

THE DAILY NEWS

Yacht owners leave few luxuries behind

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SEABROOK — Don and Dee Dee Guggenheim had two hard decisions to make each night as they cruised the Intracoastal Waterway on a recent trip to Maine — where to drop anchor and which bottle of wine to enjoy with dinner.

The couple spent the better part of a year cruising from Seabrook to Chesapeake Bay with their toy poodle, Roxy.

Although they left their spacious Seabrook home behind, they took all the comforts with them.

And before they got settled back on land, Don was ready to head out again.

Like most members of the boating community, the Guggenheims are what fellow cruiser John DeWitt calls “well-heeled gypsies,” spurred on by an irresistible urge to roam in style.

Like Columbus

Nothing beats being a tourist in your own country, said DeWitt, who also has sailed up the Eastern Seaboard with his wife, Della.

“I still feel like Christopher Columbus every time I sail into port,” he said.

DeWitt, who owns a yacht delivery business, meets new boaters every day.

The desire for adventure and the longing to explore are common denominators for most cruisers, he said.

The Guggenheims spent 18 years racing sailboats just off the Texas Gulf Coast, but the need for speed eventually gave way to the desire to slow down and take in the scenery.

They replaced their sailboat in March 2006 with Oz, a 46-foot Grand Banks cruising

yacht. Three months later, they motored out of Lakewood Yacht Club, headed for Maine.

They stopped at some memorable ports along the way — Charleston, S.C., Boston, Washington.

But sailing past the Statue of Liberty was particularly special, Don said.

Their growing wonder at their cruising experiences culminated 50 miles outside of Portland, Maine, when they were surrounded by a pod of whales.

“Pulling into Portland, the sun was setting, and I just had an epiphany of how fortunate we were to be able to do this,” Don said.

After leaving Oz at some of their favorite ports for longer stays while they flew home, the Guggenheims finally brought the boat back to Seabrook this spring.

Ready To Party

Bob and Kemba DeGroot traded in their sailboat several years ago for Spirit Dancer, a DeFever 49-foot Cockpit Motor Yacht Trawler. Their five-year cruise around The Great Loop will take them through the Intracoastal Waterway, up the Hudson River to Lake Ontario and eventually back down the Mississippi River to Mobile, Ala.

They left The Galveston Yacht Club on May 28 with a freezer full of Omaha steaks and a well-stocked wine rack.

Like the Guggenheims, the DeGroots count their air-conditioned cabin, full galley and onboard washer and dryer as luxuries.

Both couples have satellite television and cell phone signal booster antennas on board, so they're never out of touch with friends, family and the rest of the world. They use wireless access cards to connect their laptops to the Internet.

During their trip, the Guggenheims, who own restaurants in the Houston area, had cases of wine and coolers packed with steaks, veal and chicken shipped to them along the way.

To make sure Don doesn't miss out on his gourmet coffee, Dee Dee Guggenheim keeps a cappuccino machine next to her four-burner, gasstop range.

While most of Spirit Dancer's onboard luxuries are designed to make the DeGroots more comfortable, guests mostly appreciate the thumping stereo system and mirrored disco ball that hangs from the bridge on special occasions.

“We're ready to party at a moment's notice,” Bob DeGroot said.

Just Do It

Cruising might seem like a hobby fit only for wealthy retirees, but it's possible to take off on a shoestring budget and hold down a job.

Both the DeGroots and the Guggenheims work full time, using their onboard communications systems to keep in touch with clients and employees. Knowing they wanted to start cruising full time, the DeGroots chose to turn their sales consulting business into an Internet-based operation, which gave them the freedom they wanted.

DeWitt also can manage his yacht delivery business from anywhere the Peaceful Easy, a 45-foot Hunter sailboat, goes.

And although many boaters have the means to travel in style, people who don't shouldn't think cruising is out of their reach, DeWitt said.

"Boating in general is an expensive proposition, but boats come in all sizes and styles to fit all pocket books," he said.

Don Guggenheim also encouraged anyone interested in boating, no matter what their socio-economic situation, to find a way to take the trip of their dreams.

"You just have to do it if you can," he said. "We were fortunate to do it in a nice boat, but I would do it any way I could. Just give me a boat."

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