

10 checks for sailing offshore

What should you look out for before sailing an unfamiliar yacht? Nathan Zhart explains to Erin Carey the essential checks before putting to sea



How much foredeck work will you have to do? Check how the lines are led

Have you ever thought of becoming a delivery skipper or crew? It's a great way to earn extra funds and gain offshore experience. It's also the perfect way to accrue nautical miles if you're aiming for professional qualifications. However, sailing onboard an unfamiliar boat can be challenging; not knowing how to deploy the anchor in an emergency or the locations of through-hull fittings when taking on water, could end in disaster.

Nathan Zhart runs Ocean Passages, a



Crewing can be a great way to accrue nautical miles and learn new skills

US-based offshore sailing and expedition company. As a delivery skipper, he's accustomed to stepping aboard unfamiliar boats and quickly familiarising himself with the systems.

"It's very much like going to look at a boat you might want to buy," he says. "You step aboard, walk around the deck, and take a good look at the rigging. I shake the shrouds, inspect the chainplates on the outside, feel the running rigging, and look at how it's led."

Whether Nathan's single-handing or

Deliveries and adventures

Nathan Zhart has a US Coast Guard 50 Ton Masters license and RYA Yachtmaster qualification. He works delivering other people's boats all over the world and taking on freelance marine work in foreign ports and harbours. He has 20,000 sea miles under his belt and has crossed the Atlantic four times. In addition, he spent six months managing a fleet of charter boats in the Caribbean, where he had the opportunity to single-



When was the engine last serviced?

handedly sail monohulls and catamarans up and down the Windward islands.

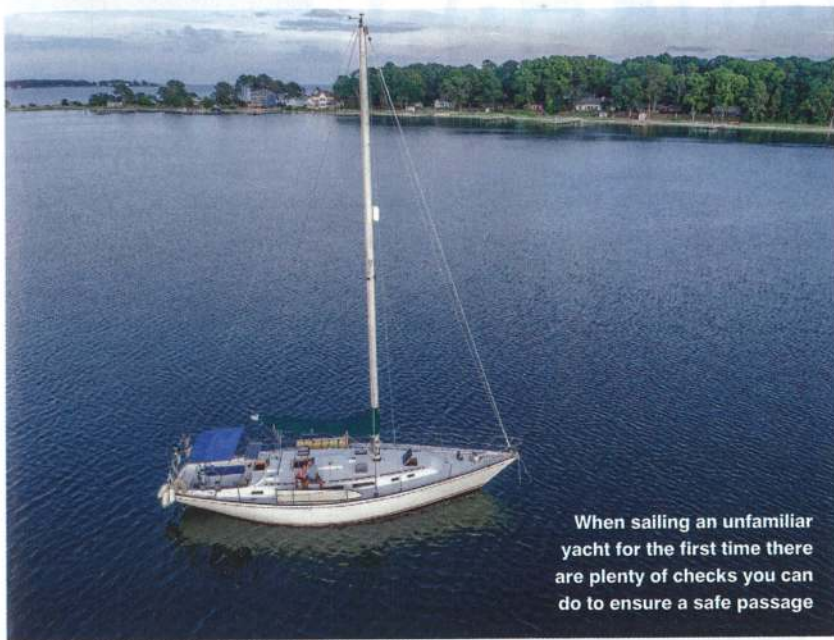
"We had tight deadlines and limited resources," he recalls. "Each day, my colleagues and I worked from morning to night fixing, diagnosing, and upgrading a fleet of 12 heavily used charter boats."

When he set up Ocean Passages, Nathan partnered with his wife Vivian Vuong – a qualified chef, photographer and first mate, who accompanies him on all his



Nathan always checks the steering turns smoothly

offshore passages – and sailing author John Kretschmer. Together, they run sailing adventures on their 47ft Compass, *Ultima*.



