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Chasing the Rays

WORDS Doug Mitchell

The eternal summer is part of life onboard a cruising luxury yacht, providing the perfect suntan and year-round watersports. But one deckhand explains why chasing the raised mercury around the globe can leave you yearning for crisp mornings and snowflakes before too long.

Minutes, hours, days, months. Besides being units of time, they all seem to have something strong in common. They vanish before I really get a chance to get a hold of them. I don't know where they go, because they don't say goodbye and they don't give you any warning. They just roll by and turn into yesterday or last week or a few months ago. I don't know what their big hurry is, but they're very sneaky. I live a very busy life but I like to think that I still take enough time to smell the roses and enjoy the ride. However, it seems that every time I look up it's time to change the calendar. And here we are once again at that time of year

when summer surrenders to autumn and a new season begins (or by the time I finish writing this it already has). It's time for change again already but this time it's different. Very different.

Being from a small prairie town nestled at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta, Canada, I am used to the changing of the four seasons being strikingly obvious. The transition from one season to the next is dramatic, both visually and in terms of weather. And not only does the thermometer change but so do the people. We wear different clothes, dust off the gear to be used in our favourite outdoor activities and really start thinking differently about what to do with our free time. Linked strongly

with memories of growing up, the changing of the seasons stirs people emotionally as well. Whether it is the leaves changing colour and fluttering to the ground before fresh snow blankets the landscape, or the bright rays of the sun getting warmer, turning the icicles into dripicles and initiating the spring thaw, you know the next few months will be very different, and this changes how you feel. Some love the winter months, darting to the mountains every chance they get with their snowboards or skis to indulge in the fresh, deep powder deposited by the passing clouds. Others hole up indoors, fighting depression and cursing the frigid temperatures until the snow melts, the flowers bloom and their smiles return. Some love ice climbing and snowshoeing, others love waterskiing and camping. Sun, snow, rain, hail, blizzards, floods and droughts – we have it all in Canada and I'm willing to bet that most of us like it that way. The changing of the seasons that is. It has a way of keeping things fresh and making you appreciate the seasons individually. And now it's time again to say farewell to another summer.

However, for the past nine months this Canadian snowbird has been working on a yacht. And like many other yachts, we seem to chase the sun's rays and affable temperatures that you would expect to find during the summer season. Apart from a few spurts of cooler weather along our travels, I've been living an endless summer since I moved down to Florida to get into the industry last September. Having travelled to many sun-drenched locales in the past, swapping the shoes and socks for flip-flops was an easy transition. It has become a lifestyle that I really love, and how couldn't it? My office being the hot,

teak decking of a beautiful luxury yacht, my uniform being shorts and a T-shirt and my job being one that takes me places ... warm places

However, living away from Canada doesn't come without a dash of homesickness once in a while. Especially during the seasons that are so different from those followed on the yacht path. Growing up in Alberta, harsh winters were a part of life. You either embraced them or hated them. Either way, snow and cold were going to be hanging out for a good five or six months of the year. Beginning with autumn, the leaves would quickly transform from a deep green to every explosive shade of yellow, orange and red you can imagine – one of nature's most stunning and vivid works of art. But before you know it, the trees are bare and you find yourself raking up huge piles of the now brown and crunchy leaves. Things begin to look dull and dreary, so all you can do is wait for the snow and make sure your snowboard is freshly waxed and ready to go. There have been numerous occasions when I have been speaking to friends or family back home and get cursed at for still being in the hot sun but when they tell me about the day they had in the mountains riding fresh, waist-deep powder the score gets evened, if only for a minute.

As yacht crew, we hail from all over the planet and a lot of us work on the sun-seeking type of yacht. Some come from climates not unlike those we follow in the industry, while others leave their dissimilar homes to shed some heavy clothing and join the suntan club. I think many would say that they would be quite happy not to return to the depressing, grey drizzle or minus temperatures found in their normal habitats. But some,

perhaps, after their 400th day of tropical weather might actually begin to miss the things they moaned about back home. Curling up inside with a hot cup of tea on a rainy day or having some fun with the two feet of fresh snow that fell over the night suddenly doesn't seem so bad. And thinking about these things, at least in my experience, always leads to missing the people you share them with. You begin to think of family and friends and before you know it, homesickness slaps you in the face.

So, what is the solution? A touch of both perchance? The general response from the crew I've talked to is taking some holiday time at the right time of year to get a fix of home while knowing the warm weather is waiting for you when you come back to the yachting world. Travelling is constantly reminding me of the things I took for granted in my own backyard and the great benefit of this is really being able to enjoy them when I find myself back there. I haven't been home for over a year but am getting very excited about a little holiday to the Great White North for a dose of winter soon.

So I will continue to enjoy this yachting life. I will keep working in the sun and rubbing it in to my friends back home that I get to go for a swim at the beach every day after work. It's an amazing industry to work in and my decision to trade in pine trees for palm trees was a good one because soon enough I'll be swapping the sand between my toes for the snowflakes under my board, if only for a holiday. ■

Do you miss the winter season when working on a superyacht? Tell us about it at TheCrewReport.com/Features