



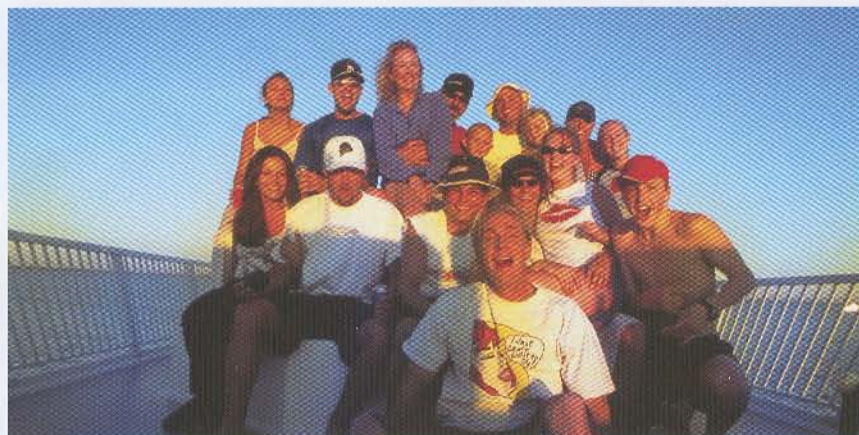
Planning your houseboat vacation

with Tips on how to have a great one!

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Photos: MDavid & Jay Carroll

Houseboating can be a lot of fun for any age of individual, and any size or type of group. The following suggestions and ideas are the result of many years of experience, and are intended to help make your trip more fun. What works for one person does not necessarily work for another, so you may find only bits and pieces of this useful to you. Feel free to use your imagination to expand your experience on a houseboat in any way you can think of. The idea is to have fun, and there are lots of ways to do it.



ORGANIZING A GROUP TO GO HOUSEBOATING

Houseboats generally sleep 10-12 people, but there are bigger boats now available with room for 24. Most people try to fill up the boat to keep the cost per person as low as possible. Putting a group together is easy. Here are several suggestions for whom you might include on your trip. Don't feel limited to these, however. Even combinations of these work well.:

Family & Extended Family

Some people have a large enough family that they can fill a boat with family members, which can be a lot of fun and can create some really meaningful experiences among siblings and/or cousins. If children are of varying ages, you may want to consider allowing them to invite friends as it may increase their enjoyment of the trip. You might just decide to make it an annual reunion, as many people do.

A Group of Friends

Inviting a group of all single adults (which can be all male or all female), or adult couples, can be loads of fun. Enjoying the water by day and a lively card or board games in the evening are some of the favorite activities.

A Group of Co-workers

Inviting your friends from work can build bonds beyond the workplace and create memories you love to reminisce about when you return to the drudgery of your job! Think of inviting a group of families, or make it an all male or all female outing.

Two or Three Unrelated Families

Often great friends make a tradition out of an annual houseboating trip together. Their children have lasting memories, and the adults have fun, too. There are no limits to who you might invite, and many times your friends might bring their friends and new friendships are formed!

Pets Can Be Welcome

Pets are part of the family and find houseboating and exploring the shoreline extremely fun. Please be aware that there are hazards to protect your pet against - such as rattlesnakes, birds of prey, and the water (pet life preservers can be found at most marine stores). If your pet happens to cause damage and/or the need for extra cleaning, part of your deposit may be forfeited to cover this additional cost. Be sure to check with your own houseboat renter to see if pets are okay.



Above: Children particularly enjoy houseboating, especially when you have a bunch of them to fill up the boat. Right: Our trip to Shuswap Lake in British Columbia typifies the type of spectacular houseboating that is available on both sides of the border.

DIVIDING THE WORK

Planning the trip includes contacting everyone you'd like to have participate, getting commitments from them, planning the food, planning any additional activities (such as sight seeing or hiking around the surrounding area), arranging for ski boats or other toys, planning the transportation, and making provisions for the payment of money.

