



SAILVATION



Chartering a Yacht with Crew

What to ask before you sign.

*Booking a boat is simple,
finding the right crew takes more.*

Incila Özmert

Thirty years in yachting

FORMER CREW · SKIPPER · BASE MANAGER



FOREWORD

What this is

And what it isn't.

I got my first boat when I was eight, an Optimist. I had no idea then that it would turn into the rest of my life. Between 1996 and 1999 I sailed around the world on a 53 foot ketch, more than thirty thousand nautical miles, as cook, mate and hostess. I stood night watches on my own, I navigated, I planned the provisioning, and in 1998 in Bali I worked on the overhaul when we took her apart and put her back together.

After this adventure my professional life led me to crew jobs on yachts up to 200 ft, a few seasons as a skipper and management of charter fleets. I know what it looks like below deck while everyone up top is laughing.

In 2022 I started a new venture, Sailvation. I arrange crewed charters on sailing yachts, catamarans, motor sailers and gulets. From the first email to the last day on board, I am the one who answers. **No call centre and no AI.**

This guide will not sell you anything. There are no sunset photos in it, and nobody says the word “unforgettable”. It is the guide I would have wanted myself before spending this kind of money, and it ends with the questions I would ask. One thing in it took me about twenty years to understand.

THE ONE THING

The most expensive mistake in a yacht charter is not the wrong boat. It is the wrong crew.

Boats are comparable. You can put two catamarans side by side, count the cabins, check the year, compare the price. Crews can not be so easily compared, they need to be known, and this is not featured on the internet. That is the whole reason this guide exists, and every chapter in it points back at that one sentence.

Somewhere in the middle of this guide there is a story about a generator, a hot Sunday evening, and a client's elderly parents. It is the whole argument in a single phone call. It is in chapter five. If you read nothing else, read that one.

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Before you look at a single boat

The first decision has nothing to do with hulls.

Most people start with the boat. They look at photos, they compare cabin counts, they save a few links. I understand that, and I would probably do the same. But that's not the first choice you should make. Before you choose a boat, you're really deciding on the type of charter, how many crew you want to live with for a week, and how much responsibility you want to entrust to them.

OPTION	WHAT YOU GET	RIGHT FOR YOU IF
Bareboat	The boat. Nothing else. You are the skipper, the cook, the navigator and the cleaner. VAT is already in the price.	You hold a licence, you sail regularly, and sailing is the actual point of the holiday.
Bareboat with crew	The same boat, and you hire a skipper, or a skipper and a hostess, on top. Usually half board, breakfast and lunch on board, dinner ashore.	You want somebody else to sail and cook, and the budget will not stretch to a fully crewed yacht.
Fully crewed	Boat and crew as one package. Skipper, hostess(es), deckhand(s), and a chef. VAT comes on top. APA handles your costs during charter.	You want a holiday. Families, your friends, people who already carry enough responsibility at home.

HONESTLY

Most people see themselves in the middle row and are right. Bareboat is for people who sail and want to. Fully crewed is for people who want a holiday and can stretch to it. If you are honestly not sure which line is yours, that is the thing to say on the phone. It changes what I suggest.

Every term in this guide is explained at the back, from APA to what a central agent actually does. If a word is new to you, that is normal. Almost nobody arrives knowing them.

Where to sail

Every cruising ground has its own character. I am happy to help you choose the one that best fits your travel dates, your group, the activities you enjoy, and the sea conditions you'll be most comfortable with. Most of my charters are in the Mediterranean, but I also arrange sailing holidays in many other destinations around the world. If you'd like to talk it through, we can arrange a chat over the phone.

A number that helps

What helps more than the weekly boat price is **the price per person, per night, with everything in it**. Once you are six or eight people, a crewed yacht lands surprisingly close to a decent hotel. The difference is that the hotel does not move, and nobody on the boat puts a towel on a sunlounger at seven in the morning.

