

KEEPING MY BALANCE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DOUG MITCHELL



Is it too cliché to say that life is about balance? Probably. But I've been thinking a lot about how that's entirely what my life involves these days. Or maybe it always has, but recently there just seems to be more scales to keep level. I'm not complaining, though, because right now I'm in the middle of the Med season, docked in Venice, and life is pretty sweet. The challenge for me is trying to do it all; keeping all my irons in the fire hot. The challenge is maintaining that balance with the mere 24 hours that come with every day.

Ten years ago, I was also in Europe. Only back then I was a 20-year-old, unemployed traveler with four months of freedom to revel in and nothing to balance but the backpack on my shoulders. They were simple days, full of small decisions and big experiences and, in neither a better or worse way, a stark contrast to my European experience today.

Working in the yachting industry seems to present as many opportunities and situations as there are fish in



the sea, and getting to do it in the Mediterranean is quite a treat. But it's only because of the balance that I'm able to enjoy it so much. We all work hard in our different roles aboard the yacht and we all make the most of our freedom when the schedule allows. I've been very lucky to find a job on a yacht that provides us with such an even dose of work and play. I really love my job, and I love where my job takes me, but I could see that relationship going sour if things were structured differently.

Of course, every yacht is different. I have many friends on different boats around the world, and apart from a few broad generalizations, finding an identical situation among crew is next to impossible. Itineraries, crew relations, guests onboard, free time, private or charter are just a few of the variables that determine how one's experience plays out in this business. Luckily for me, all the variables in my equation seem to add up to a pretty favorable way of life. I've been aboard the same yacht for a year and a half, get along well with



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the crew and the owners, and have had the chance to see many, many places for the first time. Our schedule has us moving very frequently, which keeps us busy on deck throwing lines and trying our best to get the salt off and the shine back on, while not disturbing the guests. It's the routine I'm sure any deck crew can tell you about — our daily cycle of life.

The trick is deciding what to do when we're not in uniform. Catch up on much needed sleep? Sign up for another course and hit the books so you're ready to take the next step up the yachting ladder during the off-season? Or maybe soak up some well-deserved R and R at the beach or wander through the charming streets and sites of the Old World?

I opt for a bit of all of those options, grabbing power naps here and there, perusing navigation and radar books, and stepping off the boat for some exploration and photography. I return to the boat with full memory cards and empty batteries, and before I know it, it's time to lower the flag again for another night. There never seems to be enough time to do it all, and I can honestly tell you I cannot remember the last time I felt anything close to boredom. I guess if these are my biggest problems, I'm doing alright.

So again, I think about this fine balance that sustains me. Before I got into yachting and was working a job solely to pay the bills, I always felt like there had to be more to life. The scales were tipped, overflowing on one side with things like stress, worry, and restlessness. There was always a yearning for a better way. Eventually, being in a situation that I didn't really love seemed too old fashioned for me, so I left it in the dust.

Now, I often get told by friends and family outside of the yachting bubble that I'm lucky. And that's true. While I think a lot of the time we make our own luck, there's no denying that the universe has endowed me with some good fortune. Already this summer we've been to Spain, Gibraltar, Greece, Montenegro, Croatia, and Italy — places a lot of people might never get to see. As the bosun aboard a 40-meter yacht in the Med for the first time, I'm frequently provided with the opportunity to learn and improve, and as a photographer and writer, I'm constantly surrounded by inspiration.

So, while some days it feels like the hours disappear too quickly and it's impossible to do it all, I wouldn't trade this circus for anything. Busy as I am, I've got a good balance going, and as I lower the flag on the boat in sync with the fading Italian sun, I can't help but think I'm living la dolce vita. 