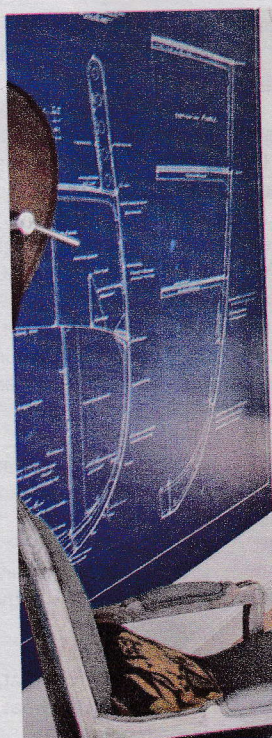


TRAVEL

ESCAPE ROUTES

PUSH THE
BOAT OUT



YES IT'S A HOUSEBOAT, AND YES IT LOOKS BIGGER THAN MOST CITY FLATS



ALL ABOARD THE GOOD HOUSEBOAT STURDY

MOOR UP ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT



Stylist's production editor Gareth Watkins takes to the ocean (sort of) on an Isle Of Wight houseboat

Extract from the ship's log: Houseboat Sturdy, May 19, year of our Lord 2014

It is with a heavy heart that I write this. Alas our brief voyage aboard the houseboat *Sturdy* is at an end. This fine vessel, which has been home for the past three days, is moored in the picturesque Bembridge harbour and sleeps nine at full crew. There are two double bedrooms (one en-suite), a room with two bunk beds for the cabin crew and a single room – all cleanly furnished and appointed to the highest standard. On the upper deck, a large modern kitchen with a zinc-topped dining table makes it a pleasure to dine with one's

fellow shipmates. The main salon, which has a subtle nautical theme, mixes local art with the cool image of Sean Connery and Ursula Andress messing around on a beach. Huge bi-fold doors open out to the prow of the ship where you will find me, dear reader, gazing through the telescope at the ferries on the Solent, wondering at the exotic locations to which they will journey – Cherbourg, Caen, Le Havre...

As you can imagine, after talking like a louche 19th-century sailor for half a day, my shipmates nearly tossed me into the brine. The point is, though, the romance of life at sea (even though the boat doesn't actually go anywhere) is hard to resist. *Sturdy's* owners live on a houseboat of their own so have brought all their expertise to the Isle Of Wight outpost, providing everything you would

ever need, from Wi-Fi and wellies to a bottle of gin in the cupboard.

There's no shortage of things to do on the isle – from ancient monuments and zoos to countless crazy golf courses. It's home to the Isle of Wight Festival (every June) and Bestival (4-7 September) but there are many smaller festivals happening, too. We spent a hazy real-ale-fuelled afternoon at the Wolverton Manor Folk And Blues Festival in the company of goth Morris dancers who were as charming as they were terrifying.

If you want to keep things local, Bembridge has everything you need within walking distance: WW Woodford & Sons butchers (try the pies), Captain Stan fishmongers and The Farm Shop all sell locally sourced produce, so load up a picnic and head to Bembridge beach – it's pebbly at the top but as the tide goes out, it gives way to acres of fine sand.

Once you've showered off the sun cream, the roof terrace is the perfect place to watch the sun dip beneath the horizon. If you don't fancy eating on board, head back to the village and try the Pilot Boat Inn (famous for its Bembridge crab sandwich), the Old Village Inn Steak And Ale House (10oz rump steak, £14.95) or Shed bistro for tapas. Then it's back to the boat to be gently rocked to sleep by the rising tide.

All in all, you need never leave, which, dear reader, is why you might still find me, face fixed against the salty breeze, gazing through my telescope and dreaming of voyages past. Sorry, I've gone again.

Houseboat Sturdy sleeps nine and can be hired from £135 per night; canopyandstars.co.uk. Wightlink runs ferries from Portsmouth to Fishbourne from £42 for a day return; wightlink.co.uk

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