Who is actually on board

The question everybody thinks and almost nobody asks. Are they always there?

Yes and no. A good crew is there when you need them and invisible when you do not. It is a real skill and it takes years to learn. Some people have it and some people never get it, and this is where good charters and bad charters separate, long before anybody raises a sail.

WHAT EACH OF THEM DOES

ROLE	THE JOB
Skipper	Runs the boat and the crew. Navigation, route, weather, mooring. Responsible for your safety and for the boat, and for nothing else.
Hostess	Serves food and drinks and is responsible for the housekeeping. Often cooks as well.
Chef	Cooks, and does nothing else.
Deckhand	The sailor. Helps the skipper anchor and sail, throws the lines, keeps the deck clean.

The number of crew is what decides the service, and it is worth understanding before you compare quotes.

Two crew usually means a skipper and one person who does everything else. They cook, they serve, they help sail. That is how I worked for years. With two crew you normally get half board, plus a couple of dinners on board in the week if you want to stay in a quiet bay. They will keep the saloon, the boat's living room, and the cockpit in order, and they will not be making your bed every morning, because there are not enough hours in the day.

Three crew or more means a real chef. Then you can eat on board every evening if you feel like it, and the cabins get done properly. Beds made while you are swimming, fresh towels, a drink ready when you come back on board. It is the service level a good hotel gives you, with ten guests instead of two hundred.

A day on board

Not from the sunbed, but from the galley. This was my life for years.

Your day starts at six. Seven, if you're lucky. It all depends on when the guests want breakfast. And yes, there are people who choose to have breakfast at seven o'clock while on holiday.

You lay out breakfast and you serve it. While they are eating you do the cabins, because that is the only window you get. Then you clear breakfast away. Then you go up and help the skipper, the anchor comes up or the lines come off, and you help sail her out. Somewhere in the middle of that you start preparing lunch. You serve it, you clear it away, and in between you are still making beds and cleaning bathrooms and helping sail the boat.

Mid afternoon you arrive somewhere. You put out finger food. You mix a drink for the sundowner. Then you start on dinner, you serve dinner, and then, if you have that kind of group, they sit and drink until midnight and every glass goes through you.

If the guests go ashore to eat, that is your window. That is when you do the jobs you do not want to do in front of them.

Late nights, early mornings, and the same again tomorrow.

Where they sleep, and where they eat



Lagoon 52, six cabin version. The three areas marked CREW are the crew quarters.

The crew have their own quarters. On a catamaran that is usually a bunk in one of the bows, sometimes with its own shower and toilet. On some boats it is a bunk cabin tucked in among the guest cabins. On motor sailers and larger yachts the crew have their own separate area and their own mess.

They do not eat with you unless you invite them, and guests often do. On the sailing boats I worked on we ate standing up, and we ate what came back from the table. You cook a little extra and you take what the guests leave. Nobody stays hungry.

If you want an evening on deck with nobody else around, say so. A professional understands that without needing an explanation.

WHY I AM TELLING YOU THIS

Not so that you feel sorry for anybody. Crew choose this life and most of them love it. I am telling you because it explains what you are buying, and because it explains why the crew makes the difference to your week. Somebody is going to be awake at half past six making your coffee and awake at midnight collecting your glasses. Whether that person is good at it, and whether they like doing it, will do more for your holiday than the size of the cabins.

Picking the boat is the easy part

The boat matters. Layout, comfort, space, water toys. It is the part we can settle in one phone call.

	SAILING YACHT	CATAMARAN	GULET AND MOTOR SAILER
How it feels	She heels. You are close to the water. This is sailing.	Stable, plenty of deck space, like a floating terrace, more comfort.	Ample space, some traditionally built in wood, more water toys, more crew.
Suits	Couples, sailors, groups of up to eight.	Families with children, groups of friends, anyone worried about seasickness.	Larger groups, either families with children or friends, multi-generational groups.
The downside	Less space on deck, more movement, smaller bathrooms.	Less sporty, you pay more for the same number of cabins.	Sails in name more than in practice, but you will see the sails out.

