

My Favorite Harbor

The Original Baltimore

John Campbell



Whenever we read about a favorite harbor, the paeans fall like autumn leaves. We read of paradise; there is talk of ambience; the adjective "idyllic" rears its familiar head. Thank goodness, the ultimate harbor is not the same for everyone, otherwise it would be full.

Our dictionary defines a harbor as "a place of security and comfort," and "a part of a body of water protected and deep enough to furnish an anchorage." Security implies a place where the natives are friendly and do not have to survive by stealing from boats. To be comfortable, one has to be able to purchase the "comforts" of life without too much trouble. Finally, the anchorage must be sufficiently well protected, so the boat is secure whatever the weather may do.

Over the years we have traversed the Mediterranean, explored the Caribbean, visited the South Pacific, and sailed through the Bahamas to the East Coast of the U. S. A. We have found some good harbors that we have enjoyed and been sad to leave. We have been in harbors of all types, from coral-fringed atolls bordered with swaying palm trees to the rugged rocky inlets of New England. Yet few could really come close to being called perfect for us. There is usually some snag, be it the mosquitoes, the swell, or the inability to get fresh food or water.

For us, our favorite anchorage is thousands of miles from the South Pacific. Indeed, it is over a thousand miles from the tropics. Our favorite harbor is on the southwestern tip of Ireland, the original Baltimore.

The harbor itself is triangular in shape, with each side of the triangle about a mile long. The entrance is at the southern point of the triangle, between the mainland and Sherkin Island. Boats drawing less than eight feet can anchor close in to the village, with deeper draft boats laying perhaps half a mile off.

The village has a post office, a few shops and several pubs. The pubs are the mainstay of life for the Irish population. The singing of ballads and the drinking of Guinness are undertaken with equal fervor. Our favorite pub, with the unlikely name of The Algiers Inn, was named for an invasion of Baltimore by pirates from Algeria, in a year long since forgotten.

There are a few fishing boats that work off the little stone pier, and some traditional boatbuilding is still carried on. There is a bus service to the bustling nearby market town of Skibbereen.

A major part of the attraction for us is that Baltimore is in one of the finest, unexploited cruising areas in the world. There are five deep bays feeling their way in between the mountains, like the fingers of an outstretched hand. There is Dingle Bay, the Kenmare River, Bantry Bay, Dunmanus Bay, and our favorite, Roaring Water Bay. You can spend a month, a year, or a lifetime, exploring these bays and their anchorages.

If headed from the United States or the Caribbean to Europe, the usual route is by way of the Azores. (Perhaps our second most favorite harbor lies there.) From the Azores, Baltimore is 200 miles nearer than any British harbor. It is an easy landfall to make. There are good long-range radio beacons, and the infamous Fastnet Rock and its lighthouse are a scant dozen miles to the southwest of the harbor entrance.

A word of warning though. If you decided to make Baltimore your first landfall of a European cruise, your plans may suffer a change. You may well succumb to the welcome of the Emerald Isle, find summer has passed, and you are still in the County of West Cork.

John Campbell and his wife Lana built their 35-foot *Papilio Ruga* in England in 1978. They've lived in the Caribbean on and off since. John is a frequent contributor to *Cruising World*.