



## Smooth sailing

THE SEA HAS CAPTURED THE SPIRITS OF SAILORS AND ADVENTURERS FOR CENTURIES. BREAKING INTO THE TECHNICAL WORLD OF SAILING CAN BE CHALLENGING, BUT THERE'S HELP AT HAND AT WATERCOOLED ABU DHABI

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**Laurie, one of Watercooled Abu Dhabi's** sailing instructors, is at least two decades my junior. His enthusiasm for sailing, however, is boundless. He's charged with guiding me and my friend Jude through our first-ever sailing lesson. He's undeterred by Jude's confession that on her only sailing expedition to date someone yelled "duck!" and she replied "why?" leading to a smack on the head with the boom. "There's your first lesson," he laughs. "When someone says 'duck', well... duck."

"A quick lesson on what we are going to do today," he says, leading us to a whiteboard. "This is the wind direction..." he indicates, sketching an arrow. He draws an acute angle around the point, "...and this is the no-go zone." This ominous-sounding zone wipes the smiles from our faces until Laurie explains that here the boat simply won't capture enough wind to sail.

Banishing thoughts of capsizing from our minds, we move on to tacking and gybing, the techniques for turning the boat across the wind. Laurie demonstrates using boat-shaped magnets on the board while we look on, foreheads crinkled in concentration. "We'll just work on tacking today," he reassures us.

The lesson is brief, and moments later we're standing by a small RS Vision sailboat. "These are great for training because they can fit three

people. These Fevas really only fit two," Laurie says, indicating a fleet of smaller craft a few feet away. He points out the main components – the mast, mainsail, rudder, tiller, tiller extension, centreboard and the head-smacking boom. He points to each part, waiting for our nods of recognition before moving on to the next.

With a heave-ho, Laurie pushes the boat into the shallows. We clamber inelegantly aboard and perch on the built-in bench-platforms on either side. Laurie takes the tiller, expertly angling across the wind so that we skim gently over the emerald-green water, Abu Dhabi providing a perfect urban backdrop.

The warm sun and gentle lapping of the waves lulls us into a false sense of serenity. "This is how you tack," says Laurie. "Stretch your back leg across the boat. Push the tiller gently away from you to turn and move into the middle. You can use your hands on the sides to balance," he demonstrates as the boom swings over his head. The sail flaps then pulls taut in the light breeze. "Straighten up and move to the other side." As he sits, he scoops his back hand under the tiller extension, neatly flipping it over his shoulder, and shifts the mainsail halyard (the rope used to trim the sail) to his other hand in one fluid movement: "Right, who's first?"

"Me," sighs Jude, trading places with Laurie and nervously gripping the tiller extension. For the next 20 minutes she wrestles with the steering, tying herself in knots as she leaps nervously from one side of the boat to the other. "Let's try without holding the halyard," suggests Laurie, patiently guiding her through each of the tacking steps again. With his encouragement Jude settles into the rhythm of the wind, keeping her gaze trained on the sea in true sailor fashion.

When it's finally my turn to prove my seaworthiness, I grasp the tiller extension and choose a distinctive building as a guide to keep me on course.

Just as my confidence leaps up to high-five, Laurie tells me to tack. I frantically try to recall the myriad actions, reaching the halfway point before my brain freezes. I forget to straighten the tiller and the boat overturns. The boom starts swinging back towards me before I correct and I give Laurie an apologetic glance. "Okay, good," he says. "You just turned a little too much. Swing her round and we'll try again."

Around an hour later, Laurie takes over, guiding us back to the beach. As we glide in to shore, he commends us. It's enough to make us want to come back. Or is it the open seas calling? ☪