



Learn in the sun

There are many opportunities to take your first sailing experiences somewhere warm, says **Rupert Holmes**. This is now the route that almost 50 per cent of Brits choose when they start sailing...

Beach club holidays are one of the most popular ways to start sailing, or improve on your existing skills, and it's easy to see why. Some degree of dinghy sailing and windsurfing tuition is usually included in the price of the holiday and many operators offer a wide range of RYA courses.

The association has around 250 centres overseas that run courses including dinghy, keelboat and multihull schemes. 'The big overseas centres account for a lot of learn to sail activity,' says John Thorn, the RYA's national sailing coach. 'On the whole they tend to run versions of our basic beginners courses and at the end of the week there's a presentation and people get their certificates and so on, which is a good confidence

boost.' A growing number of overseas centres now offer the full range of RYA dinghy sailing courses, with Sunsail following smaller operators such as Wildwind and Minorca Sailing in doing this for first time in 2008.

Families are well catered for throughout this sector of the holiday market, particularly in school holiday time, with most companies offering a range of child care and activity clubs for children from four months to teenage. Except for the very youngest, where a high ratio of care is needed, these are usually free. The range of activities on offer means even families with diverse interests will find plenty to do. Equally, it's possible to choose adult-only resorts, or others with child-free zones for singles, couples and groups

Those who are not of an energetic disposition, or just want a break from activity, are also well catered for. For instance, you can relax with a book by the pool, get pampered in a health and beauty salon, or play a couple of games of tennis. In many cases you can also choose a variety of excursions and sightseeing opportunities to explore the local area.

It's a fun, laid-back atmosphere, with lots of opportunity to make new friends, sample local



PHOTOS: HELEN FRETTER/RYA

Left You can gain your RYA certificates on holiday at many centres.

culture and try new things such as water skiing. Going afloat is simplicity itself – the boats are at the water's edge, rigged and waiting for you to take them out. The format works for many different types of people – keen dinghy racers, beginners, large families, singles and so on.

One thing to be aware of is that those who start sailing overseas are often less likely to get round to joining a club when they return home, thus severely limiting their sailing opportunities and progression within the sport. 'The challenge then is for us in the UK as an organisation,' says Thorn, '...is to convert those initial [overseas] sailing experiences into regular participation. It's a classic case that if people don't join a club they may not sail in between doing courses on a summer holiday. We're always trying to say to people that the best way to get better is to buy a boat and join a club, or even to join a club that has boats you can use.'

The various companies in the market each tend to offer a different emphasis and experience, which will appeal to different needs. Most are predominantly watersports focussed, with an abundance of the latest gear and boats. Others sell on offering multiple activities, where sailing and windsurfing are one of perhaps half a dozen activities that are given equal weight. This can be ideal perhaps for families where only one or two members want to try sailing.

Club holidays also provide the opportunity to try a variety of different boats -cats, singlehanders and twin trapeze asymmetrics are all possible, or perhaps trying windsurfing, diving or water skiing. It's also a good way to assess moving to a different class before committing yourself to spending several thousand pounds on a new boat.

Before booking, check out what winds to expect at your short-listed resorts. Some are in locations with predominately light to moderate winds, which is ideal for beginners and younger children. Other sites are specifically chosen for their prevalence of stronger afternoon winds, which will be appealing for experienced sailors or more intrepid beginners.

Most operations offer some racing as part of the experience, including an end-of-week regatta, and some run the RYA Start Racing course. However, there are fewer opportunities for race training in the sun, so if racing is your key aim, this will restrict your choice of holiday.

Over the past few years the major operators have increased the range of RYA courses offered,

but check carefully before booking to be certain that the range of courses your party wants are actually available at your chosen resort, and whether or not it's included in the price. As with other holiday packages it's important to make price comparisons using the total amount you'll pay – headline figures are rarely directly comparable. Here's a sample of what some of the operators are offering for the 2008 season:

■ Crystal Active Beach

Introduced in 2006, Crystal Active Beach offers an all-inclusive range of sporting activities including sailing and windsurfing, both with RYA tuition, water skiing, wakeboarding, sea kayaking, snorkelling, scuba diving, mountain biking, tennis, yoga and fitness at its resort near Bodrum in Turkey.

