After sailing in four (and winning) in two America's Cups and logging thousands of hours crossing oceans and setting multiple records in the Atlantic and Pacific, professional sailor Peter Isler took a breath and decided to charter a 40-foot catamaran in California with a few friends. Interestingly, the consummate sailor had never chartered a big cat before. Turns out, when you're racing all over the world or consulting or writing books, it's hard to find the time to unplug and enjoy a relaxing cruise.

"I thought it would be prudent to experience cruising in a cat," said Isler who is also a founding board member of the American Sailing Association and chairman of the Educational Committee. "Since that's a burgeoning part of the charter and education business."

Peter and company set sail from Long Beach in a 40-foot Leopard to the nearby island of Catalina some 29-miles away. The plan was to explore this most unusual section of Los Angeles from the more trodden tiny city of Avalon to the rural backside of the island where they could do what cats do so well—anchor in shallow water.

Although Isler has been a professional sailor most of his life, he admits he was a novice when it came to handling a big cruising catamaran and had to figure it out just like any other sailor new to these kinds of boats.

"Now with all the time I spend on boats—you would think operating a 40-foot cruising cat would be a piece of cake for me," Isler said. "But normally I have a bevvy of professionals on the boat, and the shore team, so I don't exercise some of my boat operation skills as much as you might think."

In addition to being a seasoned professional, Isler is also a mindful educator so he made sure to jot down some notes of his learning experience to pass along to others in the same situation.

He points out the first obvious major difference a monhull sailor faces when grabbing the helm of a big cat is this incredibly wide beam and twin screw motor set up.

"You have a very wide spacing between the two engines so, in close quarter maneuvering, you have to direct the boat with the separate engines like you would a big powerboat, rather than using the wheel."

For those new to the game, Isler suggests taking a lesson and then getting the boat into open water before attempting any real-world docking situations or tricky maneuvers. Here you can toss a fender overboard and experiment with the techniques of rotating and sliding the boat where you want it to go. He also suggests putting any pride aside and getting advice from people who are knowledgeable and happy to share that experience.

"Every boat has its own unique low speed motoring characteristics—don't be too proud to ask for tips from someone who has run the boat before," he said. "Docking/mooring/anchoring can be the most stressful time of your whole cruise—so do all you can to set yourself up for success."

Isler also suggests thinking about things like how much fuel/water consumption is expected, reviewing the operation and location of the safety gear and knowing what supplies are on board—ascertain if there is anything that looks a bit thin and, if so, bring it to the attention of the charter manager.

"The guy who checked us out did a great job—but it really takes a day or more, living and cruising on a boat to really learn most of a boat's unique systems."

The good news is: In going through this process and becoming a student again himself, Isler's assessment is the learning curve for a regular ol' cruising sailor to climb on a cruising cat and get up to speed is very manageable.

"Once you have mastered the tight quarters turns in practice—you will be ready for almost any sort of mooring situation, from dockside, to mooring or anchoring," Isler said. "And once safely on the hook you can really appreciate the extra room and comfort of a cruising cat."
ast year the American Sailing Association struck up a collaboration with the charter company Latesail whose aim is to "bring all the best yacht charter offers from the world’s leading charter fleets together in a single easy to use source."

As an organization that sees many of its students finding and enjoying the vast world of chartering, ASA liked the sound of this mission statement.

The truth is, figuring out and organizing all that goes into a bareboat charter can be involved. For many, this is part of the fun—choosing the boat, destination, and combing over all the details as you plan a great adventure. However, not everyone has the time to invest. For this crowd, Latesail is a Godsend. The company handles much of the legwork and, best of all, they guarantee they’ll find you the best price.

Latesail also has a familiarity with the industry that many civilians don't have. From major charter fleets to smaller local operators, they can do the vetting and give some well sought-after peace of mind. It's not uncommon to have your heart set on an amazing destination, but feel dubious about a company you know nothing about.

And lastly, as a consolidator, LateSail often has exclusive specials and discounts that are not available to book anywhere else. And that is never a bad thing.

For more info go to asa.com/find-my-charter.

Q: What advice would you give to sailors who are chartering for the first time?

Ash: There are lots of things to contemplate. The great thing about bareboat chartering is all of the destination choices, but when considering where to go, think about the degree of difficulty as it pertains to your skill set. Be realistic, especially if it’s your first charter. A new boat, unfamiliar cruising grounds, and foreign customs and language may be more variables than a new skipper should take on at one time. Another piece of advice would be to plan a cruising itinerary. You want to make the most of the experience so having a solid plan will make that happen. Some sailors journey to their destination and for others the journey is the destination – it’s a good idea to decide which is which before you step on board.

Because chartering can sometimes be expensive, some sailors look to get a cheaper rate in the “off season.” Should you opt for that option, research the reason why the rates are lower. Is it hurricane season? Is it cold and wet? Protect yourself with appropriate travel insurance and be sure to read the trip cancellation clause in the charter contract.

Check out ASA.com/videos for great video tutorials that will help in your next bareboat chartering experience!