Cruising The Gulf of Mexico & The Gulf Coast - 1st in a Series

by W. Lynn Seldon Jr. - Boating and Travel Writer

Ranging from the southern tip of Florida to the Mexican border, the United States portion of the Gulf Coast and the Gulf of Mexico offers a premier boating experience. From numerous and varied inland waterways to classic open water cruising, the Gulf of Mexico and accompanying coastline is southern cruising at its best.

Though it's hard to come up with an exact figure, there's more than 1,500 miles of coastline between southern Florida and the Rio Grande River marking the border between Texas and Mexico (the Gulf of Mexico is about 1,000 miles wide from Florida to the Texas coast). Much of the coastline features excellent coastline cruising, as well as a wide array of inland boating opportunities.

Along with charts, the best way to stay safe and happy while boating in the Gulf of Mexico is with Intertec Publishing’s Southern Waterway Guide. Founded in 1947, the Waterway Guide is a comprehensive full-color resource. The fun-to-read guide offers more than 450 pages packed with information on boating from Florida to the Mexico border.

Buying this guide provides the perfect introduction to Gulf Coast boating. Whether you're heading across the Gulf or just around the Big Bend of Florida, it's a great start to a great adventure on and off the water.

The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) runs for a total of more than 1,000 miles through five states to its terminus at Brownsville, Texas. The minimum depth is stated to be 12 feet, but dredging brings it only to 10 feet (and sometimes less) in some spots. There's a minimum overhead

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New and Improved ABA Online™

Have you recently visited ABA Online™, www.americanboating.org? Our website has been completely renovated with a new look and new sections to better serve you. You will still find the same valuable information that you always have, but now you can find even more!

Meet ABA members, the Andersons, in our “Cruising” section. The Andersons, (Mike and Alison) and their three children (Scott, Tyler, and Meghan) are living full-time aboard their 42’ sailboat, Moonraker. The Andersons send in logs of their experiences, which are posted on the website. Based on their experiences, the Andersons also offer practical advice for other cruisers, do’s and don’ts, the joys and heartaches of full-time cruising (and home schooling), as well as advice on how to get started on a cruising trip of your own.

The “Clean Boating” section offers valuable and insightful information on a variety of topics. Read about how the water quality of our waterways is important to our economy, our family’s health and safety, our environment, and our future. Learn about the impact of our actions as boaters and how those actions affect the environment. Practical tips are offered that will minimize your contribution to waterway pollution. Also listed are sources of information and ways that you can get involved to help encourage clean boating and good environmental stewardship. You can pose your questions and comments to “Mr. Clean Boating” in this section of the site as well.

“Boating Safety” addresses the many aspects of being a safe boater. You can read boating safety articles, take a boating safety quiz, get U.S. Coast Guard information, learn how to file a float plan, read practical safety information regarding children and boating, learn how to buy a properly fitted PFD, and more.

ABA members can now take advantage of discounts at marinas participating in the ABA Marina Alliance Program (MAP). Go to the “Marina Discounts” section of the site for a complete list of participating marinas, the discounts they offer and other services that are available. The discounts vary by marina, and ABA is at work to expand the list of MAP marinas. Read more about this new benefit below.

ABA Announces Marina Discounts Benefit

The American Boating Association is proud to introduce its Marina Alliance Program (MAP). ABA members can now take advantage of numerous savings at marinas nationwide! The majority of marinas participating in MAP offer ABA members 25% off transient dockage, a money-saving benefit when you’re cruising away from home. Other discounts vary by marina and may include discounts on fuel, service and repair, towing service, pump out, the marina store, and restaurant.

A comprehensive list of participating marinas may be found at ABA Online™. Magazine Discount Program Added to Member Benefits

ABA members can now receive guaranteed lowest rates on many of the most popular boating and general interest magazines. Take advantage of savings of up to 50% off magazines such as Boating, (regularly $28, you pay only $21.97), Boating World, (regularly $18, you pay only $10), Power & Motor Yachts, (regularly $19.95, you pay only $9.98), Sailing, (regularly $28, you pay only $17.64), Trailer Boats, (regularly $17.97, you pay only $14.97), and many other boating magazines.

