

Holidays all at Sea

Messing around in boats again. by Judith Hunter.?

As days shorten and winter approaches, we can reflect upon holidays and the balmy summer past, for once it really was a good one. Even the Scottish people will be remembering their sunburned, peeling skin, after a surprising, extra dose of hot solar rays. I shall not mention WATER.

My unusual 'holiday', of course at the time of the heatwave, was learning to sail, with a friend in Menorca. We were trying to complement our husbands sailing talents. So with suitcases packed to capacity for every eventuality, we arrived, full of trepidation, to meet our unknown sailing companions. Each of us clutching our own instruction book on how to sail, after reading the rigours and complications of the man-overboard drill I was thankful we were only spending one night on board.

It was a great relief to find the farmhouse, that would be our base, was truly lovely and had a large swimming pool. Well away from the tourist tracks and very relaxing, I looked longingly at the sun-loungers, but no, not for us! This was an activity break, a sailing course, the mini-bus arrived and the group of five, still incompetent crew, bedecked (pardon the pun) in suitable attire, piled in along with the bronzed instructor. We were whisked to Mahon Harbour, then on board the yacht. Is 35' only that long ? I thought, and checked for my quells!

It was soon to be revealed that we were in competent hands as we slid out of the moorings and started our manouvers, mainly re-applying total sunblock in my case. We were told a knot would have to be learned each day, now I have never even mastered knitting so the twisting, turning, looping and pulling of ropes had me mesmerised. However, with great concentration I eventually managed the figure of eight and reef, whilst inventing other knots the instructor had never even seen before. The first day was deemed a success, we had the most amiable of fellow 'tars' and arrived back at base full of enthusiasm. Our host, Sandy, an American and her Spanish partner Diego, cosseted us with tempting local food, salads, fresh grilled sardines, swordfish, calamarie, palma ham and Diego's utterly delicious home made tortillas plus naughty sweets, all washed down with rosy Sangria. Warm air drifted around the poolside dining table stirred in with tantalising aromas, pleasant company, good conversation and a background of easy listening music. Then another day of similar activity.

More of the dreaded knots were explained, one, the bowline actually had a story to it that went, after making a loop:- up the rabbit hole, round the tree and back down the rabbit hole. Sounds easy, is easy, but not for me.... We were informed, this was an important knot, much used on board, also if washed overboard, and a line thrown to you, this is the knot used to attach it around your body. That's it I thought, if I go over I'm dead, never would I remember 'up the rabbit hole etc.', whilst trying to keep afloat and screaming for help! Still, practice makes perfect so I kept trying.

The fourth day was our overnigher, " not much luggage please," said Mike the instructor. My friend and I tried to make light of our bulging bags full of, just in case, or we might need this, items.

Mediterranean blue was just a colour until I saw the deep waters, such an unbelievable, beautiful blue, the sailing was exhilarating, but hard work, I

found muscles in places I never though were there. Lunches were simple, salad affairs, in hot cala's, (coves) with the younger ones diving and swimming around the boat, I was among the galley slaves.

We all felt more confident learning the difference between cleats and shackles, leech and luff, sheets and halliards, port and starboard, the language of sailing. The wind was light at one point, so we goose-winged, that is sails out both side of the boat, it looked really pretty. However it wasn't enough, " we'll put the cruising chute up," commanded Mike. A large, light, colourful sail that billows over the bows, but smaller than the massive spinnakers, impressive and balloon like. I was elected to help and struggled up to the bobbing bows, (pointed end). " Attach a bowline," instructed Mike, passing me a sheet, (rope) whilst holding the chute. Crunch time! With great concentration I began, up the rabbit hole, round the tree....., it was a beautiful knot; but unfortunately I had forgotten to attach it to the sail that Mike was holding! Collapsing with laughter, my eyes streaming tears, I fumbled aft, (blunt end) and still fall apart when I remember the look on Mike's face!

We all made mistakes, but that helped us to learn and become R.Y.A. competent crew. John, a retired engineer, who had just purchased a yacht, which his attractive 28 year old daughter Nickie, was going to help him sail. And 40 year old Manuell, a Mexican born Swiss Banker, whom we all found a delight to know. The whole experience merged into a memorable holiday, at sea and on land in beautiful sunny surroundings of white and terracotta.

Battered, bumped and bruised we staggered aboard the aircraft, for our homeward flight, utterly exhausted. For the next two days, both my friend and I, experienced a swaying motion and often fell asleep, sat upright. However, we both felt a sense of achievement ; along with the aches and pains !
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