WAITING TO SET SAIL AGAIN

I live in Milford Marina in Pembrokeshire, west Wales. This region is Britain's best-kept secret. I often head up the coast, or to Skomer island, spotting dolphins and enjoying the scenery. I love sailing at night – it's magical. The isolation, the quiet... I can't wait to get back on the water.

Other than that, life continues almost as normal. Social distancing is easy when you live on a boat, and the marina's facilities are still open, with extra cleaning. Getting supplies is pretty easy, and there's a good sense of community among the liveaboards. If someone's heading out to the supermarket, we text each other a shopping list. A little bit of human contact goes a long way.

It helps that my business is stable, too. I make 'boat bling' – bespoke accessories for luxury yachts, like pulpits and solar panel arches. My workshop is close by, so I've been fulfilling orders. It's good to retain a bit of normality, isn't it? brillfabs@icloud.com



Wayne's been able to continue working, which helps maintain a semblance of 'business as usual'.

Photo: Wayne Stevens