Similar discounts can be found on many popular magazines like Reader’s Digest, (regularly $24.76, you pay only $13.96), Family Circle, (regularly $16.98, you pay only $11.97), Car & Driver, (regularly $21.94, you pay only $11.97), Golf Digest, (regularly $27.94, you pay only $16.77), and Ladies Home Journal, (regularly $16.97, you pay only $12.00), and 1000 other titles.

You can subscribe online through Member Benefits at www.americanboating.org or call our magazine subscription line at 800-289-6247. Plus, for each magazine you subscribe to, you help to support ABA’s mission to keep boating growing, safe, clean, affordable, and fun! Place your order today!
On The Horizon

Boat Shows

Representative boat shows are listed below. For a full boat show listing, please visit ABA Online®, www.americanboating.org.

Nov 2-5, 2000
Sail Expo St. Petersburg, FL
(401) 841-0900 www.sailexpo.com

Nov 4-5, 2000
Florida Sportsman Fishing Show, FL
(813) 839-7696 www.flsportsmans.com

Nov 9-12, 2000
Ft. Meyers Boat Show, FL
(954) 570-7785

Nov 16-19, 2000
St. Petersburg Boat Show, FL
(800) 940-7642 www.showmanagement.com

Jan 3-7, 2001
Atlanta Boat Show, GA
(305) 531-8410 www.boatshows.com

International Sportsmen’s Exhibition, OR
(360) 693-3700 www.sportsexpos.com

San Diego Boat Show, CA
(858) 274-9924 www.boatshows.com

Jan 6-14, 2001
New York National Boat Show, NY
(212) 922-1212 www.boatshows.com

Portland Boat Show, OR
(503) 246-8291 www.oloughlintradeshows.com

Jan 8-14, 2001
Denver Boat Show, CO
(719) 590-7717

Jan 9-14, 2001
Kansas City Sportshow, MO
(612) 827-5833 www.generalsportshows.com

Jan 10-14, 2001
Nashville Boat & Sports Show, TN
(314) 567-0020 www.boatshows.com

Jan 12-14, 2001
Quad City Boat, Fishing & Vacation Show, IA
(319) 232-0218 www.iowashows.com

Stuart Boat Show, FL
(305) 864-7333

Jan 12-21, 2001
Cincinnati Travel, Sports & Boat Show, OH
(513) 281-0022 www.hartproductions.com

Lake Union Boats Alaloo Show, WA
(206) 545-8804 www.yachtworld.com

Seattle International Boat Show, WA
(206) 634-0911 www.seattle-boatshow.com

Jan 17-21, 2001
Denver Sportsmen’s Show, CO
(503) 246-8291 www.oloughlintradeshows.com

Philadelphia Boat Show, PA
(610) 449-9910 www.boatshows.com

International Sportsmen’s Exposition, CA
(360) 693-3700 www.sportsexpos.com

The Boat Show, MN
(612) 827-5833 www.generalsportshows.com

Jan 18-21, 2001
National Capital Boat Show, VA
(804) 288-5653

Jan 19-21, 2001
Iowa Boat & Vacation Show, IA
(319) 232-0218 www.iowashows.com

Jan 24-28, 2001
Chicago Boat, RV & Outdoor Show, IL
(312) 946-6262 www.boatshows.com

Jan 27 - Feb 4, 2001
Washington Sportsmen’s Show, WA
(503) 246-8291 www.oloughlintradeshows.com

Jan 29 - Feb 4, 2001
Louisville Sport, Boat RV, & Vacation Show, KY
(502) 244-5660 www.boatsportrv.com

Jan 30 - Feb 4, 2001
Birmingham Sport & Boat Show, AL
(800) 574-9650

Jan 31 - Feb 4, 2001
Int’l Sportsmen’s Exposition, CA
(360) 693-3700 www.sportsexpos.com

Pontiac Silverdome Boat, Sport & Fishing Show, MI
(616) 560-1919 www.showspan.com

ABA member benefit entitles you to preferred pricing on Royal Caribbean and Celebrity Cruises!

For the absolute lowest prices, visit www.associationcruiseclub.com to view members only specials. Then call 1-888-226-2100 to book your cruise or find out about other specials for your cruise vacation.

Don’t forget to visit our website at www.americanboating.org to register to receive regular e-mail notification of exclusive ABA members-only prices!

Call 1-888 226-2100 to book your cruise vacation and reference your ABA membership!
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clearance of 50 feet.

