

Alberta couple expands their horizon through Offshore Sailing School



Allan is assisted by the flotilla's second mate in plotting the next day's course

Melanie and Allan Macdonald are self-taught sailors who owned a 10' single hull and 17' Hobie Cat in Alberta. They sailed on Lake Newell but now they are "land-locked" in Calgary so they do not have as much time, nor waterfront access, to sail as often as they would like. They still dream of selling their home in retirement and living aboard a sailboat.

As they've grown older, they realized that some of their interests started to shift, but sailing remained one thing they enjoyed doing together. They decided to take a certification course, so they could advance their sailing skills to the next level. They researched sailing schools online and since Melanie's father lived in Florida, so they

asked him to check out [Offshore Sailing School's](#) operation in St. Petersburg, Florida. They selected the Fast Track to Live Aboard Cruising course aboard a Catalina Morgan 440 in St. Pete in July 2014. They earned three US Sailing certifications for Basic Keelboat, Basic Cruising and Bareboat Cruising, enabling them to each skipper a boat up to 50'.

What interested the Macdonalds most in Offshore Sailing School's Colgate Sailing Adventures (sailing flotilla vacations for School graduates and friends, and other experienced sailors), was that they wanted to sail for pleasure, with some guidance. They didn't feel they had sailed enough since completing their course three years earlier, so now they could refresh their skills and enjoy sailing with a group who shared common interests.

The flotilla they chose was coincidentally in British Columbia. Other sailors on the trip wondered, why take a sailing vacation in your "home country?" but as Melanie said, "we had never sailed nor visited the Gulf Islands off the west coast." Melanie continued, "we really appreciated how welcoming not only our flotilla Trip Leaders Nate and Heather Atwater were, but the small island communities and marinas we visited were so warm and gracious. There were so many different things to see and do. The Maple Bay Yacht Club especially rolled the red carpet out for us. You could sail for years off BC's coast and not see everything – it was a wonderful trip!"

Maple Bay Yacht Club

Since their course and flotilla vacation, they have maintained those friendships with their sailing mates through Facebook, other



sailors' blogs, and even traveled to Las Vegas to visit the fellow student they met in their Offshore Sailing School course in St. Petersburg.



the flotilla welcoming party initiates friendships

Melanie added, "You book a cruise with people you haven't met, but everyone has sailing in common and was very pleasant. We looked forward to meeting new people from all over. People stepped up and pitched in to the best of their abilities. You know your own crew best, but the Trip Leaders did a great job facilitating everyone getting to know one another on the trip. We would visit other boats for drinks, arrange group dinners and tours ashore. Some people might be intimidated about Canada's weather. We were under sail every day but one, and no plans were ever rained out. We plan to return to charter and sail in British Columbia again. We no longer own our sailboats. We know we prefer sailing in cooler climates."

Melanie Macdonald has been a teacher for 12 years, with a degree in Civil Engineering and a Masters, Mathematics. Allan owns an employee safety consulting business and is called to fight forest fires as necessary. And they still share their love for sailing.

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