

Boating

GUIDE





Key West, Fla.

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Newport, R.I.

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Seattle

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Marina Del Rey, Calif.

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Get Out There!

Boaters tend to be intimately familiar with their local waterways, from hidden-gem fishing holes to the very best places to tie off for a magical night of fun.

But there are lifelong memories to be made across the U.S., if you know where to go.

Why not leave the car keys at home this year and set sail toward one of these epic boating destinations?

KEY WEST, FLORIDA

Key West is in the pinnacle of a string of simply gorgeous islands known as the Florida Keys, where you'll experience some of the country's most spectacular sunsets. You'll

have no problem finding room at the popular Conch Harbor Marina, which allows boats up to 195 feet. If you're not able to get there by water, or don't want to haul your own vessel, there are a number of local charter services that can bring the adventure to you.

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

Step back into history at this charming seaside town, which was home to the historic America's Cup

sailboat race for more than half a century. The harbor, which stretches down more than 100 feet along its outer edges, has been in use since the 1600s. Newport is still home to the largest fleet of America's Cup 12-meter boats, and you can charter most of them. Be on the lookout for majestic oceanfront estates and eye-popping yachts along the rocky shoreline's picture-perfect backdrop.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Still somehow a hidden gem for visitors, Seattle boasts hundreds of miles of protected waterways set against a soaring mountain range. There are seven boat launches within the city limits; there are also more than 20

places for hand-carry vessels in Seattle.

Just be aware that you won't be alone out there on the water. Sailing is a very popular recreational activity: In fact, Seattle is said to have more pleasure boats than anywhere else in America on a per capita basis.

MARINA DEL REY, CALIFORNIA

Located outside of Santa Monica, Marina Del Rey is a short drive from Los Angeles. You'll find the largest man-made harbor for small crafts in the U.S. Rent a boat and serve as your own skipper, or hire a certified captain to show you around. Among the most reliable sights: Yachts owned by some of our most well-known celebrities.

Buying a Boat

The first question to ask before purchase a boat is what you plan to do with it. Do you intend to use it as a fishing vessel — and where?

Conditions are much different on a river versus the ocean, requiring very different boats. Will you be entertaining guests, or staying overnight? There are boats designed around those needs, too. Here's how to determine which one is right for you.

FIRST-TIME BUYERS

First-time buyers should see out of reputable dealer to make a purchase. Private sellers will offer a cheaper option, but novices might not know what to look for in a used boat, putting themselves at risk of big problems far away from land. The pros can walk you through a variety of options, tailoring the sale to your personal needs while also providing the peace of mind of a licensed dealer-backed warranty.

THE RIGHT CHOICE

If you're an angler, fishing boats provide strength, stability and durability but vary widely in size, depending on where and how you want to participate. Bowriders are a great option for those who are just getting started, or who are more interested in water



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sports. High-performance boats are narrower, feature larger outboards and usually seat only a few people. They're obviously built for speed, but also require extreme caution. Houseboats offer you a place to call your own, right on the water. They can stretch past 100 feet, with kitchens, dining areas and bedrooms. Pontoons

and tritoons, with their wide profile and generous seating, are ideal for lazy group outings.

PRICING

As with car buying, it's easy to get distracted by the unbelievable features found on today's newest boats. The first order of business after deciding which type works for you is

to decide how much you want to spend. High-performance boats may provide a jolt of adrenaline, but they won't be suitable for anyone who wants to use it for a relaxing afternoon with friends — and it might blow your budget, too.

THE RIGHT TIME

If you're looking for score the

very best deal, pay attention to the calendar. Some of the best prices of the year can be found as new models are unveiled; dealers are looking to make room for last year's options. Make time for area boat shows too. The vendors there are ready to deal, opening the door for some choice bargains if you're willing to negotiate.

Electrical Safety on the Water

Boater-safety courses usually focus on the perils of water conditions and traffic on the water.

But there is another danger lurking in every vessel's electrical system. Here's how to keep yourself safe from electric-shock drowning.

WHAT IT IS

Electric-shock drowning happens when current leaks into the water from a nearby source, typically from boats, marinas or yachts.

It's often a low-level current, but the charge can cause paralysis as it passes through a swimmer's body, and they may drown. This danger is present anytime electricity is found near water, but it's a particular concern around docks.

That's why swimmers are encouraged by the BoatUS Foundation to stay back 150 or more from where electrical equipment or wiring is present.