Setting a Date

How you go about organizing the group will depend on the type of group, but there are lots of things in common. The first challenge is picking a date. If you know exactly who will be going on the trip, you simply talk to everyone and find out what dates they are able to go, and select dates that work for everyone. It is strongly recommended that your group agrees on a second and third choice of dates in case you're planning on vacationing during a popular time. As soon as you have the dates established, you should make a reservation. Even though there is frequently last minute availability of boats, all of the boats of a particular size could easily be reserved for any

Multiply the cost per night from #5 by the number of nights for each guest to arrive at that guests' allocated cost for the houseboat

Don't forget to include all costs when calculating the total expense for your vacation. For example:
 Total Houseboat Cost:
 Houseboat Rental: \$4995.00
 Gas For Houseboat: \$300.00
 Fuel Tax Waiver: \$175.00
 Miscellaneous (movie rental, ice): \$24.00
 Total houseboat trip cost: \$5494.00

Since the cost of the trip is divided among your group on a per night basis you can see that a houseboat getaway - full of fun and relaxation - is a great value when compared to other vacation alternatives.

Be sure to keep a good record of how much money you have received and from whom. In some cases it might make sense to have people pay you a small amount of money each month over a six month period to get to the desired level. You will be required to pay a deposit when you make the reservation, and then pay the full amount of the rental 75 days prior to your trip. You will get the deposit back after your trip, less the cost of any vessel damage/loss should it occur.

A useful tool in arranging for payment between you and your friends and family members is paypal.com. PayPal can be used by your friends and family to pay you, using checks or credit cards, for their share of the cost of the rental. You can either forward your resort the money you receive in your PayPal account via PayPal.com, or else send a check. For more information on how this service works, visit PayPal.com.

Calculating the Cost

- 1) Figure out the total cost of the trip
- 2) Make a list of the guests who is going on the trip, reserve the houseboat for the dates that work for you, and then invite other people until you have commitments from enough people to make the trip possible.

The \$\$\$ Aspect

If everybody going on your houseboat trip will be paying their own share of the cost, it is a good idea to have people give you the cash for their share of the rental cost at the time they make the commitment. If they've paid, there is less chance that they will change their minds. If someone drops out at the last minute and hasn't paid, it puts a burden on everyone else who is going on the trip. You are likely to find that most people have a hard time actually making a commitment, and will not feel locked in until they have paid. You can pay for the boat as early as you want, so the sooner you collect the money and pay for the boat, the better.



PREPARING THE FOOD

This can be done in several ways, depending on the type of group, and the likes and dislikes of the people. The boat will have a stove, an oven and a barbecue, so the choices for cooking are varied. Roasting something in the oven for three hours on a hot day may not be the best idea, since it could contribute to making the boat uncomfortable. It is a good idea to stick to things that are simple to prepare. Here are some ideas to make your meal planning easier:

1) Have one person prepare a menu for the entire trip, and buy all of the groceries for the menu. Type up a sheet explaining what food is for which meal, and showing what the menu is. Of course, if someone eats the wrong food at the wrong time it may upset the plans, and could upset some people. However, this approach results in a minimum of excess food, and with planning could make it easier

to handle food storage. If you go out for a week, storing all of the food for a large group is a challenge. One thing to consider is the possibility of packing the meat for the second half of the week in an ice chest with some dry ice, and tape the lid shut. After four days everything will still be frozen. Try not to bring too much stuff that needs refrigeration, because the refrigerator capacity on a houseboat is limited, and the propane refrigerators are not as efficient as the ones you have at home.

2) Assign meals to various people, making each person responsible to bring one, two or three specific meals. This spreads the work around and lets everyone participate, without any one person having to do too much. It spreads the cleanup job, too!