■ Mark Warner

Most of the company's seven Mediterranean and Egyptian beach resorts are RYA-recognised sail training centres, offering a full range of RYA courses, as well as a wide range of other activities both onshore and afloat, including windsurfing, water skiing, scuba diving, tennis, soccer training and aerobics.

■ Minorca Sailing

This well-established operation has carved a reputation for its amazing selection of 250 boats, from Optimists to a Laser SB3, and just about everything in between, along with knowledgeable and enthusiastic instructors. All levels of RYA courses are offered, as well as additional race training opportunities and inclusive daily individual tuition. There are more than 70 Lasers and over 100 asymmetric boats allowing you to race daily in the craft of your choice.

As with other club-type operations, visitors can choose their own pace and activities, but the scale of the operation is such that there is always a good-size fleet for the end of day race and race training and coaching is on offer daily. This includes theory sessions on the land and practice on the water, along with video analysis, aimed at improving your race tactics, starts and boat handling skills. For keen racers there's a five-day race series, in addition to the end of week regatta. Enthusiasm for introducing even the very youngest children to sailing and helping them improve their skills.



PHOTO DAWN HINSLEY/YS*

Above Sailing straight off the beach into warm water is a great confidence booster.

■ Neilson

This company operates nine centres – seven in Greece, one each in Turkey and Egypt, the latter offering year-round holidays. All include RYA tuition and courses in the cost of the holiday, whether you are a first-timer aiming for an RYA Level 1 certificate, or an expert working on your performance sailing. Different centres have a differing emphasis, with Porto Heli and Finikounda in Greece geared more towards performance sailing. Neilson also offers other activities including windsurfing and mountain biking; yacht sailing and scuba diving is also available, depending on the location.

■ Rockley Watersports

Rockley Watersports offers RYA tuition, plus use of dinghies and windsurfers, on freshwater lakes close to the Atlantic coast of France, one near La Rochelle, the other to the south of Bordeaux. It's a rather different product from the others here, but provides an interesting alternative, particularly for families looking for a high-season watersports holiday without the searing heat of the Med in July or August. Prices include a five-day sailing or windsurfing course, as well as use of equipment on other days. Accommodation is in modern chalet-style tents on four-star campsites, with full facilities including a choice of bars, cafes and restaurants, swimming pools and a supermarket.

■ Sunsail

Over the past five years or so Sunsail has

rationalised its number of clubs, in favour of opening larger ones with improved facilities, accommodation and standards of service. Each now has a particular specialism. For instance, Vounaki in Greece is ideal for beginners thanks to the predominantly calm waters and light to moderate winds experienced here. By contrast, Javelin in Turkey enjoys stronger winds, particularly in the afternoon, and is ideal for more intrepid beginners, or those with more experience.

All have a high standard of watersports equipment to cater for all levels from beginner to expert, while other activities, depending on the particular club, include water skiing and scuba diving; and all apart from Colonna in the Caribbean have day yachts. Ashore, all have tennis courts, swimming pools, health and beauty spas, and mountain bikes.

For the 2008 season all the company's clubs are offering a much expanded range of RYA courses, including race training and sailing with spinnakers. These are either included in the price, or offered as a relatively low-cost extra. Also new for this year is a small selection of specialist weeks, including a Laser Regatta Week and an RS Summer Shakedown.

■ Wildwind

Wildwind has been established for 20 years at Vassiliki on the Greek island of Levkas. It's one of the few independent companies left in this market and has developed a distinctive identity and many loyal fans. Although an Ionian destination, where winds are typically light to moderate, this site was chosen with considerable care – the local geography funnels the wind, so there's more breeze than you might expect – it's light in the mornings (ideal for novices), but frequently Force 5-6 in the afternoons – Wildwind claims a Force 5 for more on two out of every three afternoons.

The centre is aimed at those who are serious about their sailing, whether experienced racers or beginners who want to learn fast. It has an impressive line up of boats, including high performance dinghies and a large catamaran fleet for experienced sailors, as well as a good selection of less demanding craft for beginners and youngsters. Tuition for all RYA courses is available at no extra cost. ■

Right You can also learn to yacht sail on a villa-flotilla holiday which combines instruction with cruising.



PHOTO HELEN FRETTER/YS*

Further information:

www.rya.org.uk
www.crystalactive.co.uk
www.neilson.com
www.markwarner.co.uk
www.minorcasailing.co.uk
www.rockleywatersports.com
www.sunsail.com
www.wildwind.co.uk