WHAT TO DO

If you see a swimmer in distress and suspect they've been subjected to an electrical shock, you shouldn't jump into the water to help — since it could be charged and now you'd both be at risk of ESD. Instead, throw a flotation device. Next try to find the source of power — like say, a battery-charging station — and then disconnect it.



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ESD'S MAIN CAUSE

Even if you're handy around the house, be aware that the wiring on boats requires a different kind of specialized knowledge. The truth is, electrical currents often enter the water because of faulty repair jobs done by owners themselves. If an inspection reveals wear and tear, or your boat needs an

electrical upgrade, hire a qualified marine mechanic. Repairmen certified by the American Boat and Yacht Council are recommended; contact the nearest marina for local referrals.

TAKE PRECAUTIONS

For swimmers, stay well away from marinas, boat-yards and public or private

docks with electric service. If you are swimming and feel a tingling sensation, move away as quickly as possible. Boaters should have a qualified electrician install an equipment-leakage circuit interrupter on the vessel. Only use power cords that have ELCIs, rather than the typical household extension cords when providing shore power. Ask

questions at your marina. Become familiar with the maintenance schedule, and keep a close eye on upkeep. Pay attention to their ground-fault protection systems; make sure they're undergoing regular inspections. If these basic safety precautions aren't being followed, consider moving your boat to a different location.

Maintaining Your Boat

Boats are no different than cars in that they require periodic maintenance in order to operate at peak performance.

Regular servicing is a must, or you might find yourself stranded in open water. Here are some important tips for maintaining your boat for a successful season.

OIL CHANGES

Inboard, four-stroke outboard and stern-drive boats should have an oil change every 100 hours of operation, according to Discover Boating — or annually, whichever comes first.

There aren't any quick-stop oil changing places out on the lake, however, so you'll have to learn to do it yourself or be prepared to take the boat to a local dealership or shop. Only use oil that's been approved by the National Marine Manufacturers Association, and follow all manufacturer instructions.

BOAT WASHES

This is like a car wash, except for your boat — and they're not recommended for aesthetic reasons.

Boats should be washed after every outing, in particular if you've been navigating in the ocean.

Salt water corrodes metal, ruining fasteners and other hardware over time.



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PROP INSPECTION

You should remove the propeller to inspect the propshaft several times a year, in case fishing line has accumulated there. Discarded or lost line floats on the water, and can become entangled in the prop of passing boats. The line can work it was between the propeller hub and gear case,

wrapping around the prop shaft and then wearing away its seal. If this seal were to fail, water will enter the gear case and cause extensive damage. Your owners manual will provide specific instructions on removing your propeller.

ANNUAL PREP

If your boat has gone unused

for the winter or any other long period of time, there is a checklist of things that need to be evaluated before returning to the water. Inspect the fuel system for leaks or excess wear and tear. Check the electrical system for obvious issues, as well. Clean terminals of any corrosion, and test or charge the battery. Call an electrician

if anything else looks amiss. Look for brittle, soft or cracking hoses, and inspect connections and surfaces for integrity issues. Check all fluids, since these levels are critical for performance. Consider booking a service call by a certified mechanic, since they might target issues the layman overlooks.

The Perfect Spot to Fish

Bank fishing will only take you so far on a quest for the sweet spot on any lake or waterway.

You'll have to jump in a boat to reach distant areas where they're really biting. Here's how to find the perfect place to fish.

BE WEATHER AWARE

Checking the area weather report is always a good idea before heading out onto the water. But that also can have a direct impact on fishing. Water temps, the tide, light levels and barometric pressure all play a role in how active fish are beneath your boat.

BECOME FAMILIAR

Fish tend to congregate around certain places, and knowing where those places are can go a long way toward success. For instance, any spot where water enters or drains from a lake will often attract fish, because the water is much cooler. Scout around in search of other favorite locales. On the way, look out for downed trees, clusters of branches or other favorable habitats. Fish will be nearby, since they often call areas like that home.

WHERE THEY'LL BE

Piles of rocks in cooler water are attractive to walleyes, perch and small-mouth bass; they're also like the current.

Trout prefer calmer pockets of water amid swift, shallow



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cold-water streams, where they can feed on insects. Flooded timber and weedbeds provide a place for bluegills and large-mouth bass, who like relatively warm, shallow water.

