

2015 Summer Training Guide p.47

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## HOT SEX IN A HURRY

P.93

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P.107

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A man in a black and yellow life vest is jumping from the back of a white boat into a river. The river is surrounded by high, reddish-brown rock walls, forming a canyon. Other people are visible swimming in the water. The sky is blue with some clouds.

# The MH Life™

ENJOY YOURSELF—IT'S GOOD FOR YOU!

## Stressed Out? Just Add Water

Studies suggest that leaving shore may be the best way to recharge. BY K. ALEISHA FETTERS

### EVERYTHING IS BETTER OUT ON THE WATER.

The sun is brighter, the air more crisp. Cell reception is so unreliable that—"Oh, hey, boss? Can you hear me? I'm losing you!"—you're off the hook on real-world demands.

That's likely why a 2013 study published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* found that people feel more calm and revitalized after visits to the coast than to a park or the countryside. "The water seems to spur a sense of freedom and autonomy that people don't enjoy anywhere else," says study author Mathew White, Ph.D., a social and environmental psychologist at the University of Exeter, England.





“Water gives you a break,” says Wallace J. Nichols, Ph.D., an environmental researcher and the author of *Blue Mind*. And that can free you from your normal, everyday concerns. Hell,

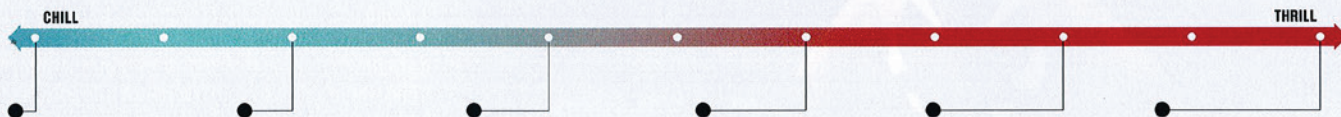
even Einstein was a seaman. He did some of his best thinking on a 15-foot sailboat.

Need more convincing that you should plan your next vacation around whatever body of water is calling to you? When researchers from the European Centre for Environmental and Human Health analyzed data from 48 million people, they found that those closest to the ocean were better off than their landlocked peers. One possible reason may be that these environments can promote physical activity as well as provide opportunities for stress reduction, the study authors say. (There’s a reason the 11-hour-long “Calming Seas” recording on YouTube has more than 5.9 million views.)

With America’s 95,000 miles of shoreline and 40 million acres of lakes, odds are you live within a few minutes of navigable water. And some 88 million people pulled away from a dock last year, reports the trade organization Discover Boating. So read on: We tapped the experts to find the best, most accessible on-the-water outings, ranked from chill (kicking back with a brewski) to thrill (potentially peeing that brewski down your leg).



**GREAT CATCH!**  
Those nights at the gym? This is what you were training for. You just didn't know it at the time.



**\$\$ SPEND THE DAY ON A SAILBOAT**

Book a skipper, or complete a course and take the helm yourself. Stu Gillfillen of U.S. Sailing suggests the latter. “You’ll connect to the water in a more meaningful way,” he says. Many sailing schools have affordable day sessions (startsailing.org), and sailing centers offer basic memberships that come with boat access and discounted instruction.

**SPOT TO SAIL** San Diego. The sailing culture is huge, and the winds are steady and gentle, says Gillfillen.

**\$\$\$ CHECK INTO A HOUSEBOAT HOTEL**

Don’t let the size intimidate you: Learning to operate a houseboat is relatively easy. The folks at the rental shop will show you how. Some sleep more than a dozen people, making them great for bachelor parties or family reunions. Split the rent and it’ll probably end up costing less than a hotel, says Ellen Hopkins of Discover Boating, a boating advocacy nonprofit.

**CRUISE HEAVEN** Lake Powell has over 2,000 miles of scenic shoreline, mostly in Utah.

**\$\$\$\$ CHARTER A PERSONAL PARTY YACHT**

They’re not for the budget traveler: A week-long yacht cruise can set you back \$15,000—but the photos you post will make people think you’re living in a Puff Daddy video. Look into outfits such as Sun-sail, The Moorings, and Yachts and Friends to set you up with chefs, stewards, and captains.

**TOP YACHT SPOT** The British Virgin Islands. “They’re so close you can island-hop with little more than an hour between stops,” says Oliver Kinchin, a captain with The Moorings.

**\$ CRUISE THE SWAMP ON AN AIRBOAT**

Powered by automobile or aircraft engines hooked to huge propellers, airboats can skim across swamps at 50-plus miles an hour, says Kevin Murphy of Hamant Airboats in Melbourne, Florida. Book a private group—airboats designed for five can go faster than those that carry 20—and watch for gators, wild hogs, and more.

**SWAMP SUPREME** The Florida Everglades are great. For smoother, less muddy airboating, try Nebraska’s Platte River, suggests Murphy.

**\$\$ SUPERCHARGE YOUR WATER SPORTS**

Renting a powerboat will give you a personal launch pad for snorkeling and all the muscle you need for wakeboarding, tubing, or sprints in excess of 90 mph, says Jonathan Meyers, a U.S. Powerboating training manager. A rental shop can teach you to drive it, but if you’re nervous, start at a training center (uspowerboating.com/find-a-course).

