

Readers' Cruising Stories

Yachting Monthly's founder Herbert Reiach wrote in the first issue in 1906: **'We shall be glad to receive the best logs and cruising stories offered to us from all parts of the world'** 110 years later, nothing's changed! We're still publishing your cruising stories

PLEASE SEND YOUR STORIES TO yachtingmonthly@timeinc.com

Testing the water on a cruise to St Petersburg

Harri Sane was part of a cruising delegation from Finland testing the new 'tourist-friendly' Russian sailing legislation

Since 2013, foreign boaters in the Baltic Sea have been permitted to enter Russia's territorial waters by checking in at either the city of Vyborg, near the Finnish border, or on the island of Kronstadt, which lies 25km (13.5 miles) west of St Petersburg at the centre of the city's enormous flood barrier.

Kotka Sailing Club in Finland, which is about 30km (16 miles) from the Russian border, has been working with the Russian authorities on a development program to open safe guest harbours roughly 30 miles from each other along the entire east coast of the Gulf of Finland in order to make a daysailing voyage from Finland to Estonia, via Russia, a possibility.

I sailed my 1990 Finngulf 36, Catherine to meet a convoy of four motorboats and three other yachts at the Finnish port of Klamila just 10km (5.5 miles) from the border. We planned to



Sailing towards Dupkovaya, we enjoyed chilly but beautiful conditions

visit some of the main Russian harbours in between Vyborg and St Petersburg to show that anyone, with good preparation, could do the trip. In our case preparation included visiting most of the harbours by car in advance.

My crew consisted of one experienced sailor and a couple with minor sailing experience. The first leg, 50 miles to Vyborg, was to be the longest. We stopped

briefly at the Finnish Customs office on the island of Santio, which is right on the border, to complete some straightforward paperwork, then sailed into Russian waters enjoying the sunshine and a pleasant Force 3-4 tailwind. To avoid any possibility of an accidental gybe, I sailed under goosewinged gennaker and genoa only, just enjoying the scenery as we sailed past.

Vyborg Customs was prepared for us but still it took time. As soon as we got permission to tie all the boats to the pier we started filling out the paperwork. Passport control was fairly smooth but at Customs we began to run out of time and there was a fair amount of arm-waving and raised voices. Finally it was done and we all managed a smile as papers and permits were carefully stowed on board.

Vyborg is a beautiful city with an old castle and interesting history. It has three guest harbours that are relatively small, so booking in advance is a good idea. Harbour facilities are somewhat basic, but the authorities are trying hard to make things work. Diesel is much cheaper than in Finland and electricity is available in some of the harbours. None of us added any water to our tanks, although it looked clear and clean enough.

The next stop was Sovetsky, which is known to Finns by its old name, Johannes. This small town located at the end of a beautiful, pristine curvy channel was a big



Vyborg castle, once a Swedish outpost, commands views over the town



Dupkovaya offers a modern and well-equipped marina and restaurant

surprise to everyone. Our paper charts were made by Finns in 1943 and still valid, although the newly built harbour with floating berths, a fuel pontoon and shore power astonished us. There were showers and toilets too but no restaurant yet, so crews had to choose for themselves whether to cook on board or make the short walk to the centre of the town. To top it all off, there were about 60 children out on the sheltered waters in the harbour learning to sail with the sailing academy from St. Petersburg.

Dupkovaya Bay (Tammikonniemi/Seivästö in Finnish) was next. On the way we passed the Primorsky Oil harbour, which has a small guest harbour with some basic services. Dupkovaya offers modern pontoons with shore power and we all enjoyed a nice meal at the harbour restaurant soaking up the last rays of the setting sun.

Narrow channels

At Zelenogorsk (Terijoki) the narrow entrance is marked with very small green buoys. The channel is heavily dredged, as one of the convoy powerboats discovered, venturing the wrong side of a green buoy and getting stuck on a rock. I had my diving gear on board so I went under to check that there was no damage. Terijoki was known as the 'Finnish Riviera' back when it was still part of Finland. Little wonder – there is an extremely soft and beautiful sandy beach next to the spa. The city is within walking distance from the harbour and is also beautiful and worth visiting.

The next day, Force 4-5 westerlies blew us towards the biggest city on our voyage. Approaching St. Petersburg, we were careful to stay on the starboard side of the channel to make way for the large, fast hydrofoil ferries. These vessels create a lot of spray and smoke and look a bit like spaceships as they go screaming past.

Four TV crews were waiting for us in St Petersburg. We were interviewed on camera and then sat down for a conference with a group of local officials. They were interested in our experiences and the needs of the recreational boaters. We also heard about their plans for further tourist development in the future.

St. Petersburg is a huge city with enough culture and history to keep visitors entertained



The fleet of yachts enjoyed great sailing conditions as they headed south east towards St Petersburg



My boat, Finngulf 36 from 1990



The hydrofoils are fast, noisy and smelly, so best keep out of the way



Four TV channels waiting for us in St Petersburg to hear about our trip

for weeks, but our stay was far too short. We overnights in Krestovsky Yacht Club, before moving to Kronstadt. We had to postpone our return leg to Haapasaari Island when the wind got up to 38 knots. It's the only time I can recall spending a night alongside with double lines to the pier! Finally we left Kronstadt Customs late afternoon and prepared for the 16-hour sail ahead. The wind was right on the nose, but as the sun set on the horizon five hours later, I was enjoying myself, reminding me that the whole point of sailing is to feel the wind on your face.

The voyage was a totally new experience for us all, opening up a new route. The differences in culture and environment are sometimes unpredictable, but I learned a lot and my advice to anyone considering the trip solo or in a group, prepare well and then just go for it! 🚢

Harri Sane

Harri, 59, from Espoo in Finland, is an engineer whose career includes stints at Esso and Nokia, but now works for himself as an information security consultant. A lifelong sailor, Harri is a qualified instructor; a board member and committee president on the Sailing and Boating Federation of Finland, and a former Commodore of Espoo Yacht Club. He owned a 1990 Finngulf 36 for 10 years before down-sizing to a smaller vessel in 2015.

