

The cost of living on a boat:

We've tried to periodically take time to make sure our blog sends the message that you don't have to be a multi-millionaire to take off on an ocean going trawler. For a number of years we were subscribed to the Nordhavn Dreamers List and were often concerned that many Dreamers would be scared away from buying a boat as so much of the discussion focusses on very large and very new boats. We hope this blog counters that image a bit (but also paints a realistic picture).

We've also run into a number of young folks who are living aboard both with children and without but in all cases making a dream come true while they are healthy and able. We've talked to several of them about how they managed to afford cruising before they had a retirement fund to draw from as we do and we will touch on their stories here and in most cases refer our readers to their blogs.

Going back to the beginning of how we chose this boat we refer you to the side document [Our Purchase Decision](#). Now that we are 4 ½ years into life on the boat we still believe very strongly that our decision was the right one for us. We have spent a lot of time visiting larger trawlers and always come back feeling glad that we don't have that much more boat to maintain. We have visited sailboats and continue to find that many of them make us feel like we are in a cave when we are in them, they don't have as much deck space, and they use a LOT of resources in space and costs maintaining sail rigging that is in reality seldom used (there are many sailors who love the romantic idea of sailing and a few who really sail a lot).

There is a curious difference between a house and a boat: If you have a large house it doesn't feel as messy as often because the traffic is spread throughout a larger space (but in the end takes longer to tidy up). On the other hand maintaining a larger house does not require much more time and money than does a small house in many ways. Costs of maintaining a boat, on the other hand, seem to go up exponentially as the size of the boat increases. I often look at the costs of sailboat winches (which we also have 2 of) a small winch for a 25 ish foot boat is \$150 while a winch for a 50 ish foot boat is between \$1000 and \$3000 and an electric winch for a 100 ish foot boat can easily be from \$4000 to \$5000. This pattern follows for many items and repairs on boats. If you dream of living on a boat then ignoring this fact could sink your dream more quickly than you can imagine. Instead of counting sheep one night to get to sleep I started counting water pumps aboard Salish Aire (not including spares). The count goes something like this (bow to stern):

- 1-Salt water wash down pump
- 1-low pressure intake watermaker pump
- 1-high pressure watermaker pump
- 3-salt water intake pumps for the heat pump / air conditioners (and a spare)
- 1-domestic fresh water pump (and a spare)
- 1-electric sewage pump (and a spare)
- 1-clothes washer drain pump
- 2-shower sump drain pumps (and a spare)
- 2-toilet macerator pumps

- 1-bathroom sink sump drain pump (and a rebuild kit as a backup)
- 1-manual sewage pump
- 1-saltwater intake pump for cooling the hydraulic stabilizers (and a spare)
- 3-engine coolant pumps (and a spare \$1000 pump for the main engine)
- 3-raw water pumps for the two engines without keel coolers and dingy outboard (and spare impellers for all of them)
- 2 bilge pumps
- 1-hydraulic heating system circulation pump (and a spare)
- 2- manual pumps for dingy and kayaks
- 2-emergency battery operated high volume pumps

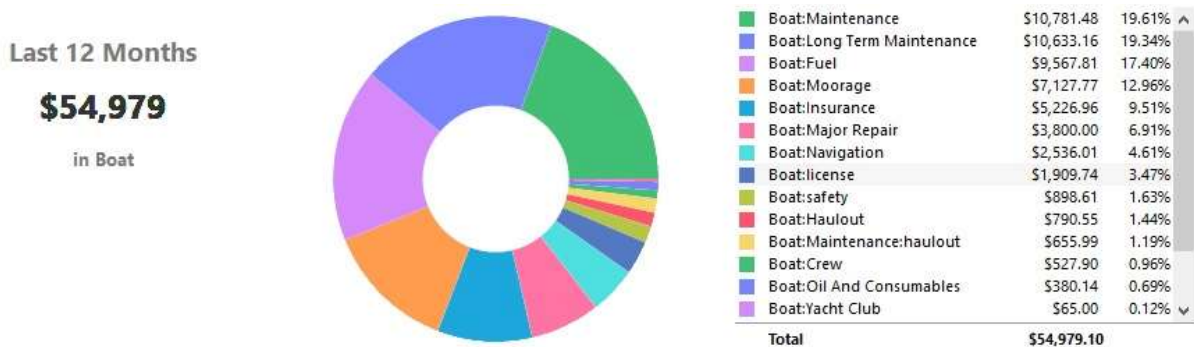
For a total of 28 water pumps and this is a “small” boat. I use this example to show how complex this machine is and thus how many things can go wrong. The good news is that I am able to repair almost all of the systems and enjoy (?) doing this kind of work.

There is another “hidden” set of costs with larger boats in that many marinas have a significant price increase for boats over 50 feet. We also understand that if we go through the Panama Canal that being under 50 ft will lead to a considerable savings.

The message in all of this is don't let yourself get taken in by the space in a bigger boat than you can comfortably afford. We had looked at a Nordhavn 47 and I loved the standup engine room and it had about ¼ more space than we have now because it is wider and taller as well as longer BUT it would have added a year to the time we needed to continue working to pay off the bigger mortgage.