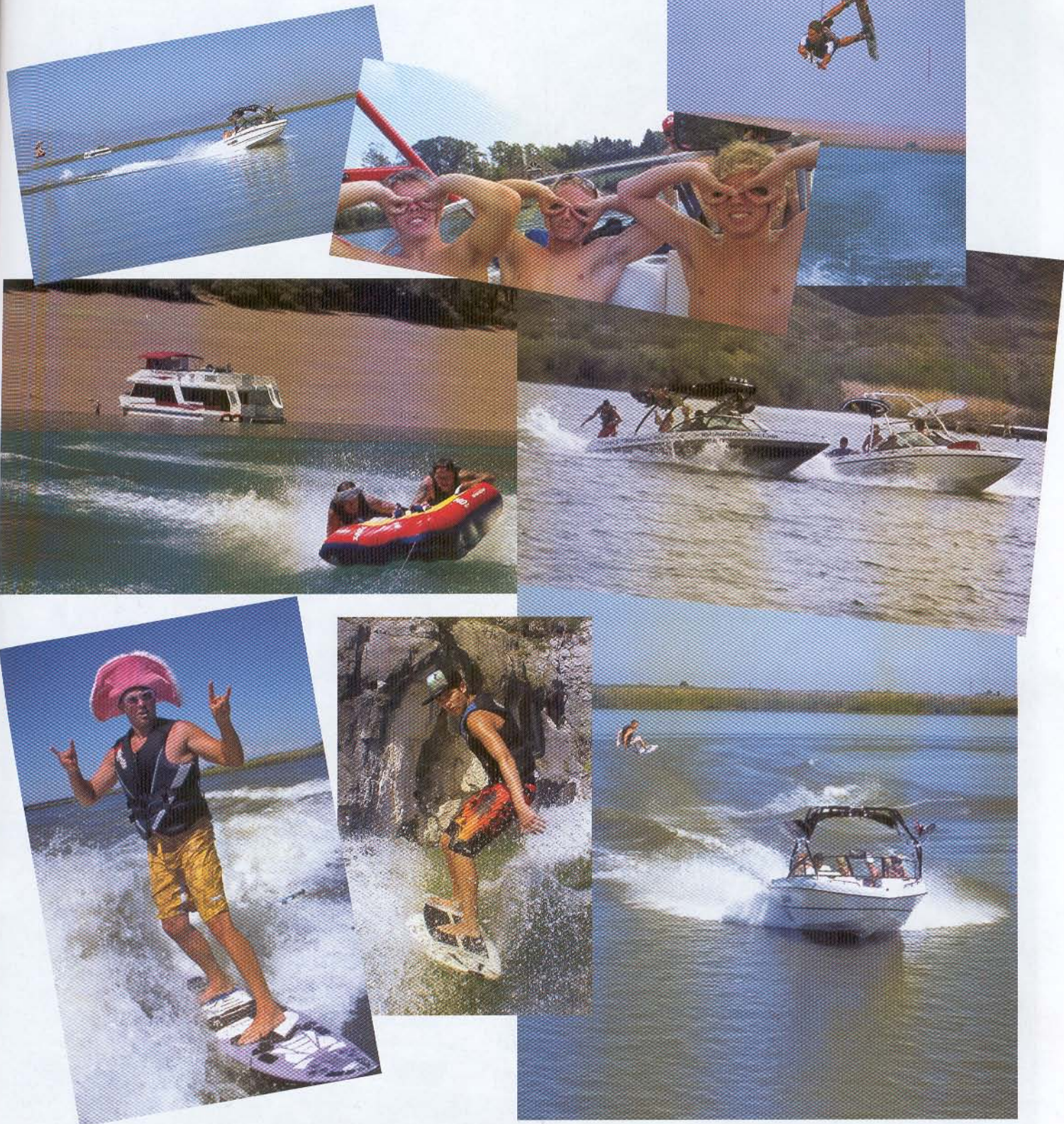
3) Let each individual or family take care of their own food. This might be a good idea if one family has special eating demands, such as being vegetarians. Generally, though, it is more fun for all to eat together.

4) Drinks are an important consideration. Usually it will be easiest to have everybody bring what they want to drink. You should use the ice chest that comes on the houseboat for the drinks, because the drinks stay colder in ice. Also, frequent opening of the boat's refrigerator door to access drinks will result in the refrigerator not working adequately, and nothing will be very cold. If you buy common drinks for everyone, be sure to estimate the cost high and collect the money before the trip. Also, expect to buy at least a couple bags of ice per day during your trip. The exact amount of ice you will use will depend on the outside temperature. Block ice will last longer.



The division of food costs is an important consideration. If you use the first method, there will be an easily calculated cost that can be divided by the number of people on the trip, and everyone can be charged for their share. It is important to be fair in allocating costs, to prevent anyone from possibly 'getting their feathers ruffled.' If you use the second method, try to give each group comparable meals to bring. If you use the third method, money may not be an issue.

