

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of light pink paintbrushes, each with a white bristle head and a dark pink handle, arranged in a grid-like fashion.

the crew REPORT.com



THE MAINTENANCE ISSUE

NEW BUILD REALITIES | PERFECT PARTY PLANS
REVISITING EUROPE AS CREW

NO. 43 | OCT 10

OLD WORLD, NEW EYES



WORDS & PHOTOS **DOUG MITCHELL**

FEW EXPERIENCE THE CINQUE TERRA FROM THE DECK OF A 50-METRE YACHT OR ENJOY A PRIVATE TOUR AROUND POMPEII. IT'S EASY TO BECOME BLASÉ ABOUT THESE THINGS WHEN YOU ARE A SEASONED YACHTIE. ONE CREWMEMBER STAYS GROUNDED BY REMEMBERING WHAT EUROPE WAS LIKE THE FIRST TIME ROUND, ON A SERIOUS BUDGET.

RETURNING TO A PLACE FAR FROM HOME THAT I HAVE VISITED IN THE PAST ALWAYS CONJURES UP SOME FEELINGS OF NOSTALGIA AND SENTIMENTALITY INSIDE ME.

After 10 years of travel, study, work, soul-searching and normal life in between, I am back on the continent that first opened my eyes to the world and infected me with the travel bug. I'm back in Europe and it feels good.

It smells the same – that familiar aromatic mix of delicious food, lingering tobacco and reeking sewers all effortlessly invading the nostrils. It looks like the Europe I remember, too: old and modern standing shoulder to shoulder, both seeming to respect each other. Even my ears tell me that it is the Europe they heard before: Euro-hit, techno beats blaring in one passing car and traditional tunes of the area floating out the window of another, both just momentarily overpowering the quick and passionate conversations among the locals on the street.

But something is different. Maybe it is the view. The breathtaking view, that is, from my position seated at an impossibly charming cafe overlooking another incredibly beautiful European town built along the Mediterranean coast. Taking this in while sipping on the best cappuccino of my life or an ice cold beer and watching the fiery sun slowly plunge itself into the coolness of the far side of the sea, I think it's definitely the view that's changed.

You see, back in 2000, when I was 20 years old, I went backpacking around Europe for four months and my view then was always from outside the cafes and restaurants. I was financially restricted to the free sidewalk space where I could only lick my lips and whimper like a hungry dog at the culinary marvels that filled the tables while

cruelly letting their aromas waft out to my spot with the pigeons.

I worked for a while after high school and saved up just enough funds to get me across the Pond with some clothes, a Eurorail pass and a very modest, overoptimistic budget for accommodation. I quickly discovered that I would not be able to indulge in all the "Europeanness" or participate in many of the activities other kinds of travellers could afford.

However, I did come armed with a young head so full of adventure and naivety that none of this mattered. I was on my own, a long way from

anything familiar and could not be happier. I would search out the cheapest hostels I could find and often end up with a place devoid of much in the way of space or cleanliness but abundant in character and usually brimming with other open-minded people from around the world just looking for a bit of discovery.

I survived on peanut butter and banana baguettes, walking for miles every day to ancient ruins, old castles, historic landmarks or simple side streets that I stumbled upon.

A friend from home came over to join me, backpack in tow, financial restrictions much like my own. We planned our travel to be overnight as often as we could, sleeping on the train to save on accommodation. Often seated in an upright chair, packs on our laps or under our feet, it was not quite quality shut-eye but enough to recharge the batteries.

Above: The Erechtheion caryatids in Athens

Above inset: Mitchell in Gibraltar

Left: The Mediterranean view from onboard M/Y Sovereign

Overleaf: A trip to Turkey

The excitement of arriving somewhere new always fended off the cold grip of fatigue anyway.

Each day we would trek through the cobbled streets of the Old World for hours, encountering culture and history at every turn. And when evening arrived, we would return to our hostel exhausted and famished. After creating our backpacker dinner in the shared kitchen (pasta with tomato sauce and occasionally cheese), we would return to the streets for more exploration.

Since we could not afford the clubs or bars, we usually shared a cheap bottle of wine from a nice perch, taking in the nightlife and people watching. Although we occasionally felt like we were missing out on some things, life was good and free theatre was all around us. We were unemployed, did what we wanted every day and learned more about history and ourselves than I ever thought possible. In those four months I managed to see 13 countries, and in my mind I was living like a king.

Fast-forward 10 years and I find myself back in Europe. Only this time, I am employed as crew and my idea of living like a king has, well, slightly evolved. I have been aboard the same yacht for one-and-a-half years now, and when I found out we were doing a Med season this summer I was thrilled. It is a private yacht, so even though we do not make those big charter tips, it is worth it to work for such friendly, relaxed owners that we know so well. They often include us in their excursions and always encourage us to see and do as much as we can. And in between their trips we usually get some time off to experience the Europe that was out of my league before.

I would not say that I throw my hard earned euros around recklessly or that I live like I am in the upper echelons of tourist society. But not having accommodation or food expenses has certainly provided me with the opportunity to try some things.

Since 1 May, I have been diving, taken some tours and dined authentically in both Spain and Greece. I have explored with my professional camera and lenses that I never could have lugged around in my backpack for four months but fit nicely into my cabin (which, ironically, I catch myself thinking is so small from time to time).

› I share a cabin with the deckhand and we have our own bathroom and shower with hot water every day – an almost non-existent circumstance in the hostels I previously frequented. Most of the time we have fast internet and I can always jump on my laptop to send emails and photos to family and friends, while 10 years ago we had to search for expensive and crowded internet cafes to send word of our survival and quick details of our adventures. And before the digital age, everyone had to wait until long after I got home and could afford to develop my rolls of film before they could see any evidence that I actually travelled this amazing continent. It really was budget travel and living any more comfortably came with a price tag dangling from every aspect, and I was not there to be shopping.

When I step onto the dock and into the streets now, those same price tags are still there, they just do not matter as much. Being able to sit down and have a drink, or buy a piece of art, or go inside that museum makes all the difference.



Besides being spoiled with all the comforts and amenities of living aboard, yachting also provides a perspective of seeing a world that is inaccessible to other travellers. We often anchor in serene and beautiful bays and take the tender to explore beaches or villages not always found on the mainstream tourist trail, which are far more authentic because of it. With the owners onboard for a five-week stint now, we have been moving every day or two and seeing some extraordinary coastlines, while never ceasing to be awestruck when pulling into the port of another famous city after miles at sea. Being employed to do this is pretty amazing.

So, when I look at both my European experiences it is tough to say which is better. Obviously, I am glad to be in

my current position but I do not want to detract from the experience I had 10 years ago. Back then, I learned to fend for myself and stretch a dime to the extreme and that first trip abroad got me hooked on travel and inspired my leap into photojournalism, which, after a few twists and turns, led me into the world of yachting. Both have formed layers of character and insight that I hope to have forever. And each one, in a different way, has taught me a lot about how life works. One thing is for sure: Europe is an amazing place and very easy to appreciate with my spectacular view from the deck of our yacht.



Doug Mitchell is a bosun onboard the 40-metre superyacht *M/Y Sovereign*. He has worked in yachting since 2008.