KNOW YOUR ENGINE

Approaching the sweet spot

for fishing is an art unto itself. Get to know how your boat runs, so you can make the quietest approach possible. Once you do, head to the edges of a fish's preferred habitat, since that's where they can attack prey most efficiently. Cast from as far away as

possible so they're not alerted to your presence.

BOATING BONUSES

Boating allows you to quickly change locations if a particular fishing hole has run dry. And there's no need to pack up your gear every time, either.

You'll also get to enjoy more of the beauty of nature than you'd ever see with the naked eye while still ashore. There's a peacefulness to being out on the water too, since you're not lined up on the bank with other fishermen who had the same idea.

Boating with Kids

Family time on the boat makes for priceless memories. But it's important to be aware of the risks associated with having children out on the water.

Here's how to keep them safe while boating.

WHEN'S THE RIGHT AGE?

Kids shouldn't be on board until they weight at least 18 pounds and can don a snugly fitting life vest, according to the U.S. Coast Guard. Ensure that their personal flotation device fits properly before leaving the dock. Try it out at home with a trial run in the bathtub or at a local swimming pool. Remember that it's crucial to travel slowly and steadily with a baby on board, even when they're wearing a life jacket. Once they're mature enough, everyone on board should know how to drive and potentially dock the boat. Discover Boating recommends waiting until kids are at least in the fourth grade.

SAFETY CHECKLIST

Check your state's regulations for life-jacket age requirements for children. In states without these laws, the U.S. Coast Guard requires children under 13 to wear approved flotation devices on moving boats. Rely on the manufacturer label to deter-



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mine correct weight and size recommendations. Ensure there isn't excess room above the arm openings, and that the flotation device doesn't cover the child's face or chin. Work to improve swimming skills among your younger passengers. Always have a cellphone or VHF radio at hand in case the unexpected happens.

SEASICKNESS REMEDIES

Kids can be particularly prone to seasickness, but there are some every-day remedies to help ease the symptoms. Peppermints are a kind of aroma healer, while ginger or lime also work for some people. Some parents swear by bracelets that use pressure points to prevent seasickness in the first place. For many it

works, even if only by placebo effect.

BE SUN AWARE

The sun can be particularly damaging out on the water, and that's even more so for children. Only a few serious sunburns can increase children's risk of later contracting skin cancer, according to the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention. Their delicate skin must be given additional protection from these UV rays, but sunscreen is not recommended for children under six months old because the chemicals are too harsh. Instead, use a large hat or umbrella for protections. After six months, the Mayo Clinic has suggested using sunscreen with an SPF 15 rating or higher.

Do-It-Yourself Boating

You don't have to have a swanky yacht to enjoy a day on the water. Canoes and kayaks provide a fun and easy form of do-it-yourself boating.

Here's how to make the most of it.

HUGE ADVANTAGES

One of the biggest headaches of boat ownership is getting the vessel to and from your selected spot, and then in and out of the water. Smaller personal watercraft open the door for anyone to get out there. Even an every-day passenger car can transport canoes and kayaks with the aid of a professionally installed roof rack. Unlike motorized boating, this is great exercise, providing a low-impact, high-energy workout. You'll strengthen your core and upper body, while improving cardiovascular fitness and you can kayak or canoe in almost any body of water.

STAYING SAFE

Take safety or how-to courses if you've never navigated these smaller vessels. You'll learn how to enter and exit in a variety of situations — and it's not always an easy proposition — as well as different paddling techniques. Before you board, put on a life jacket. Rough conditions can turn kayaks and canoes over



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without notice. Study waterway maps and decide on a route and destination before you leave. Plan on making a series of stops along the way to refuel.

GEARING UP

You'll need a personal flotation device, of course, and perhaps some thermal outfits.

Additional equipment only enhances your safety and comfort. Invest in a weather radio so you'll be updated on possible hazards. Bring whistles and flares in case you need help; cell phones can be lost in the water, or lose a signal in particularly remote areas. Buy a waterproof bag to store an extra set of dry clothes, a snack

and other needed things. Secure it to your vessel, in case you capsize.

BEST PRACTICES

Plan a trip to a place where conditions align with your particular skills, whatever they may be. Always double-check the forecast before pushing off, and wear safety gear. Rely

on the buddy system, and develop an emergency plan. Research potential hazards, if possible. Avoid fog, in particular as a beginner, since it muffles sound and reduces visibility. It's always smart to stay off busy waterways, and away from polluted water since you could be accidentally exposed to harmful bacteria.