Seasickness

This is a question I sometimes get approached about, and I take it seriously. A monohull is the sportier boat and she moves more. Catamarans and motor sailers sit very steady. There is always medication on board, and there are acupuncture bands and tablets that work for most people.

If somebody in your group is worried, tell me at the start. I will look for a cruising ground with less swell and less wind, and I will suggest a boat that is more stable. I cannot promise you the weather. Nobody can, so I would rather not pretend.

Water toys

Jet ski, Seabob, e-foil, sea scooter, stand-up paddleboards. The bigger the boat, the more of it there is, mostly because there is somewhere to put it. If this matters to you, say so early. It narrows the list quickly.

Old boat, new boat

A ten year old boat that has been looked after, with a crew who have run her for five seasons, will almost always give you a better week than a brand new hull with a skipper who arrived in April. Age has very little to do with it. What matters is whether somebody takes care of her, and that is a crew job.

WHAT ABOUT MOTOR YACHTS

I am specialised in sailing yachts, catamarans, motor sailers and gulets. Motor yachts I handle together with a colleague who specialises in them, and she is very good at it. It costs you nothing extra. You get two brokers for the price of one.

Internet

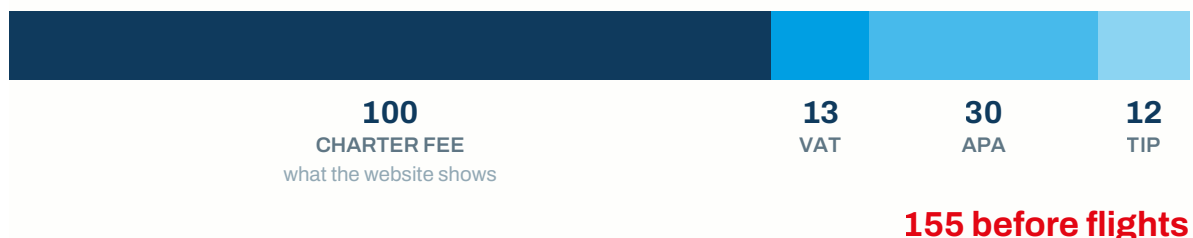
Most boats have wifi. It works almost everywhere, but you may have a few bays with poor reception. If you rely on strong wifi during charter for work, kindly let me know up front and I will double check accordingly regarding onboard wifi systems.

What it really costs

The price you see is not the price you pay. Everybody in this industry works that way and there is nothing shady about it, but it is worth knowing before you compare offers.

In a hotel the final number is in the booking. In a crewed charter the charter fee is one line out of several. I am going to show you all of them as a percentage of the charter fee, because the euro figures change every year and the proportions do not.

ITEM	WHAT IT IS	APPROX. %
Charter fee	The boat and the crew for the week.	100
VAT	On a fully crewed charter it comes on top. Turkey 20%. Italy 22%. Croatia 13%. Greece between 6.5 and 13%, depending on how the boat is registered. On a bareboat it is already in the price.	6.5–22
APA	Advance Provisioning Allowance. A float you pay up front. Out of it come fuel, marina and harbour fees, food, wine, and daily excursions. The captain keeps the accounts. Whatever is left comes back to you, or if you have overspent, you top up.	25–35
Gratuity	Written into the charter contract, and calculated on the net charter fee. Generally 10 to 15% is recommended.	10–15
Total before flights	Greece, fully crewed, VAT at 13%, mid range assumptions	about 155



What you actually pay, to scale. A charter advertised at 100 costs around 155 before you have booked a flight. Some of the APA comes back. None of the rest does.

The full costs you rarely see on websites, this gives you a chance to compare offers properly.

Where your money actually sits

This is the part I would want to know, so I will tell you without being asked.