Don't forget to bring all of the toys when you go houseboating because you'll have plenty of opportunity to use them, especially with a crew of fun-loving adrenaline junkies.



PLANNING FOR SKI BOATS, AND OTHER BOATS AND TOYS

Having a small boat along can make your houseboat trip more fun. If you have a ski boat, fishing boat or runabout, you should bring it. If you don't have a small boat you may want to consider renting one for the week, or at least for one day of your trip. Wakeboarding, waterskiing and wakesurfing adds a fun dimension to the houseboat trip. Jet Skis, WaveRunners or other personal watercrafts are also an exciting alternative. In addition, inflatable rubber rafts, tubes, air mattresses, flotation cushions, canoes, kayaks, wakeboards, water-skis, kneeboards, and anything else that floats can add variety to a houseboat trip. Most of these items can be rented or purchased from marina stores. If you bring a ski boat don't forget to plan on everyone to pay for their share of the gas it burns.



Once the cost of the trip is divided among your group on a per night basis you can see that a houseboat getaway - full of fun and relaxation - is a great value when compared to other vacation alternatives. Bottom photo: One of the many tranquil and secluded arms of Lake Amistad, Texas provides perfect houseboating conditions.

CLUBS & GROUPS

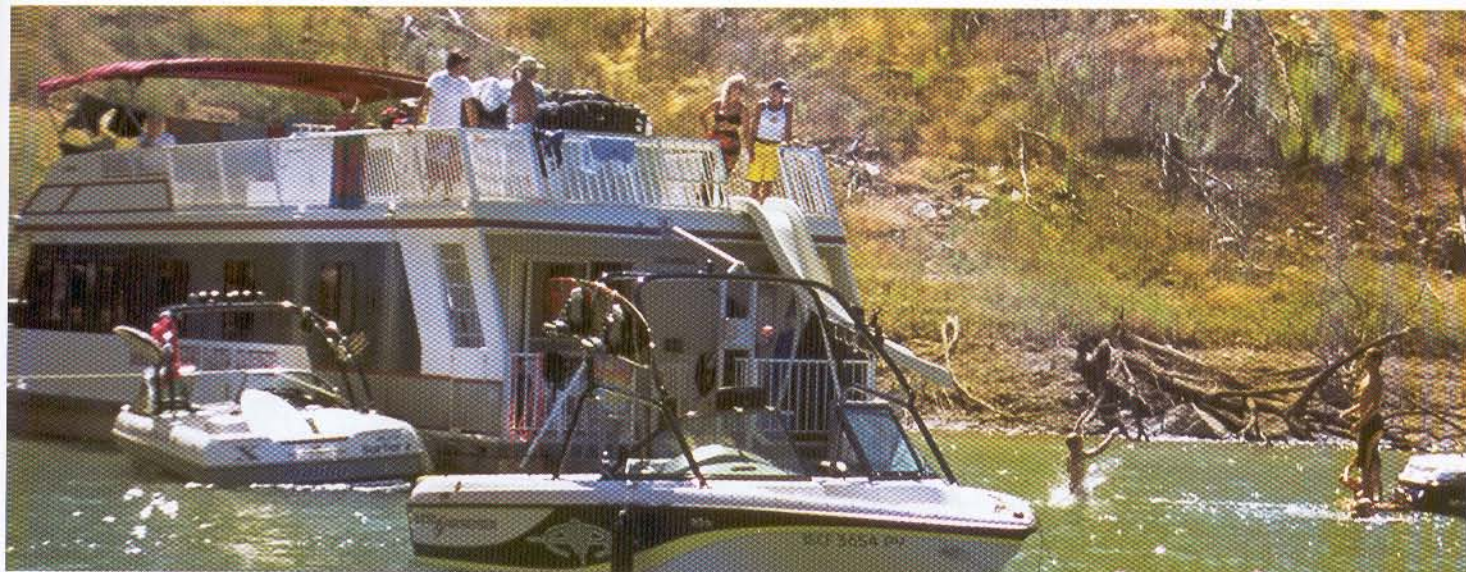
We suggest that you consider a houseboating trip the next time you are in charge of coming up with a new idea for your club, association, or church group outing. Several church youth groups make this an annual event, and rent many houseboats at a time. It's a great outdoor adventure for kids of all ages. And it is an activity that will delight even those hard-to-please teenagers.



