



Life on the Costa revolves around the crystal-blue Mediterranean Sea, and yachting ranks high among residents' favourite activities. Luckily, you don't need to be rich to indulge: Thanks to the CBYA, sailing is accessible to everyone

A GREAT expanse of blue at your feet, a bracing sea breeze and a stunning coastline that even makes Sydney Harbour seem a poor relation in comparison means the Valencia region couldn't be more ideal for hopping on a boat and hitting the waves – indeed, if it's good enough for international celebrities who head here from Ibiza to moor their yachts and take in the heady summer air, Mediterranean mainland Spain must be a jewel in the nautical crown and certainly have plenty to recommend it to us mere mortals.

A stroll along the marinas in Dénia, Jávea, Moraira, Oliva, Gandía and Calpe will show you just how many sailing fans have chosen our coast for their hobby – or, as many of them would rather call it, way of life – with every type of vessel from modest motorboats to cruise liners bobbing, gleaming-white, on the salt-sand waves

licking the harbour wall.

The problem with learning to sail, though, is that it's so expensive – yachting is a millionaire's playground, way too élite for wannabes on an average budget.

Or is it?

Learn sailing from scratch for two-and-a-bit euros a month

“For just €25 a year in membership fees, you can learn to sail from scratch,” says Bob Gordon of the Costa Blanca Yacht Association.

“And as a member, you can use the local yacht club facilities, too, which typically cost thousands every year.”

Starting out for the first time, you'll probably learn on a dingy – not a rubber blow-up craft like the ones we played in the sea with as children, but a small and very basic yacht, easy enough for a lone person to navigate but large enough for a crew of up to three, or for a newbie with an instructor.

With no complicated equipment, no confusing instruments and easy to manoeuvre, dinghies are perfect for early learning and also for more experienced sailors wanting to hone their skills.

You'll learn to rig and de-rig the vessel, which is easier in a

dinghy than in larger yachts, and then get onto the rudiments of moving around in the water.

“This is sailing at its core, at its most basic,” chairman Bob tells us.

“It's the perfect opportunity to really connect with the water; the wind and some fun boats.”

Costa Blanca Yacht Association (CBYA) has acquired two dinghies – Louise and Wally – currently stationed at Moraira's El Portet marina, often dubbed, and for good reason, 'Paradise Bay': low-rise, spaced-out residential homes tucked in between secluded beaches, pine forests and mountain folds, this peaceful and beautiful corner of the earth will seduce you as much as the heady wind-in-hair experience of actually moving a yacht where you want it to go across the sea, of returning home with the gleeful thought, ever-present, of: “I did that! I did that myself!”

Lifelong learning: Always a new challenge ahead, if you want one

Once you find you're getting the hang of sailing, the possibilities for a higher level of fun and speed are endless: “We have a special relationship with Calpe Royal Yacht Club giving access to their six fleet-racing TOMs at a unique discounted rate,” Bob explains.

The CBYA runs training days twice-weekly on the TOMs, a fast-paced, large, comfortable craft described as very stable and well-balanced, ideal for day trips and, of course, designed for speed as they are used for regattas.

Of course, you can't expect to be taking part in regattas after two or three lessons; like any sport involving 'equipment' – skiing, equitation, scuba-diving, sky-diving...you get the picture – learning is a slow process and getting to grips with it takes a combination of hard work, self-confidence development, concen-

tration, and mind-over-matter if you're naturally of a nervous disposition. Often, in fact, 'scaredy cats' become more successful learners in 'extreme' sports, because they are used to a lifetime of battling against fears that seem trivial to others, whilst inherently gutsy types rarely have to bother and go into meltdown when forced to overcome an unfamiliar onset of terror.

Of course, a dash of innate tal-

able to wangle a day out with your new mates on their crafts.

If not, you can still savour all the pleasures of water-borne transport, a splendid view of the shoreline from an angle not seen by many and the consequent photo and 'selfie' opportunities this offers, without any of the work involved: the CBYA runs 'Hobie catamaran' days every year from Les Bassetes in Calpe, chartering a craft for two or three hours, with the experienced sailors acting as skippers and the others just putting their feet up and enjoying the ride.

If you make friends with someone who's a licensed skipper, or reach that stage yourself, you can charter a yacht in Dénia for the day at a very low rate and go off on your own, thanks to your CBYA membership, and the Association runs charter day cruises every month which require no sailing prowess, just a yearning for a day out with a difference.

Day trips and nights out

You don't even have to be a committed sailor to enjoy the fruits of the CBYA – if you just want to go for a few lessons a year and otherwise prefer to be an armchair sportswoman or sportsman in great company, you'll have

a full calendar of fun stuff to do waiting for you the minute your membership form is filed.

A day trip to Valencia's coast-guard station, visits to the Volvo Ocean Race and the Valencia Boat Show, and monthly gourmet meals out at Jávea Yacht Club's plus restaurant for decidedly non-gourmet prices are among the events organised to date, and with over 250 members already, there's a very good chance you'll make some life-long friends.

Tempted? We're not surprised. Contact the Association on info@cbya.org or via their Facebook site, www.facebook.com/CostaBlancaYachtAssoc, to find out more.





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