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# The Ultimate Surrender on a Catamaran, Madeira, Portugal

The Ultimate Surrender on a Catamaran, Madeira, Portugal – Part 2



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Lloyd Images

Imagine my surprise being invited to experience the Extreme Sailing Series Catamaran Regatta in Madeira, Portugal, knowing absolutely nothing about sailing. But there I found myself, surrounded by the manliest of men from around the globe, the cream of the crop, world-class Olympic athletes... sailors.

No, not the Fleet Week white uniform kind; imagine Lycra, chiseled bodies, and very handsome men who have dedicated their life to the sport.

Although I grew up on an island, the isle of Manhattan, sailing and boats were not a part of my life, unless the Staten Island ferry counts. Water activities like kayaking and

snorkeling had no appeal when comparing the East and Hudson Rivers to the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Prior to my maiden voyage at the Madeira stop for this global event that spans eight countries over ten months on three continents (including Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Russia, and Australia), my brief encounters with sailing were minimal.

A couple of memorable highlights:

### **A BIG CRUSH ON A BOY NAMED RICHARD IN HIGH SCHOOL...**

I put on my bravest bravado and pulled out my flirtiest skills and said 'yes' when Richard, a fleeting heartthrob, invited me for a sail on his Sunfish. It was a beautiful day – they always start like that – and we were happily sailing in the East Hampton Bay on Long Island.

He, so manly, and I, so maidenly, until he said, "Duck, we're going to jive."

Not knowing what that meant, I didn't listen.

The sail hit me in the back of the head, I fell overboard, and capsized the 120 lb. boat. As we struggled in the water, the sky transformed, and a storm moved in. Water, lightening, metal boat... that, along with not swimming after eating, were neon warning signs that flashed in my head.

In an instant, everything changed, and I figured we were going to die. Perhaps a tad dramatic, but at the time, it seemed an appropriate sentiment. A rescue boat, however, prevented that fate, and that was my last date with Richard.

### **SAILING IN CANNES WITH FILMMAKER JOHN SAYLES, THE ITALIANS, GERMANS, AND SWISS...**

Back in the day when I was a film publicist, the Cannes Film Festival in the south of France was a natural stop. But being swept away by several European film producers, agents, and filmmaker John Sayles for a day at sea aboard a 50-foot sailboat complete with an Italian chef was a most unexpected, happy surprise. Swimming, eating, drinking lots of wine, international intellect, and the Mediterranean – what more could one ask for!

So how better for such a sailing virgin to experience Extreme Sailing then during an international Catamaran race crewed up with sailing royalty, the best in show?

## **THE EXTREME SAILING SERIES IS...**

Extremely fast, incredibly physical, tactical, balance-driven, and adrenaline-packed... when there is wind. It's all about the maneuvers, communication amongst the crew, and anticipating nature's next move. These catamarans go twice the speed of the wind and after they reach several knots they'll foil, which is basically the closest thing to flying on water.

It's a combination of science, strategy, skill, and Mother Nature's mood.

Think the grace and precision of ice-skating, meets car racing, bumper cars, tight rope walking, and a relay race/obstacle course, all morphing together, on the ocean.

The hydro-foiling GC32 catamaran is ultra-light, fast, and highly responsive but very challenging for the 5-man crew because of the brute strength that's needed to balance while maneuvering the 39-foot, 2,000+ pounds of boat. Each team uses identical catamarans.

Set in the Marina Funchal on the south coast of the island, the course was short, just meters from the shore, allowing spectators to be up-close-and-personal with the action from stadium style seating.

When nature cooperates, each of the seven to nine teams participate in six to eight races per day for four days, with each race taking about 15 minutes and there's an average of eight minutes to rest in between.

There's a twenty-plus year age difference across the teams, which provides a synergistic blend of stamina and wisdom. And each sailor is striving for that moment of Zen, "Being able to read the wind and what Mother Nature is throwing at us, and getting it right, while maneuvering a massive machine and being in harmony with the crew. That's the pinnacle of sailing performance that everyone is shooting for," as one sailor said.

## **GEARED UP AND READY TO SAIL...**

The Extreme Sailing Series allows each catamaran to have a Guest Sailor on board during a race.

So, there I was, signing a liability waiver, watching a mandatory safety video, and getting geared up as though headed to the Alps skiing with helmet, gloves, waterproof jumpsuit, booties, raincoat, and a red life vest with guest sailor in big letters on the back.



Walking past three EMS workers on stand-by caused a slight bump in my heartbeat, but I knew I was in good hands. I mean the team rosters included 35 sailors from 11 countries, with a cumulative 23 America's Cup campaigns, 19 Olympic campaigns, 4 Olympic gold medals, and 37 world championship titles.

Awe and deference were more fitting than fear.

All of us guest sailors gathered in a dinghy that took us near the racecourse where we sat, baking in the sun, waiting for the individual team dinghy to deliver us to our designated catamaran.

My first outing was with the Visit Madeira team who said, "sit here, hold on, and don't move." There were ropes all around and one lifting of my arm at the wrong moment could trip a sailor or get him tangled in the ropes.

I felt like part of the team with my critical role of simply not moving, which was no small feat as I'm a perpetual fidgeter. The only problem, Mother Nature was taking a nap so all the adrenaline that went into prepping was anticlimactic.

This wasn't a hair blowing in the wind, standing on the bow of the ship with arms outstretched Titanic sort of experience, nor one of sipping martinis sailing into the sunset. This was to the Extreme Sailing Series.

But it turned into extreme waiting. We sat, and sat, hoping for the wind to kick up as I sweat profusely under all the gear. There were wind whisperers for the Extreme Sailing Series who microscopically and seemingly scientifically evaluated the whole course to determine if the wind was up to snuff, because the wind must be even throughout the racecourse.

The sailors on Visit Madeira were chilling, as I stretched my legs and started to peel off some of the protective layers. I assumed they were talking strategy with the coach as they sipped power drinks and ate snacks, although it could have been about anything since they were speaking Portuguese.

It turns out, they were discussing tactics, which play a fundamental role in low wind races. While fast races may be more demanding physically, slower ones require a different level of focus and strategy, and a mental challenge for the sailors.

The race officials decided there was only enough wind for an obstacle course exhibition to entertain the spectators that lined the shore and the media that were live broadcasting in Portuguese and English.

Game on. Guest sailor ready? Check.

My maiden voyage was mostly a windless affair, but I could still imagine the adrenaline, excitement, exhilarating experience it must be when Mother Nature cooperates and the boats and crews are at their best, foiling.

From chatting with some of the sailors, and what I witnessed, it's clear that this is the ultimate Zen experience, of being fully present in the moment. And these sailors have mastered Zen and the Art of Extreme Sailing.

Even though this was foiling-interruptus, I caught the bug.

Like those that chase waves, or the high from running, I'm hungry to put that liability waiver and all the protective gear to work and experience flying on water. No doubt, you may find me somewhere on the upcoming Extreme Sailing Series circuit which kicks off in March, with stops in Oman, China, Germany, Madeira, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Mexico.

***Comments, shares, and likes are welcome!***

*Susan Jacobs is a writer, storyteller, strategist, and world traveler. She contributed a chapter to the book "Pain, Purpose, Passion: That Was Then, This is Now," and has a book publishing deal with The Round House Press for whom she is working on her first memoir. She is a contributing blogger for Huffington Post, Yogic Living, Thrive Global, and Identity Magazine, and her writing has appeared in FourTwoNine Magazine, Aquarian Times, Spirituality & Health, PR Week, and IndieWire.*