



# Guests Gone Bad

A **survival** guide  
for every good host

Boat training the wayward  
guest is possible; it just takes  
some creative ingenuity

BY DIANE SELKIRK

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL BYERS

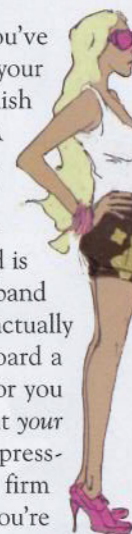
**T**here's no greater bonding experience among boaters than sharing a survival story. Dock talk revolves around these tales—like the time you dragged in 50 knots and nearly landed on a reef, or when that fishing boat heading out for an opening missed crushing your hull by inches...or the weekend you had three landlubbers aboard.

Boat guests seem to come in two forms—those that adapt seamlessly to the rigours of life aboard, and those that don't.

Sometimes you realize you've made a grievous error with your invite before the words finish slipping from your mouth. A casual, "You should come for a boat ride sometime," is taken literally, and suddenly that friend-of-a-friend is gushing about how her husband won't believe that they've actually been invited to holiday aboard a yacht. It takes a moment for you to realize she's talking about *your* boat. But when she starts pressing you for the date and a firm departure time, you know you're in trouble.

Not all boat guests advertise their deficiencies so quickly or so obviously. We've had guests who have shown up clad in suitable sailing clothing, carrying the requisite single duffel bag in one hand, while clutching a gift for the boat in the other, who still went on to become nightmare visitors.

Over the years we've tried many techniques for training boat guests. We've drafted letters explaining the boat in detail, sent it out ahead of the visit and followed up to clarify major points. We've held pre-departure orientations, naming the parts of the boat—"This is a boom; it will kill you if it hits your head"—and describing in detail how things work. We've left notes on the head, faucets and lights, and explained which foods are available to eat on which days. And we've learned that some people just make bad guests.



**HOW DO YOU FLUSH THE TOILET AGAIN?**

The water ran for a full five minutes while she, what, brushed her teeth? Washed out clothes? Day-dreamed? You've been over the systems of the boat three times with Miss Boats-Are-So-Complicated. You've explained your limited tankage, reminded her to turn off the lights and shown her how to pump the head, but for some reason she's just not getting it. Now you're down to your secondary water tank, you're running the engine to charge the flat house battery and you need to go fix the clogged head, again.

Often, all it takes to get this guest ship-shape is to let her think disaster has struck. Fix the head, but don't tell her. Show her how to position herself outside the lifelines when nature calls. Keep the water tank switched to empty unless *you* need some (and she's otherwise occupied). Let the lights stay off for an evening. And make her feel guilty, "Of course you didn't mean to ruin the trip! You couldn't have known that we were serious when we explained that you mustn't put paper towels down the head or leave an 'emergency' light on all night!"

The next morning everything can be miraculously repaired. Don't expect perfection, though: get out the sticky notes and leave reminders in all the relevant trouble spots.

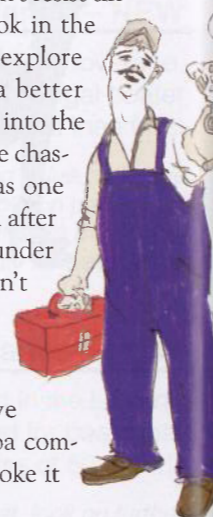
**I CAN FIX THAT!**

This is the guest that can't resist tinkering. He wants to look in the engine compartment, explore your wiring and find a better way to lower the dinghy into the water. You feel like you're chasing a curious toddler as one sensitive marine system after another malfunctions under his heavy handling. Don't believe him when he brags about being mechanically minded while claiming to have fixed his brother's scuba compressor. He probably broke it in the first place.

Do give Mr. Fix-It a project, though. Do you have an old outboard around that you cannibalize for spare parts? Or maybe a bilge blower that stopped working on the last trip and you haven't tossed it yet? Set your guest up with one of these hopeless projects and relax while he toils. You'll both be happy.

**AHHH, WE NEEDED A HOLIDAY!**

These folks can look pretty good when they first arrive. So maybe the matching blue and white striped shirts, crisp khakis and brand new topsiders look a bit stupid, but they only have one bag between them and they brought fresh flowers. Then one of them orders a cocktail and the other sends your husband for their luggage.



Mr. and Mrs. Charter Guest have arrived, and they're expecting to relax.

There's only one way to deal with these people (well, two—you can push them overboard and motor away, but I'm assuming they're your friends). You need to stop them before they rev up. The minute you start to pamper them like well-paying charter guests, your holiday is over. You'll spend the rest of the trip providing fluffier pillows and watching your liquor stash flow into these former friends.

