Outfitting and Planning for Cruising Remote Alaskan Waters

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Anyone can cruise remote Alaska waters, in almost any kind of boat...
You'll see a wide range of sport boats, runabouts, etc. near popular ports.
But the issues a boater has to confront are:

- Great distances between services especially fuel
- Distant Coast Guard and assistance
- Sparse navigation aids, no guidebooks, and sometimes inaccurate charts
- Often inclement weather
- Expanses of exposed waters
Rewards:
Scenery
Wildlife
This Session:

Selecting a (motor) vessel for remote Alaska cruising
Necessary and appropriate equipment
Voyage planning
Daily operations
Post cruise strategies
Most of the following pertains to sailboats too
Selecting a vessel:
should be “sea-kindly”

Hard chine, soft chine, round bottom
Adding stabilizers, ballast, weight distribution can help
Flush deck for safety
The ideal hull for deep water
But a shallower draft works just fine, and is better where shallows prevail.
Rolling chocks or stabilizers can improve comfort in a round bilge (soft chine) hull.
Modest topsides profile
Reinforced windows
Uncluttered deck
Good handholds
Adequate fuel range... (at least 600 n.m.)

(Drums on deck stored gear for research charter, not fuel)
Necessity: prop and rudder protection
Accessible engine room

Note wing tanks
Quality plumbing and wiring. Especially fuel plumbing.

Note dual canister Racors, fuel transfer valves.
Essential:
Good filtration
Cabin heat

Compact interior
On Deck:
Anchor winch
Adequate ground tackle
Two anchors, different kinds, with rodes, plenty of chain
On Deck:

Inflatable tender with davit
On Deck:
Storage of lines, fenders, boathook, tender fuel, etc.
Also, some means of boarding
Basic electronics:

- Autopilot
- Depth sounder
- Radar
- VHF
- HF-SSB
- GPS-Plotter

Optional: AM-FM tuner, Sat radio, Sat telephone

Go for stand-alone units

An inverter is nice
Safety gear: get a good liferaft, keep it serviced
Make up a ditch bag.
There's not much in a life raft pack
Minimum safety checklist:

Survival suits, and PFDs
EPIRB, hand VHF, Sat phone
Ditch bag (take one ashore in tender)
Damage control kit
Overboard recovery system
Alarms – smoke, CO, bilge, engine room fire
Pumps
First aid kits
Don’t forget fire extinguishers
Note: Be sure head has overboard discharge
Miscellaneous

Charts, tide & current tables.

Coast Pilot

Binoculars

Various containers - trash

Regional information

Portfolio for document, ins.

Manuals for all systems, equipment.
Regarding paper charts:
• You need them
• You need to know how to use them
• You can get less expensive copies
• You can download Pilot, Tide & Current tables
Essential!

Know your systems. Know how to:
Change oil, filters, belts, raw water pump, alternator
Add fluids, tighten stuffing box, unclog head, use VOM
Voyage Planning:

Don’t over-plan

Too much changes, too quickly

Over-planning robs you of opportunities
Planning:

Know where to get fuel and water
Planning:
You can often get fuel and water, groceries and sundries at villages and fish processors
It may be easiest to get water from nature.
Planning:

Carry all spares you can think of.

Some emergency spares may be found at the parts stores in fish processing plants.
Planning –

Weather, current, distance all cause schedules to be inaccurate.

What’s on the chart or in the Coast Pilot may not be what is actually there.
Plan one day at a time.
Allow yourself short running days.
Running at night is OK

But you miss a lot of scenery
Be flexible – don’t pass up opportunities
Daily considerations:

1. Weather
2. Weather
3. Weather
You can get forecasts on HF, and AM bands, and on VHF if you’re in range. Write down frequencies and schedules.
Remember, wind direction is more important than velocity, as is fetch, and how wind interacts with tide/current determines whether it’s dangerous.
Daily considerations:

4. Anchoring
Don’t hesitate to ask for advice from locals
Your most important navigation and safety device: your eyes

Pay attention to what is going on outside the boat
Danger, and the perception of danger:

• Discomfort – normal and persistent
• Outside the “envelope” of experience
• True danger – rare if vessel well-found and reasonable prudence applied
In summary…

Pick an adequate vessel
Learn basic repair and maintenance
Get necessary equipment, simpler the better
Get necessary spares, essential supplies
Plan for getting weather forecasts
Plan for emergencies
Plan for fuel, re-supply stops

Don’t over-plan

Navigate with your eyes, for the conditions
One day at a time
Remain flexible
A final thought:
Post Cruise – run your boat all the way home or store in Alaska for more adventures

Here or there: remember
Good winterization
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