INSURANCE

There are various kinds of insurance to protect you on your vacation; however, you are still responsible for some deductibles and for some potential costs that are not covered by insurance. Not all rental companies provide the same insurance coverages, and many do not provide any liability protection, so you should consider the differences when you compare rental rates. You also may have some personal liability protection from a homeowner's policy or an umbrella policy. You may want to discuss this with your insurance agent. If you have any questions about insurance, please do not hesitate to ask your houseboat renter.





BASIC RULES OF THE ROAD

Read and understand government regulations governing the waterway on which you will be traveling. Know the marking systems and the signaling rules. Here are some general basic rules:

Approaching an oncoming boat, keep to the right. Slow and use caution when approaching a blind bend.

In the still of the night. At least one hour before dark always get back to the dock, anchor or find a proper cove to beach on for the night. Always try to know beforehand whether a cove or quiet inlet will be safe depth. The boat can be left high and dry if the water recedes out of that lovely inlet during the night because of the tides. Locks and dams on rivers can also cause changes in the water elevation. A peaceful river can become a roaring torrent after a hard rain upstream, so know the water challenges before you go exploring.

If at dusk you can't reach a dock, anchor out of the main channel or tie up to trees near the bank. When about 75 feet from your anchorage, drop the stern anchor from the rear deck. Be careful not to foul your propeller. When the stern anchor is secure, move in closer and tie the bow line to some fixed object on the shore, or secure the bow anchor into the shoreline.

Person Overboard. Keep the overboard person in sight at all times. Throw a floatable item (PFD, large plastic bottle, thermos jug, ring buoy, etc.) to the person overboard and bring the boat around. Never reverse, as the propeller may strike the victim. Approach the person slowly and carefully in a manner that keeps them upwind of your boat. Whenever possible, cut the engine until the person is back aboard.

Carbon Monoxide. An alarming number of carbon monoxide deaths involving houseboats have occurred because gasoline-powered generators with through-transom exhaust systems were left running and exhaust fumes became trapped beneath the swim platform while passengers were on the swim platform or swimmers were in the water. Turn off both your engine and your generator when people are swimming near your houseboat.

Tow, Tow, Tow Your Houseboat. If your houseboat is being towed, remember that the towline is under great stress, and if it breaks it can whip and cause serious injuries. Be sure that all crew members stay away from the line while your houseboat is being towed. Many people will not tow you unless you provide the line. Virtually all rental houseboats will have a stout anchoring/towline aboard for such uses. Check that yours does beforehand.

Refueling. The riskiest operation on a houseboat, strangely enough, is refueling. Smoking, naturally, is taboo during refueling and all electrical appliances and lights should be turned off. Pilot lights on any appliances should also be turned off. If the boat has built-in fuel tanks, keep all doors and windows closed to prevent heavier-than-air-gasoline vapors from seeping inside cabins and the engine compartment. Fill all portable tanks on the dock. Ventilate before starting the engine. The blower should always be run for a few minutes and until all gas odors have left the engine compartment.

First Aid. A houseboat with a first aid kit aboard shows very good planning. Keep a well stocked first aid kit handy and remember to replenish supplies as they are used. At least one crew member should know first aid. First Aid training should be an essential part of training for all houseboaters.

Life Jackets and Life Preservers

Be sure you have the right size life jacket for each person on board. Fit your life jacket snugly and know how to adjust it. Remember, too, that because there may not be time to put on your life jacket while you are still on the houseboat, you and your crew will have to learn how to put it on in the water. That takes a bit of practice. If you and your crew are not good swimmers, think about wearing life jackets while underway.

Fire. Be sure you have the proper size fire extinguishers (minimum size, five pounds) and know how to use them. Fire extinguishers, by the way, are required by law to be on board. With an engine compartment fire, the chance of explosion is present. If a fire breaks out in the engine compartment, turn the engine off at once. Fire in the galley is dangerous but preventable. Use as little fat as possible when cooking on the stove, and be sure that flammable items are not allowed near the stove. Also be aware that a houseboat moves and its rocking may cause overfilled pans to spill.

