

# The Dallas Morning News

## Baby boomers savor retirement living on boats in Mexico



Allyson van Os of Dallas and her husband live on their boat in La Paz, Mexico, from October to June. She is one of millions of retirees living part of their lives on boats.

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Published: 09 March 2014 11:19 PM

Updated: 10 March 2014 11:52 AM

LA PAZ, Mexico — They're nomads, sailing freely, crossing international waters, guided by one principle: Just float.

“Good thing is we don't have a schedule,” said Allyson van Os of Dallas. “We just do the things we like to do, when we want to do them. That's our schedule.”

Van Os, 62, is one of millions of baby boomers living part of their lives on boats, inspired by a lifestyle that she acknowledges is harder than it seems.

She and her husband, Ed, and two dogs, Dexter and Pequeña, dock their 65-foot boat, the Virginia Reel, in the waters of La Paz in the Baja Peninsula, the same place where Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés first docked his boat in 1535. They are joined there by more than 100 other boat owners, part of a growing nautical tourism business in Mexico that isn't without legal hassles, including tax agents, but that is a dream many boat owners say is worth pursuing.

With an estimated 80 million baby boomers retiring in the coming years, Mexico looms large as an alternative place to live not just on land, but on sea. Recreational boating industry experts predict that the number of boomer boat owners will grow, although finding exact figures — anywhere from 10 million to 17 million, by some estimates — is difficult in part because of their nomadic existence.

Many of these retirees are living seasonally or year-round on boats, lured by the simplicity of life and lower cost of living. They are also searching for tranquillity, a place away from the fast pace and hectic life increasingly dominated, they say, by time pressures in an age of social media.

“You come here to check out on a life that's not yours anymore,” said Leanne Lawrence, 61, originally from Texas and now commuting between La Paz and Oregon with her husband, Jack Jandreau. “You come here to reconnect with yourself and the nature around you, the sunsets, sunrises, and the welcoming people of Mexico.”

Hence La Paz, The Peace, a seaside town known for sports fishing, whales, seafood and, increasingly, Americans seeking to reinvent themselves, much the way author John Steinbeck did when he stayed here and was inspired to pen some of his classic books, including *The Pearl* and *Sea of Cortez*.

“The community is just right, feels right,” said Jandreau, 64, who with his wife has been sailing to La Paz for more than 20 years.

In the shadow of Cabo San Lucas, just an hour or so down a new highway, La Paz is booming into something not quite defined yet, but with some certainty that it won't become another tourist trap like Cabo or Cancún. Instead, La Paz retains its Mexican aura of familial ties, even with a makeover that includes bike lanes, pricey condos with stunning ocean views, an 18-hole Gary Player golf course and a list of hotels. That list is headed by CostaBaja Resort, which includes a marina for more high-end clients, including Hollywood actors who dock and quietly mingle on their own.

“We have all types of clients,” said María del Mar Bueno Riestra, the CostaBaja public relations event manager. “Whether on sea or on ground, all are looking for security, tranquillity, and this is what we offer, peace.”

But the boat lifestyle is not for everyone, and challenges are many, cautioned Mark Nicolas, author of *Living Aboard A Boat*.

“The live-aboard lifestyle is easily sold as a romantic dream,” Nicolas said. “While that can be true, boats require work and experience.”

In November, Mexican tax agents disrupted the tranquil life for many, temporarily impounding more than 300 foreign-owned sailboats and yachts across Mexican marinas. Most of the boats have since been released. The tax agents seemed to be going after tax cheats without fully understanding international laws, said Lawrence, who added that boat owners are not required to pay tax or duty if they have a 10-year temporary import permit, which costs about \$50.

“There was a lot of confusion, but that’s been resolved,” she said. “Life is back to normal.”

Mexico’s Tax Service Administration, equivalent to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, declined a request for an interview, but an official said most of the vessels seized have been freed.

Still, Morey Glazer, a Dallas-based international tax consultant, said the incident serves as a warning for Americans.

“Mexican authorities can take and sell your assets, or just take your boat, your condo,” he said. “As more Americans move south of the border, they have to be on top of the tax laws because they can be confusing and sometimes messy.”

Nicolas has other practical advice. “Take time to understand a bit about the lifestyle, and if you haven’t already, spend time aboard a boat getting used to the sights, sounds, motion and smells. There are lots of pros, but also lots of cons, including limited space, moisture and so forth.”

Even so, for boat owners like van Os and her friends, sailing, living on a boat, sleeping on gentle ocean waves and building a community on a marina never gets old.

Van Os lives in La Paz between October and June and wishes her three granddaughters in Dallas would visit. She insists that Americans are too consumed with concerns about security.

The Texas Department of Public Safety issued its annual travel warning this week: “Based on the unpredictable nature of cartel violence and other criminal elements, we urge individuals to avoid travel to Mexico at this time.”

“I don’t even give that a thought,” said van Os. “Security has never been an issue for me. This has always been personal, about finding an inner peace.”

She was just 5 years old when she first visited La Paz with her brother and parents. She has a photo of the four of them that day, one she still keeps aboard the Virginia Reel. She said her late brother would always point to that photo and say, “That was the happiest day of my life.”

“I knew then I would want one day to live here, and La Paz always somehow finds a way to give something back to me, that moment in life that’s always there.”

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