The Florida coastline of the Gulf Coast starts
down in the swamps of the Everglades and runs north
up through several great boating communities and
large cities before hitting the Big Bend and turning
westward along the Florida Panhandle. There’s about
600 miles of coastline, as well as several nice stretches
of the Gulf Intracoastal
Waterway (which starts where
the Okeechobee Waterway, a
popular cross-Florida route,
ends).

Florida’s west coast over to
Alabama is different from
Intracoastal Waterway boating
on the east coast. Inland
waterways tend to be less stable,
in general, with more bends
and turns and varying channel
depths. Off the coast, though,
Gulf of Mexico cruising is very
much like open water Atlantic
Ocean cruising on the east coast
of the Sunshine State, though
with more barrier islands and
lots of shoals to keep boaters
alert.

The southern portion
of Florida’s Gulf Coast, up
through the Dunedin area, is marked by small towns,
large cities, and many barrier islands. There are
dozens of marinas and anchorages from which to
choose all along the way. North of Dunedin and
leading up to Carabelle, the Big Bend coastline is low,
marshy, and quite undeveloped. Many boaters choose
to make the 170-mile open water run from the
Tampa Bay area, which is well marked by a string of
navigational aids. The Panhandle over to the
Louisiana line features deep and uncrowded waters,
great beaches, and many excellent marinas.

From Pensacola to the Rio Grande, the GIWW
arcs 870 miles. There’s a wide variety of inland
boating, with the open water of Mobile Bay and
Mississippi Sound contrasted by several narrow
canals. Of course, actually boating in the Gulf of
Mexico can bring the heavy effects of wind and
waves, as well as lots of commercial traffic (vessels are
often 1,000 or more feet long and sometimes travel in
packs). With the Gulf, it’s important to monitor
weather and traffic both offshore and inland.

From Pensacola onward, the Gulf coastline is
marked by modern southern cities like Mobile,
Biloxi, New Orleans, and
Galveston, as well as long
stretches where marinas are
scarce (watch the fuel tank
carefully). After Pensacola, the
coasts of Alabama, Mississippi,
and Louisiana, lead to the long
curve of the Texas coastline.

Many mariners choose to make
the 240-mile open water run to
New Orleans, but the inside
GIWW route is prettier, easier,
safer, and actually shorter (180
miles).

After New Orleans, boaters
enter true Cajun country, where
radio traffic can include a mix
of English, French, and more.
The quiet run to Galveston
must be planned carefully, with
few facilities along the way.

South of Galveston, the
stunning Texas coastline offers quiet and inexpensive
marinas, nice anchorage opportunities. Outlying
islands make the GIWW easy to navigate, with it’s
dead end at South Padre Island and Port Isabel actually
marking an exotic launching point to further Gulf
boating adventures in Mexico.

DETAILS

As mentioned above, the Southern Waterway
(regularly $36.95, but just $33.26 for ABA members)
is a great resource for Gulf of Mexico cruising. They
also publish the Mid-Atlantic Waterway Guide and
the Northern Waterway Guide.

Upcoming Issues: More Gulf of Mexico boating
coverage. ±

Boater’s Quiz

Real Numbers

Boaters are used to talking in numbers, whether about speed in knots or distances in nautical miles.

But there may be reason to suspect that not all of us are using the lexicon of boating mathematics with
equal precision.

How closely can you match the maritime terms or concepts below with their likely meaning,
assuming you heard the word at sea and not on land?

1. Mile
   a. 5280’
   b. 6072’
   c. 6834’

2. Knot
   a. Nautical mph
   b. 23 meters
   c. 1.67 on-land mph

3. Liter
   a. 0.36 USG
   b. 0.8 quart
   c. 0.36 USG

4. Meter
   a. Parking timer
   b. 39.75”
   c. 39.37”

5. Fathom
   a. 8’
   b. 6’
   c. 6 yards

6. Yard
   a. 36’
   b. Spar
   c. 39.75”

7. Foot
   a. 12”
   b. 5 toes
   c. Bottom of sail

8. Breeze (in MPH)
   a. 4-31
   b. 2-12
   c. 8-25

9. Cable length
   a. 600’
   b. 340 meters
   c. 12 fathoms

10. Deep
    a. Thoughtful
    b. 3000+ fathoms
    c. 1000+ feet

Key to Answers: 1b; 2a; 3c; 4c; 5b; 6b; 7c; 8a; 9a; 10b

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