Abandon Ship! Remember, during most shipboard emergencies it is usually safest to stay with the boat. In a situation of peril the most experienced boater should direct the decision to stay or go. If it becomes necessary to abandon your houseboat you and your crew should know where the nearest life jacket and life preservers are located and how to use them. If it becomes necessary to abandon your houseboat, remember:

Try to send a Mayday on the UHF radio and describe your location

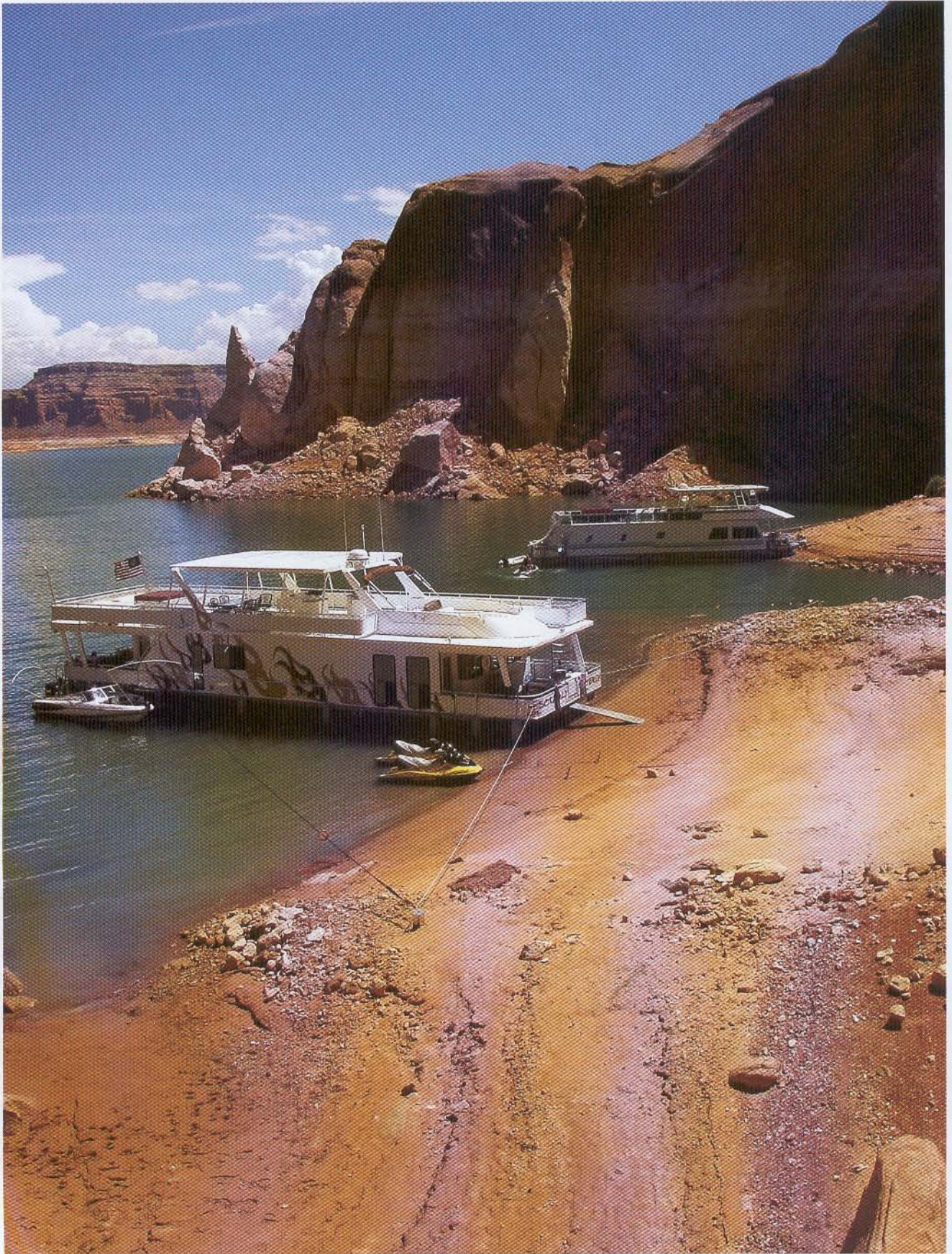
Wear your life jacket

Go overboard on the windward side

Stay clear of the propeller

Conduct a head count. Try to keep together and get to shore

Never fight the current, use it to help you.



