

By Laurie Smith

Most people merely day-dream about ditching the daily drudgery of the old nine-to-five, buying a yacht, creating a new career, and giving themselves and others the opportunity to take to the open ocean – if only for a few hours or days.

Captain Dana Parks of Point Loma has turned the fantasy into reality. After a couple of intense decades working in the high-tech, high-stress computer world, Parks took up sailing as a means to unwind. Ultimately, this led to the acquisition of a sailboat, and then a power yacht, leading to the birth of San Diego Boat Tours.

“It began as a way to keep my sanity,” laughed Parks, who is still amazed that his desire for good mental health has resulted in just that, as well as a completely new and different career path.

His natural love of the ocean stems from growing up on the east coast of Canada near the Bay of Fundy, and continued to flourish after moving to San Diego.

A former La Jolla resident, Parks said, “I began walking along La Jolla Shores at night, walking and walking, and I found myself thinking all the time, ‘all I need is a tall ship, and a star to steer it by.’”

The quote from poet John Masefield’s “Sea Fever” stuck with Parks, becoming a mantra of sorts.

“I really got into sailing, started taking [a lot of] courses, and kept looking for ways to get more and more into it – and perhaps even to somehow make a living out of it,” Parks reminisced.

Eventually his dreams began to materialize with the purchase of his first sailboat, aptly named “Star Dust.” Parks, a Coast Guard licensed captain, was on his way to realizing the creation of the business, and his next acquisition was a luxury power yacht.

He pointed out that many seafaring offerings are aboard large boats holding dozens, if not hundreds of passengers, and are often on a tight schedule and fixed route. Parks’ goal was to provide the privacy of the luxury yacht to accommodate smaller, more intimate groups. This also allows each group to completely customize their experience if they desire.

“There are very few people who cater to small groups,” Parks said. “Our yacht is very comfortable and warm; it’s completely enclosed in colder weather.”

“We also provide a host on most cruises to see to the passengers’ every need,” he said. “Tours can be completely customized, or we can plan it for you.”

“We offer all kinds of charters from sight-seeing, tours around San Diego Bay, night charters, corporate team-building, champagne charters, anniversaries, ash-scattering – we do a lot of those – anything, really,” Parks offered. “We are also able to do longer charters – Catalina for a long weekend, for example.”

If people have the time, Parks added, even longer charters are available, such as to San Francisco. “We can even offer one way charters, if guests would rather fly back.”

Brenda Biss and Eddie Fritz, visiting from New Hampshire, recently spent a picture-perfect, sunny San Diego afternoon on a whale watch with a small group of friends, who found San Diego Boat Tours on the San Diego Convention and Visitors Bureau website.

“It was awesome,” gushed Biss. “We saw two pods of whales. Captain Parks kept up with them and we were able to see them fluke and breach several times.”

Fritz, who was visiting the area for the first time, said that, “The captain and the host were really knowledgeable about the whales, and about San Diego. It was not only a lot of fun, but also a real learning experience. You don’t see too many whales in New Hampshire,” he laughed.

“My favorite part of the cruise,” added Biss, “was that Captain Parks let us decide where to go, and we ended the day by taking a cruise around San Diego Bay.”

Would they do it again? “In a heart beat,” laughed Biss shooting a playful glance at Fritz. “Next time, maybe champagne cruise at sunset to celebrate an engagement.”

Parks added that even small intimate weddings are doable, and can be quite elegant.

Biss and Fritz expressed surprise at the cost of such an intimate adventure. “With our group of eight or 10 friends, it really only cost about as much as a nice dinner out,” Fritz reported. “We had good food [on the boat], and you couldn’t ask for a better view.”

The 52-foot yacht features four levels, including the fly bridge, from which the captain usually pilots the boat. “Guests are welcome to join me up there at any time,” invited Parks, who also allows people to get the feel of driving the boat.

The yacht also features a completely enclosed sunroom with a great view and comfortable wicker furniture. The next level down is the salon, with an overstuffed leather couch and chair, a stereo, Hi-Def Sony flat screen television and DVD player – however, for most, the view out the picture windows is usually enough.

The complete galley includes a refrigerator, microwave, stove and seating for several people to gather around the galley table. This level also has two staterooms, each with a double bed, head (bathroom) and shower.

Parks loves his new career, and it is evident. A recent passenger from New York City observed, “Captain Parks, you must have really low blood pressure.”

Parks smiled as he reminisced briefly about the time when perhaps the numbers were higher, and agreed. “I guess I do.”

San Diego Boat Tours is located at 2240 Shelter Island Drive, 619-987-0663, or visit [www.SanDiegoBoatTours.com](http://www.SanDiegoBoatTours.com)