**SPEED STATES** The New England states and Florida make up the powerboating hubs, says Meyers.

**\$\$\$\$ FIGHT A MARLIN FAR, FAR OFFSHORE**

On most deep-sea fishing charters, you’ll push off before 7 a.m. and be back in time to eat your catch for dinner. But you can scale up: Companies like Marlin University offer longer trips that journey 50-plus miles out to sea, where you can find bigger fish like sailfish and blue marlin. Most offshore charters run \$1,000 to \$2,500 a day.

**THE MARLIN MECCA** Australia’s Great Barrier Reef is that trip of a lifetime. Closer to home, hit the Pacific coast of Central America.





**STRESS HATES WATER**  
Hit the waves and leave your worries back at the marina.

**4 NAUTICAL RULES EVERY MAN MUST KNOW**

CHECK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU WRECK... A VERY, VERY EXPENSIVE BOAT.

**1**

**Share Your Float Plan**

Write down your travel itinerary, boat description, and passenger info (names, addresses, and phone numbers). Give the deets to a friend or marina employee so someone knows when to expect you back, says Ellen Hopkins of Discover Boating. You may lose cell coverage out there.

**2**

**Rock Those Boat Shoes**

You'll look like you fit in. But more important, you'll keep the boat's deck scuff-free. "You can spend half a day rubbing off scuff marks," says Oliver Kinchin, a captain with The Moorings charter company. At the very least, avoid wearing shoes that have black or brown soles.

**3**

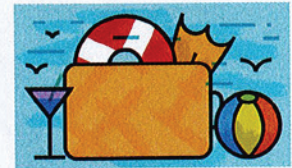
**Steer Your Ship Right**

If two vessels are approaching each other head-on, both captains should turn hard right, Kinchin says. But if your boat's motorized and the other guy is sailing, he has the right-of-way. Communicate with your horn: One blast means you're turning right, two means you're going left.

**4**

**Cut the Anchor Some Slack**

When you drop anchor, let out four to five times as much chain as the water is deep, says Kinchin. Example: If the water is 20 feet deep, drop 80 to 100 feet of chain. This allows the chain to better grab hold because it's at an angle. "I always say, 'If in doubt, let more out,'" says Kinchin.



**TALK YOUR FRIENDS INTO AN EPIC TRIP**

SELL YOUR IDEA. THEY'LL THANK YOU LATER.

**BUILD A PERSONAL NARRATIVE**

Talk to each guy individually, saying something like "You need to celebrate that big raise," suggests Susan Weinschenk, Ph.D., author of *How to Get People to Do Stuff*. Make it about his life story. Other fodder: a breakup, expecting wife, or professional rut.

**TAP THE POWER OF THE GROUP**

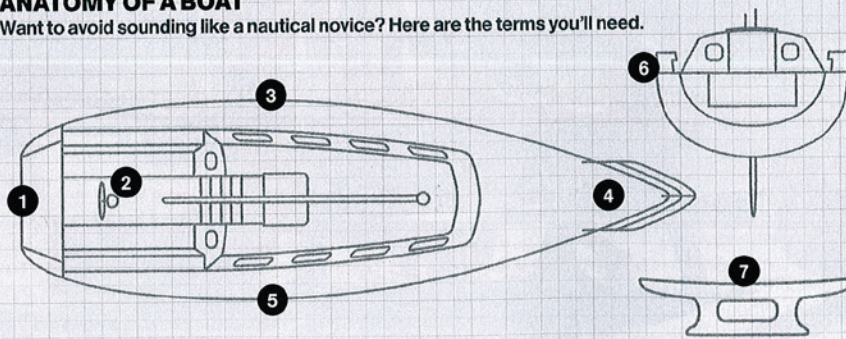
Nobody wants to feel left out, so make it about a set crew, like your pals from college. And pitch the idea with "We're outdoorsmen" instead of "We like to fish." Identifying the group this way, with nouns rather than verbs, is more persuasive, suggests Yale research.

**SET A CHALLENGE**

The prospect of lounging on a cruise ship may repel some, but the allure of reaching a big goal, like catching a 12-foot marlin, can be irresistible. "Tie the adventure to learning a new skill, like sailing or reaching some far-off location," Weinschenk says.

**ANATOMY OF A BOAT**

Want to avoid sounding like a nautical novice? Here are the terms you'll need.



**1/ STERN** The back of the boat. Great place for a beer cooler.

**2/ HELM** The steering position. Also the act of steering: "Hey, helm the boat while I hit the head."

**3/ PORT** The vessel's left side, as seen by a guy facing the bow.

**4/ BOW** The front. It rhymes with "wow."

**5/ STARBOARD** The right side as you face the bow. Pronounced *STAR-bird*.

**6/ GUNWALE** The upper edge of the craft's side wall. It's pronounced *GUN-el*.

**7/ CLEAT** T-shaped attachment used to tie a boat to a dock.