FIVE DO NOT DO'S

No wakeboarding or platform dragging: Although some houseboats are powerful and fast enough to pull riders, doing so is dangerous because a houseboat is not maneuverable enough and its propellers (unlike an inboard boat) are typically too close to the rear of the boat.

No Tinkering: Don't tinker with the fuel system or the electrical and control systems. If something goes amiss, get a qualified technician to help.

No Operating Under the Influence: Don't even think about drinking alcohol and operating your houseboat. Your passengers and your vessel are your responsibility and alcohol and drugs have been proven to be the cause of most boating accidents.

No Swimming near your propellers: Never forget the danger to swimmers which boat propellers can inflict. Shut off your engines when approaching swimmers and keep swimmers away from your stern.

No Wake: Watch your wake because you may upset small boats and damage others at docks, even at a great distance away. Remember, you are legally responsible for any damage caused by the wake of your craft.

Left: When your houseboat is on beautiful Lake Powell, all houseboats are beached when stopped for the night. Notice the beaching lines off the boats on either side, an example of a proper and secure tie-up.

HOW TO BEACH YOUR HOUSEBOAT

While every houseboat destination has their own rules about beaching and anchoring your houseboat, it's always a good idea to beach your houseboat at least an hour before dusk. Most lakes will be too deep to properly anchor a houseboat so being able to beach your houseboat properly, safely and securely is very important. If you follow these 10 simple instructions you'll find that beaching a houseboat is easy and stressless.

1) Try to choose a cove that is well protected from wind and waves and is away from rocks. You'll also want to insure that there is a good drop off that will be deep enough at the stern (rear) of the houseboat so that it will not damage the propeller.



2) Make sure there are no sharp rocks that will damage the pontoons or the hull.

3) Another consideration is the location of the sun. Will you want shade in the afternoon or sun? The choice is important for recreation as well as comfort.

4) If your potential location is okay, approach the spot you have chosen at the slowest possible speed...900-1000 rpms. Make sure you approach the spot as straight as possible.

5) When the front of the pontoons dig into the ground, leave the motor idling in forward. This will hold the houseboat to the beach while you pound in your stakes and tie up your ropes. (If the wind or waves start to turn the boat sideways – with your engine running at low rpm in forward gear, turn your wheel in the same direction the back end of the boat is turning. This will straighten the houseboat out.)

6) Hold the houseboat in this position (straight) until a crew member has secured the mooring lines around the stakes. Make sure someone is at the helm until the boat is secure.

7) If your boat should turn sideways on the beach put the throttle in neutral. Try to push the back end of the boat out. Once the back end is far enough out, put the engine in reverse and back up. Approach the beach again as straight as possible. If you are unable to back out because of the wind, you can turn the wheel into the beach and put the boat in forward. You will pivot the boat around until it is perpendicular to the shore. You may need a person on shore holding the front corner of the boat against the shore with a rope to perform this maneuver.



8) Your stakes should be pounded in at a 45 degree angle away from both sides of your houseboat. Be sure to pound them in at an angle away from the houseboat with no more than 12-14 inches showing above the ground. (An even easier way is to use the PowerPointe Anchor System – check page 33.)

9) Pull your mooring lines around the stakes and make a loop knot. Wrap around and knot 3-4 times until the ropes are secure. It is important to leave as little slack in your ropes as possible, the snugger the better. If one side is too loose, it could result in one side of the houseboat coming up against the shore, which could result in prop and pontoon damage. After the ropes are secure push the knot as close to the ground as possible.

10) After you have tied up and turned the engine off, make sure your key is in the off position. (A key left in the on position will drain your battery.)

Relax. You've made it. Just remember to keep a keen eye on the weather and be prepared to react. Anticipation will save you and your crew from disaster.

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