

get active

All aboard!

Kate and Daniela went to sea in a beautiful snow-white boat.

Not content with learning to dive, flamenco dance and stand on my head in recent years, I was looking for a new way to brighten up the end of a rainy summer in the UK. Cheered on by an eager friend who aspires to chartering a yacht somewhere hot, I spent a lunch break surfing the net looking for somewhere we could learn to sail.

The first locations I found in the London area were Wembley Sailing Club, and Docklands Sailing and Watersports Centre, both Royal Yachting Association (RYA) affiliated clubs. We opted for the second, intrigued by its proximity to the stunning Canary Wharf skyline.

My previous experience of sailing the high seas mainly involved fighting my brothers for control of the rudder on creaky pedalos and, in the other extreme, revisiting my overzealous hotel breakfast in between scuba dives on the bounciest little dinghy in existence.

The RYA (Level 1) 'Start Sailing' course at Docklands was rather different. One unsurprisingly grey weekend in September Daniela and I turned up in our 'comfortable clothes and old trainers' for a 9.30am start. I personally thought it must be a joke on the part of the course organisers that no wetsuit was required! But amazingly, only one group capsize the whole time we were in the water.

My fellow sailor wannabes mainly came in couples and paired friends, like us. Required to form groups of three we were joined by a



by to keep an eye on us and offer useful advice, in some kind of maritime language that I responded to with willing nods and smiles.

It was then quite literally time to get our feet wet as we were thrown in at the deep end. Afloat with our cargo of four we each took turns practising tacking (turning the front of the boat through the wind), gybing (turning the back of the boat through the wind) and 'getting out of irons' (when you're stuck with no wind). Not to mention 'lying to' which means to stop.

Being in control of a sail and a tiller while also positioning your body correctly (everyone knows what happens if you don't duck



looked like a large scale water-based dodgems. It really was bedlam: if you can imagine the three-point-turn you have to do in your driving test, this was a kind of 15-point-turn in a boat. There was much careering off into the distance then hurtling back again, boats crunching alongside each other, near-capsize moments, and much laughing (or maybe that was just me). Daniela outdid us all by managing to knock a windsurfer off his mount.

At the end of the two days my confidence in controlling the boat had definitely improved, which was all down to our instructor's calm commands, expert supervision and tireless patience. Given a larger stretch of water under a lovely blue sky I'm sure sailing would be just idyllic, and a huge buzz. Our crash (another fitting word) course was the perfect introduction to the sport, and, I think, a very constructive way to spend a weekend. On departure we were issued with a certificate and a manual – a useful revision tool should I undertake the 'Improve Your Sailing' course – Level 2.

High on fresh air and smug at our new-found skills, or the beginning of them, Daniela and I set off for Canary Wharf for a well-deserved glass of wine. I would like to report that I have already returned to the DSWC to practise and improve, but I think I might just wait until next summer. Or until that invitation finally arrives...

See www.dswc.org for further information.

'Faster than you could say "man overboard", it was time for a race.'

Frenchman who works for Ralph Lauren, who explained how he was tired of having to turn down his friend's offers to borrow his yacht; an invitation to join his future crew will, I'm sure, be on its way any day now...

Headed by a tanned talkaholic in flip-flops and outsized fleece, our first lesson was how to tie knots. There was a general look of bewilderment as, after a brief demonstration, ropes were passed around and we attempted a figure of eight and a round turn and two half hitches.

This initial 'dip' into the world of sailing set the pace for the remainder of the two-day course. Zipped up in our buoyancy aids and hauling sails and tillers behind us, we were marched off to the boatyard to rig the boats. We would be sailing bosuns, we learnt, in groups of three plus an instructor. Additional wind-chapped members of staff circled close

at the right moment!) and warning the rest of the 'crew' of our actions with the correct terminology – eg 'ready about!' before a tack – was no easy task. The biggest challenge was reacting to the wind and knowing what to do with the sail as a result. We also had to contend with the concrete walls on both sides of the sheltered dock where we practised. No sooner was I scudding nicely along with the wind in my hair than it was time to tack or gybe – and we soon learnt what it felt like if we left it too late! Luckily the boats and our lovely instructor were pretty resilient.

Faster than you could say 'man overboard' the head instructor announced that it was time for a race and plotted a course of buoys on the whiteboard in the clubhouse. Giddy with excitement and adrenaline we tottered back out to our boats to proceed in what must have