



Photo: Barbara Cole SV Complexity

# Fitness Afloat

Exploring by pedal kayak

**Everyone knows that a balanced diet and regular exercise are the pillars of maintaining a healthy lifestyle but it can be difficult to put that knowledge into action, especially on board**

**W**e spent 2016 exploring the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Choosing to stay close to the equator meant that we were well out of the typical cyclone zone, allowing us to linger at the places that we found most welcoming. However there are disadvantages of skirting “The Line” for so long. Extended windless periods meant putting up the iron spinnaker more than we liked, and when we were able to sail it was more akin to drifting with the sails flapping. Our usual daily sailing activities—those of hauling halyards and grinding winches—were almost non-existent.

To compound matters most of the villages we visited were accessible only via sea, so there were no roads for a brisk afternoon walk. Murky water in

many of our anchorages meant that not only did I often skip jumping in the ocean to cool off, but over the months I missed out on long hours of snorkeling and swimming. As the end of the year rolled around I was beginning to feel a little lazy.

Sticking to a healthy meal plan and fitness regime can be hard when you live on land, but on board it often feels impossible to maintain a routine of any kind. Being constantly on the move means diet is often dictated by how thoughtfully you provision ahead and how much effort you put into preparing meals on board. Trying to exercise on a boat that is in motion can be very difficult, not to mention the space restrictions that many of us face. Finding alternatives ashore when your typical on board activity levels dip isn't always possible but there are ways to keep active and have fun while you cruise.

## **DIP, DIP and SWING**

Kayaks have long been a popular addition to cruising boats and are a great way to get out and explore an anchorage. Long and slender but with a lower profile than a canoe a hard kayak will fit nicely on deck. Gaining popularity over the past decade are inflatable kayaks, perfect for those sailors who have limited space or don't want to store items on deck while underway. Stress reducing, low impact and a perfect activity for the whole family, kayaking offers a host of physical benefits.

Traditional paddle kayaking strengthens the chest, back, shoulders and arms. You also work the core muscles of the torso as you rotate your body through a paddle stroke. Leg muscles are used to balance the kayak and to push during a power stroke. Depending on your location and the conditions kayaking can also provide

a cardio workout, for instance if you have to paddle against a current or race against a fellow kayaker.

Available in single or double seaters kayaking can be a great way to spend time with the kids or just escape for a little quiet time by yourself. Some kayaks are also available with sail kits, making them a more versatile and exciting choice. Newer pedal-powered kayaks are gaining popularity as well, perfect for those with shoulder injuries.

**GET UP, STAND UP**

Stand-up paddleboarding is thought to have originated in Hawaii. Invented by surfers who were looking for a way to get some exercise, and have a bit of fun when the waves were small they basically changed their stance on the board and added a paddle. The sport has recently gained enormous popular-

ity and it seems everywhere you go these days someone is SUP-ing.

I have been very interested in trying out a SUP for a while now but only recently had the opportunity to borrow a board. Like most people who try the stand-up paddleboard I was hooked. With equipment limited to just a board and a paddle, you are required to use almost every muscle in your body, including your brain.

You use your legs and core as you constantly work to stabilize yourself and the board. The arms, back and shoulders are exercised while you paddle. When you're new to the sport it can demand a lot of mental atten-



Rowing ashore can be challenging and fun

tion as you concentrate on balancing and paddling at the same time. This focus and the almost soundless motion through the water lend a lovely meditative quality to the workout that is akin to yoga. But don't let the calm fool you, one trip around the anchorage and you'll feel the burn. Stand-up paddleboarding is also a cardio workout and a great way to increase your endurance.

Like kayaking, the SUP is considered a



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Markus Pukonen of [www.routesofchange.org](http://www.routesofchange.org) using a SUP to paddle ashore in Palau as part of his mission to travel around the world without ever using a motor

low impact activity, perfect for young and old alike. And because of its popularity there are many different styles, sizes and designs of boards to choose from.

### ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT

It is true that good quality kayaks and SUP's are a bit of an investment and not everyone has a room in their cruising budget for "toys." I understand that extra equipment takes up extra room, even if you decided to go the more compact, and small-boat friendly, inflatable route. The thing is you don't *need* fancy toys or extra equipment to incorporate a little activity into your day; you just need a little change of perspective.

Chances are if you own a sailboat you also own a dinghy, and no matter the design you can use your dinghy as a rowing machine. You don't even need to remove the outboard. Whether it is up a quiet stream for a picnic lunch or just back and forth to shore, rowing is a great way to keep your daily routine active. Like kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding, rowing is a low impact activity so it is easy on the joints and tissues. It is an exercise that concentrates more on the upper body but you'll find with proper technique it works the core and legs too.

Some of the flat bottomed inflatables don't track that well, but instead of seeing this as a disadvantage think of it as a challenge; you'll get a little more exercise as you try and reach your destination. No doubt you'll be surprised how much of a workout you can get by pulling on the oars instead of the start cord.

We all like the laid-back, easy-going lifestyle of cruising but sailing demands a certain level of fitness. It is important to keep active even when circumstances seem stacked against you but it need not be difficult and should definitely be fun. It is easy to turn the next anchorage into your new favorite gym, with a view. Just pick up a paddle and get out there. **BWS**

*Heather Francis is from Nova Scotia, Canada and for over a decade has worked and lived on boats throughout the world. In 2008 she and her Aussie partner, Steve, bought Kate, a Newport 41', and have been sailing ever since. They are planning to do a lap around the planet, albeit slowly. You can follow their adventures at [www.yachtkate.com](http://www.yachtkate.com).*

**TRY BEFORE YOU BUY:** Many resorts, sport stores and paddling clubs provide lessons and equipment rental to the public. This is a great, and inexpensive, way to try a new water sports activity or test out new equipment if you're looking to upgrade.

**DO YOUR RESEARCH:** Choosing what board or boat is right for you can be difficult. Checking online forums and talking to users are great ways to get first-hand opinions about equipment performance and longevity.

**PADDLE IN PAIRS:** Sticking to an exercise plan is easier if you have someone to motivate and support you. Many communities have Paddling Clubs and welcome visitors to participate in their regular scheduled activities. Or ask around the anchorage and start your own mobile paddling club!

**STAY SAFE:** Exploring new waters can be exciting but it is important to be aware of potential hazards and dangers. Check tides and weather conditions before departure, tell someone where you are headed and how long you'll be gone, wear a PFD when it is appropriate and never let children play on the water unattended.



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