You do not pay the owner of the boat. You pay into a client account that is kept separate from the money I run my business on. I pass it on to the central agent, minus my commission, and the central agent holds it.

A **central agent** is the company that manages a particular yacht on behalf of her owner. Every broker in the world who wants to book that boat has to go through them, and they sit between the owner and the money. They are neutral, and that is the point.

The owner does not see your deposit until roughly a week before you sail. They do not see the balance until the charter is finished.

There is a reason for that. Charters are often booked a year ahead. If the owner had fifteen thousand euros of your money sitting in their account in January, they could spend it on a refit, and if they then go under, your money is gone and your week is gone with it. So the money stays with a neutral party until you are standing on the boat.

It is worth asking any broker how this works with them. If the money goes straight to the owner, that would worry me.

Why there are no prices on my website

Because I like to give my clients an updated quote with the latest discounts. The same boat costs one thing in the second week of July and something quite different at the end of September. And the honest answer to “what does a yacht cost” is the same as the honest answer to “what does a car cost”. It depends where you want to go in it.

So we talk first and I do the numbers afterwards. The conversation is free and it commits you to nothing.

ONE THING WORTH KNOWING

You can compare brokers. You can compare boats. You can compare prices. The one thing you can't compare on a quote is the crew, and that's what makes or breaks your week. Two hundred euros saved on the boat, and a crew running their first season, is the worst trade in yachting.

The boat is replaceable. The crew is not.

If you only read one chapter, read this one.

Two identical catamarans. Same bay, same week, same weather. On one of them, eight people have the best holiday of their lives. On the other, eight people are polite to each other for seven days and go home. The boat is not the difference. **The difference is who is standing at the wheel.**

A Sunday evening

I had a quiet Sunday planned. That evening a client messaged me on WhatsApp, halfway through his charter. The air conditioning was off while the boat was under way, it was hot, and his elderly parents were on board. He was angry, and he was right to be. Nobody had told him it would be like that, and that includes me.

The reason is technical. On a boat of that class the generator sits low, and in any swell it pulls air instead of water. Run it under way and you can wreck it, and the unit costs twenty to thirty thousand euros. So the crew cool the boat at anchor and switch off once you are moving. On a fully crewed yacht at twice the price, it runs all day. Nobody had ever explained that difference to him, and he did not ask the question either.

So I called the skipper, then the charter company, and we went through what the machine could really take. We found a solution, cool the boat right down before the anchor comes up, then slow her mid-passage and run the generator again. The skipper agreed on one condition. He wanted it in writing from the charter company, because if that generator dies he is the responsible one. I got it in writing. Done.

It doesn't happen often, and I won't pretend it does. But things break. Expectations get crossed. Guests sometimes arrive expecting something no one ever explained to them. When that happens, only one question really matters: who picks up the phone? If you booked through a website, you fill in a form and wait for someone to get back to you, often not until Monday. The person reading your message has probably never met the skipper, spoken to the crew, or stepped aboard the yacht.

WHAT A PLATFORM CANNOT KNOW

- Whether the skipper actually likes children, or just tolerates them.
- Whether the chef can cook vegan without being offended by it.
- Whether the crew have worked together for five years or met in the last port.
- Whether they smoke. Whether they turn up in a clean shirt. Whether they smile.
- Whether the skipper gets tense at six Beaufort.
- Which bay fills up with day-trip boats at two in the afternoon, and which one does not.

None of that is in a listing. Not all of it is in a review. You find it out by interacting with the crew and spending time with them on the boat.

The chef is crew too

The most underrated argument for a crewed boat, and the one families understand fastest.

A hotel has a menu and you choose from it. On a crewed yacht, the kitchen has your preference sheet.

One month before you sail you get a preference sheet. It starts with the boring part, the guest list and the passport numbers for the paperwork. Then it asks what you cannot eat. Allergies, intolerances, anything medical. Then what you like. Vegetarian, vegan, more fish or more meat, Mediterranean or a burger on a Tuesday.