When sailing an unfamiliar yacht for the first time there are plenty of checks you can do to ensure a safe passage

taking crew, he believes it's important to know if all lines lead to the cockpit or if work will need to be carried out at the mast. He'll then do a quick inspection of the winches and turn the helm lock-to-lock to check it turns smoothly without resistance.

Down below

Nathan familiarises himself with the autopilot and instruments before going below decks to open every bilge compartment and locate the pumps and through-hull fittings. He runs water and pumps heads to detect any leaks and checks for standing water or oil.

A well-rested crew is essential, so every crewmember needs a dry bunk that's comfortable and safe. There should be a lee cloth if the berth isn't secure on both sides.

Lockers are opened, tanks and safety gear located and electrical equipment inspected. Finally, Nathan checks the electrical and mechanical systems.

For longer voyages, in particular, it's essential to have sufficient water and fuel tankage, and ensure the heads and engine both function, with spare parts on hand.

"I also make sure I have all the supplies I'll need while underway, including spare parts," says Nathan. "Items such as gaskets, seals, hose clamps, filters, impellers, oil and other small parts in case of a system failure, so you can repair and continue on course to your destination."

While not every boat Nathan delivers is

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erin Carey and her family cruised the Caribbean for two years before crossing the Atlantic aboard their *Moody 47 Roam*. Erin runs her own PR agency, *Roam Generation*, helping fellow sailors, travellers and adventurers share their stories with the world. www.roamgeneration.com

Essential Boat Maintenance



For a full list of checks and maintenance advice on everything from electronics, engines and glassfibre repairs to deck gear, rigging and sails,

see PBO's *Essential Boat Maintenance*, available on Amazon in print or Kindle.

in shipshape condition, there are a few red flags that would stop him doing the delivery altogether. For example, if there are significant structural issues such as soft decks or collision damage to the hull, as well as old rusty, damaged rigging: "If I can't trust that the mast will stay up, I would be extremely hesitant to take a boat off the dock."

Nathan assesses the safety issues carefully before accepting any delivery. While hesitant to deliver a boat that was filled with mould or had sank recently, he would do extra checks, preparations and precautions before ultimately making a decision.

Once under way, there is an entirely separate checklist to continually ensure safety, the most important being to walk around the deck at least once a day; you'll spot things such as chafed lines or damaged hardware you'd never see from the cockpit. Noticing these things early can allow for preventative maintenance rather than mandatory repairs.

When motoring, it's good practice to check the engine every hour to ensure there are no fuel, coolant, or oil leaks. It's also wise to keep an eye on the engine oil pressure and temperature gauges.

10 checks before setting sail

- 1 Water tank condition and capacity:** ensure they're full.
- 2 Batteries:** are they topped up? Are the terminals free of corrosion? Are they charged and secured correctly?
- 3 Engine:**
 - Check fuel hose condition and that hose clips are tight.
 - Make sure fuel in tanks is clean. Take a fuel sample.
 - Ensure fuel filters and water separators are free from debris, scum and water.
 - Check throttle and gears for smooth operation and that locking devices are fitted, ie split pins and lock washers/wire. Ensure the throttle cable is in good condition.
 - Remove cover plate and inspect impeller for broken vanes.
- 4 Sails:** are they in good condition?
- 5 Through-hull fittings and bilge pumps:** check condition and tie a bung to each through-hull.
- 6 Heads and holding tanks:** do they function properly?
- 7 Steering cables:** do they have broken strands? Is there smooth function when turning the wheel full port and starboard? Are cables excessively slack? Do cable pulleys rotate?
- 8 Running rigging:** is there any chafing? Check knots are adequate. Is there extensive UV damage, cuts or abrasions? Are they routed correctly?
- 9 Standing rigging:** look for cracks, corrosion, broken strands in the wire rope.
- 10 Ground tackle:** check anchor and chain condition. Does the windlass work, and do you know how to operate it? Where is the circuit breaker?



Top up depleted battery cells with de-ionised water



Check fittings on the boom for any movement