So how much does it cost to own and maintain a boat. After a year of cruising we are starting to get an understanding of the costs which we are glad to share (share the knowledge that is – unless you really want to help out our cruising kitty) . One of our larger line items this past year was “long term maintenance” which includes any repairs done to our 20 + year old boat that we hope amounted to a once-in-a-decade expense such as spending \$2500 for fuel hoses to replace the original ones that were getting stiff and the rubber was starting to show signs of deterioration. We hope that we are over the hump in getting those type of items taken care of and that line-item will be much smaller over the next 12 months. Just as significant was the line-item of “maintenance”. This category has been a bit of a catch-all for anything from a bolt for a specific project to a tool “that I might need someday” and spare parts so I need to start separating things out better but it does give a general idea of the costs involved for someone who does their own work. Fuel is unavoidable if we want Salish Aire to be anything but a floating condo. Fuel costs have been averaging about \$4 / us gallon and our long term average is about 2.5 nm/gallon (including generator and hydronic boiler use). Moorage could be a lot less or a lot more. We have been in marinas in BC and Alaska where we stayed for free. We have stayed a few nights in marinas charging \$2/ft/night when there was a specific reason but in general we hesitate before agreeing to anything over \$1/ft/night and have so far refused to stay in marinas charging \$2.50/ft/night. Anchoring out is generally free (or a small fee for use of a dingy dock) and has the advantage that many places we anchor are surrounded by the natural settings we love. On the other hand some anchorages can involve 24 hours per day of boat motion and always involve the hassle of using a dingy or kayak to

get to shore. When at anchor we also need to plan on an average of between 1 and 2 hours per day of running the generator to top batteries, wash clothes, and make fresh water. Our boat insurance costs this year went up considerably but by our own choice. We came to believe that our previous insurance carrier was simply not familiar with the world cruiser market and once we found someone who was we got the coverage we believe we need but at a higher premium. The “safety” line item includes such things as EPIRBs (satellite emergency locator beacons which had outdated and the manufacturer would no longer service) many of which were a one-time expense. The categories of “major repair” and “haulout” are similar in that they were the amount we paid to boat yards but whereas haulout costs were for our semi-annual planned bottom work in Port Townsend the major repair was an unplanned lift in Cabo and use of yard labor. The haulout maintenance was for the materials we used while in Port Townsend. Our crew costs were pretty minimal but involved flying our son-in-law from Ontario Canada to Alaska and then back home after he assisted us in getting back across the Gulf of Alaska. We have now gained comfort with just the two of us for extended runs and our new insurance carrier expects that we will use good judgement rather than dictating who is on board. Finally “Oil and Consumables” is starting to add up as we are no longer changing the main engine and generator oil on a calendar basis but rather on an engine hour basis as we are hitting their recommended service intervals pretty frequently. So as the chart shows our boat costs were about \$55000 for last year and will hopefully be less in 2019.



Another costs involved in leaving the nest of an employer before reaching Medicare age is that of health insurance. At one end of the scale some cruising families choose to plan to just pay with cash in foreign countries with good healthcare but much lower costs and thus go without health insurance at all. Some families choose international policies that are relatively inexpensive but don't provide the coverage we feel we need. We choose to maintain our USA health insurance coverage and expect that when Norman's COBRA coverage lapses next month we will end up paying about \$1400/month for the two of us plus we carry DAN insurance to cover any diving and other emergencies that require emergency evacuation which costs about \$300/yr. Our final “unusual” insurance costs is an inexpensive auto liability policy for people who don't own a vehicle but want to be covered for rental cars and when borrowing other people's cars that might not be insured through GEICO.

As to how folks afford to cruise full-time, some are just plain well off but a lot of others have taken some creative approaches:

We were able to put enough aside during our working career to have a large nest egg. We sold everything we had that would not fit on the boat (including a house and a duplex) to pay off most of the initial cost of Salish Aire. Then we watch our expenses pretty closely and try to make sure we always have money for unavoidable costs including operating costs for the boat, insurance, and food. We also try to make sure we don't get so frugal that we don't have a chance to enjoy life so we do eat out but more to enjoy the local flavor than to be extravagant, we drink very little alcohol, we walk a lot rather than renting cars or taking taxis, and doing our own work on the boat makes a huge difference. We also make sure we plan to take vacations away from the boat and to visit family periodically.

Several of the young and not-so-young cruisers we know did well in the tech industry. Another common theme is people who have owned a private business that has done well and either were able to sell it to lay down their nest egg or have a manager who can now run it for them.

Other younger cruisers have decided that they are at an age where they can enjoy cruising to the fullest and have chosen to delay having children and taken their savings and will see how far they can go before they have to return to "the real world". One such couple tells of saving money for a home in the Bay Area only to have the prices jump up dramatically every time they almost reached their goal – once they finally reached the goal they realized that instead of buying a house they could buy a boat and go cruising.

A lot of couples have chosen to not let children delay their cruising dream. We have heard and now are witness to the well-mannered and well-educated kids that grow up on boats. Most of them are home-schooled and will often share teaching resources while in port with other floating families. Math may be taught along with celestial navigation and a foreign language and culture lesson is much easier to understand when you are actually living in the culture. Self-reliance comes from being responsible for your family's safety while you take a watch at sea so the rest of the family can sleep.

Finally there is the option to make money as you go. We have heard of people financing their cruising by working in different ports but so far we haven't seen much of this as many countries (including the USA) limit who is allowed to work and potentially displace a native craftsman. We know a couple of families who cruise for a time and then a family member heads back to the States to make money before returning to the boat – this seems to work well for nurses and doctors who are in high need specialty areas.

If you are considering cruising full-time we hope this has helped inspire you while giving you some realistic ideas of what will be involved. No, it is not a 365 day a year vacation but it is a way to see the fascinating world we are part of in an up-close and personal way. For other ideas please refer to our referral links for our ever-growing list of cruising blogs done by people we meet along the way.