Then it asks about the week itself. Is anyone having a birthday. Is this a wedding anniversary, because the crew can arrange a special celebration. Whether you want a wine tasting, some hiking, water sports, or simply to lie on deck and be left in peace. How many evenings do you want to eat ashore and how many on board.

All of that reaches the crew before you arrive, and the shopping is done around it. That is why I keep asking who is actually going to be on the boat, and I keep asking until you are tired of me.

If you have a child with a nut allergy you already know what that is worth. You spend most holidays reading labels in a language you do not speak. On a good boat you have one conversation in April, and then you stop thinking about it.

Why I go to boat shows

Three times a year, four days each, sixty to eighty boats. I go on board. I look at the cabins and I check the fittings. I get invited to lunch and I taste the food. I look at how they lay the table, and whether they bother to change it during the week.

Mostly I talk to the crews. I know which skipper has run the same boat for eight seasons and which one changes every year.

When you tell me you are two families, four children between six and fourteen, your father has a bad back and your sister gets seasick, a boat comes to mind. So does a crew. That is the entire service.

*Booking a boat is simple,
finding the right crew takes more.*



How a booking actually works

So you know what happens after you get in touch, and what does not.

STEP	WHAT HAPPENS	WHEN
1 Enquiry	You write or you call. There is no call centre. It is me.	Ideally 6 months out
2 Reply	I answer every enquiry within 48 hours, and usually a lot faster.	Within 48 hours
3 The call	Twenty minutes on the phone. Who is coming, what everyone wants, what it can cost. After that I know more than ten emails would have told me.	Twenty minutes
4 Proposals	Three to five boats, each with an e-brochure covering crew profiles, prices and availability, and a sample itinerary. With the names of the crew, and the reason I picked those boats and not others.	A few days later
5 Option	The boat is held for you while you decide. No obligation.	One week, free
6 Contract	Charter agreement, then 50% of the net charter fee within a week.	On signature
7 Balance	The rest of the charter fee, plus APA and taxes. I remind you myself. No automated system emails you.	4 to 6 weeks before
8 Preparation	The preference sheet. Allergies, menus, celebrations, transfers, route.	About 1 month out
9 On board	The crew are expecting you. They know your name and they know your son cannot eat nuts.	Saturday, usually

WHERE THE TIME GOES

A single booking runs to somewhere between forty and sixty emails. Me, the owner, the central agent, the crew. You see maybe eight of them. That is the job.

What it costs you to talk to me

Nothing. My commission is built into the charter price and it is paid by the owner's side, not by you. The charter price is the same whether you book through me or go directly, except with a broker, you also have someone looking after your interests.

FOR READERS OF THIS GUIDE

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Both come straight to me. Write in English, German or Turkish.

Ten questions to ask anyone. Including me.

These are the questions I would put to any broker and any owner. If somebody gets vague on one of them, that is your answer.

- 1 **Who is the crew? Names, languages, how long on this boat?**
“We will assign someone” is an answer. It is a bad one.
- 2 **Can I speak to the crew before I book?**
With a serious operator, yes.
- 3 **Have you been on this boat yourself, and when?**
A photograph from 2019 is not an inspection. If the answer is no, ask whether they saw her at the last boat show. That counts too.
- 4 **Does the boat have a charter licence?**
Plenty of smaller boats are chartered without one. The licence is what guarantees the safety equipment, a captain with real qualifications rather than a keen amateur, and proper insurance.
- 5 **What is in the price, and what comes on top?**
VAT, APA, gratuity and other possible hidden costs. In writing, not on the phone.
- 6 **How much is the APA, and do I get the accounts with receipts?**
The APA is accounted for by the captain at the end of the charter week.
- 7 **Who holds my money until the charter starts?**
If the answer is “the owner”, ask what happens if they go under between now and July.
- 8 **Who sleeps where, and where does the crew sleep?**
The first argument over cabins could happen on the first evening. And if the crew sleep in the saloon, you have no living room.
- 9 **Who decides the route in strong wind?**
Correct answer: the skipper, always. Anyone who says the guest decides is dangerous.
- 10 **Who do I call on a Sunday evening when something breaks?**
You want one name, and you want to know they will pick up. If something goes wrong mid-charter, that is the person who fixes it, not a form you fill in and a wait until Monday.