You're going to need to be honest. Sometimes all that's needed is a polite "Goodness, we never have a drink until everything is stowed. I'll show

you where you can put your bags—once you go get them."

Other times you need to be more brutal, "Wow, were you expecting a crewed charter? For that we charge \$1,500 a week."

**SHOULDN'T BOAT STUFF FLOAT?**

Watching an \$80 winch handle slip beneath the waves is enough to bother any boat owner. But if the plate of sandwiches you just set out follows the winch handle, you're bound to get annoyed. Oops is the guest who just can't function on a boat. She shows up without a hat—then drops the one she borrowed overboard (usually your favourite). She tends to lose her balance in light chop and inevitably reaches out for something fragile—like the brass lamp that hangs beside the handrail in the saloon.

Oops needs to be sat somewhere quiet, out of the path of danger, until the anchor is down and the boat tidied. Usually the type that's eager to help, Oops needs to be told that this is *her* holiday: "Just relax and watch the waves. See if you can spot a whale." Maybe in port, after a day or so, you can assign her a few small jobs. But never let Oops handle anything sharp, valuable or sinkable.

**IS IT ALWAYS SO ROUGH/CALM/NOISY/BUSY/BORING/HOT/COLD/CROWDED ON THIS THING?**

It's a beautiful day and you're sailing along on a smooth beam reach in 12-knots of wind when a pod of orcas surfaces just metres from your boat. The Complainer has been whining since he arrived, but you think that something will finally be to his liking. But no, the whales are too far away and the "weird" motion of the boat makes his vision blurry. The Complainer has probably been whining since birth. In fact, his behaviour isn't really a surprise—this is the guy that complained about everything from the cut of meat to the colour of



his veggies the last time you went out to a restaurant.

The best option is to drop this guy at the first harbour and tell him you're sorry boating doesn't suit him. If you need to keep him, you can either ignore his behaviour (trying to change it never works) or you can torment him a bit. Personally, I like to give the Complainer something to really complain about. We like to stop the dinghy a good distance off the beach and have the Complainer hop out into the cold water "so we don't scratch the dinghy bottom." When we shop, we'll buy a couple of really heavy jugs of water (because the water aboard tastes funny) and let the whiner carry them back to the boat. "Oh goodness," I'll say after walking a while, "we're going the wrong way, I think the boat is the other direction."

I know, I'm not very nice.

**I'LL BE OKAY—I JUST NEED TO LIE DOWN.**

Ms. Mal de Mer is the guest who is most in need of our sea-going wisdom (unless she is also the Complainer). This is the guest you need to actively watch and help—otherwise you may end up with a really yucky job down below. Make sure you always have some ginger ale and a selection of seasickness meds on hand. If she wants to sleep, bring the blanket and pillow on deck and cozy her up in the fresh air. Hopefully it will pass. If not, plan to do lots of hikes on shore.

**M**ost of the time boat guests add to the fun of being out. There's nothing as exciting as watching someone really take to sailing, and often a weekend aboard will deepen a fledgling friendship. The best way to end up with a great guest is to choose carefully. Just because you enjoy sharing the occasional dinner with someone doesn't mean you'll also enjoy sharing 50 cubic metres of damp, cramped space. But if you've already invited him, don't worry. Hey, we're boaters—we're good with challenges and can fix almost any problem with a multi-tool and a little resourceful thinking.

**10 WAYS TO TRAIN A GUEST**

1. Send a list. Let your guests know what to bring and what to leave behind.
2. Be prepared. People never read lists, so have extra hats, sunglasses, rain gear, sunscreen, motion sickness meds and sweaters available.
3. Tour the boat. Even seasoned boaters need to know about the hazards on a "new-to-them" boat.
4. Do it twice. Go over sensitive systems twice—show guests how to use the head and to turn the water and lights on and off before their first use.
5. Give them space. Show them where to keep their belongings and point out good places to sit so they can keep clear when need be.
6. Share the work. Encourage everyone to be involved, but make sure you show each guest how to do each task.
7. Explain what's off limits. Prefer your guests not mess with the GPS? Say so before they reprogram your route.
8. Involve them in planning. Pull out the charts and explain the options. Let them know the "cool harbour" they heard about from a friend is upwind in a 25-knot blow before you commit to going there.
9. Speak up. No one wants to be a rotten guest, so let people know when things aren't working.
10. Have fun. As boaters, we have access to a remarkable part of the world. It's easy to forget how amazing it is to first-timers—so show it off with gusto!