Print this page. It is the part you will actually use.

The words we use

Nobody arrives knowing these. People who have chartered for years still can get terms wrong.

APA

Advance Provisioning Allowance. A float you pay up front, usually 25 to 35% of the charter fee. Fuel, marina and harbour fees, food, wine, tickets. The captain keeps the receipts, gives you the accounts. Either you get a refund or you will have to top up.

BAREBOAT

You charter the boat and nothing else. You sail her, you cook, you clean. You need a licence. VAT is already in the price.

CENTRAL AGENT

The company that manages one particular yacht for her owner. Every broker in the world books that boat through them, and they hold your money on an escrow account until the charter starts.

CHARTER LICENCE

What makes a boat legal to charter. It guarantees the safety equipment, a properly qualified captain and real insurance. Not every boat advertised online has one.

FULLY CREWED

Boat and crew come as one package. VAT on top.

GRATUITY

The tip for the crew. It is written into the contract and calculated on the net charter fee. Generally 10 to 15% is recommended.

GULET

A traditional wooden Turkish boat with sails and a large engine. Broad and roomy, popular with larger groups. She sails, in theory.

HALF BOARD

Breakfast and lunch on board, dinner ashore. Standard when there are only two crew.

MONOHULL

One hull. She heels when she sails and moves more than a catamaran.

NET CHARTER FEE

The charter fee before VAT and APA. Both the deposit and the gratuity are calculated on it.

OPTION

The boat is held for you while you decide, normally a week. Free, no obligation.

PREFERENCE SHEET

The form you fill in one month before you sail. Allergies, diets, celebrations, what you want from the week. It reaches the crew before you do.

VAT

On a fully crewed charter, it is added to the net charter fee. The amount is regulated by the current VAT laws of each country. On a bareboat, it is already included in the price.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Who I am

And what you can expect from me.



Incila from Sailvation with Captain Bozhidar Alekov from Sunreef 70 Power Catamaran "Alteya"

I am Incila Özmert. Everyone calls me Inci. I am based in Germany, and I travel for most of the year, through the cruising grounds I work in.

Thirty years in yachting, six of them living on boats. I have been the cook, the mate, the hostess and the skipper, and I have run charter bases. Since 2022 I have been arranging crewed charters through Sailvation. Sailing yachts, catamarans, motor sailers, gulets.

Sailvation is a one woman company, registered in Germany.

I am a member of the [Charter Yacht Brokers Association](#). To get in, you need a separate client account for client funds, references from other brokers and central agents who have worked with you, and several years of a proven track record. I can tell you I'm careful with your money, but anyone can say that. It carries a lot more weight when an independent organisation has looked at how I work and agreed.

WHAT YOU GET FROM ME

- You get three to five boats, not twenty. Making the suggestion is my job.
- If something breaks on a Sunday evening, I am the one on the phone.
- I will tell you if I am the wrong person for your trip, or if I feel I cannot meet your expectations, even when that costs me the booking.

Twenty minutes on the phone with me and you will know whether this is for you or not.

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sailvation.com · Reviews on [Proven Expert](#) and [Google](#)

If you enjoyed this guide, you might also enjoy [my occasional newsletter](#). Every now and then I share last-minute opportunities, favourite cruising areas, and boats that I think are worth discovering.

If you found this helpful, pass it on to someone who's thinking about chartering a boat this year. Most of my clients come through personal recommendations, and I'm grateful for every one of them.



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