



Paying to unmake your mark

By Tom Haines
GLOBE STAFF

To avoid setting too-high hopes for voluntary carbon offsets — the system by which a traveler can give money to a wind farm project in Minnesota, for example, to minimize the environmental impact of a flight to Tuscany — it helps to stay grounded.

For that, turn briefly to northern Norway and to Cecilie Hansen, farmer and vice mayor of an Arctic region along the Russian border. Hansen lives rooted in a natural place with cows in the fields and bears in the forest. Yet she has flown through crowded European hubs en route to work and play.

“We cannot travel in the future like we do today,” Hansen said, sitting at her kitchen table one summer evening of endless sun. “Vacations in Spain. Flying here, there, in jet planes. It is not possible.”

But we do keep flying, more and more each year, from Boston to New York for business, from Montreal to Marrakech for escape. So as Earth Day approaches and the planet it celebrates turns toward climatic peril, it is worth another look at offsets.

The idea seems simple enough. Where conscience and capitalism intersect, a market has grown quickly in recent years for individuals to pay money for an eco-friendly project to counter the damage modern living does to the atmosphere. You can, with a few clicks on the Internet, help finance projects to make up for carbon emitted by everything from the house you heat to the car you drive. Air travel is a relatively small contributor, with far more carbon emitted by road transport, or electricity generation, for example. But many individual offset buyers start with a single step, something as specific as a round-trip flight from Boston to Washington, D.C.

The seeming simplicity of the system dissolves quickly in details. Consider three examples encountered when trying to offset a flight.

At nativeenergy.com, a website run by a nonprofit offset provider in Vermont, the round trip to Washington measures 788.71 miles, is said to emit 0.315 tons (or 630 pounds) of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere per person, and would require a \$12 payment to an alternative project. The project options offered by NativeEnergy include helping with methane reduction on the Brubaker family farm in Mount Joy, Pa., and providing wind turbines for farms such as that owned by Dean Tofte-land in Luverne, Minn.

At Terrapass.com, a for-profit provider that handles offset programs for Expedia, Alamo, and Enterprise car rental agencies, and other leading travel providers, the round trip measures 796 miles, contributes 509 pounds of carbon dioxide per person, and would require a payment of \$9.90. Customers can choose to contribute to a methane-burning project in Arkansas, for example, or, to the

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ADVENTURE SECTION

COSTA RICA

Sweating out a midlife crunch

By Stephen Jermanok
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

HERRADURA BEACH — Sweat pours down my face and my biceps tense as I pull back on the pole and reel the line in quickly. “You can do it!” yells Captain Daniel from the deck above, but my arms grow tired and I lose my footing as the fish runs out with the line yet again. I’ve been playing this game for a good 10 minutes, knowing full well that the big guy at the other end weighs more than any fish I’ve ever caught. I want him on board now!

I use the stern railing as leverage as I yank the pole back and reel in the slack to keep the line taut. As the fish nears the boat, crew members scoop him up in a net and throw him at my feet. It’s a yellowfin tuna, weighing a good 40 pounds.

“Call me Ishmael,” I say to my friend Jeff Katz.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m no Hemingwayesque hunter

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FLORIDA

Gathering enough salt to be given the helm

By Kari J. Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

FORT MYERS BEACH — The sailboat heeled to its starboard side as it sliced through a narrow, finger-shaped inlet off the Gulf of Mexico. Its sails loomed above me, and from where I sat at the stern, confidently steering the vessel between passing boats and a palm-dotted shoreline, I could see across the emerald-green water to a rocky outcropping where hundreds of pelicans were sunning themselves.

Suddenly the wind shifted, causing the 26-foot boat to tip dramatically onto its side, its sails parallel to the water. I thrust the tiller away from me, as I watched the rail dip below the surface, and braced myself to keep from falling in.

“Sheet out the mainsail,” called out Beite Cook, 49, my instructor, as he crouched at the front of the cockpit.

While I tried to steer us away from disaster — in the form of a large wooden pier and a sizable powerboat docked next to it — Charles

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DANIEL COOPER ILLUSTRATION/ISTOCK.COM; JEFF KATZ/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE; KARI J. BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The author and a friend go ziplining in a forest canopy (top), deep-sea fishing, biking near a volcano, and horseback riding in the Costa Rican hills. In the Gulf of Mexico, instructor Beite Cook (left) and student Charles Kiss have smooth sailing for their outing on San Carlos Bay off Fort Myers Beach.

Learning to heel and tack and sense a burst

► **SAILING**
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Kiss, a fellow student, grabbed the line for the mainsail and played it out, enabling the sail to spill air and the boat to right itself.

In two days of sailing, this was the closest we had come to tipping. I was rattled by the experience, called a knockdown in the boating world. At least our custom-designed training boat was “virtually unsinkable”: the hull’s foam-filled compartments help keep the boat afloat.

My husband has been a sailor since he was 7. We’ve talked about chartering a boat with friends and sailing around the Greek islands or Belize. But I want to be a participant, not a passenger, so I decided to take a five-day Learn to Sail course through Offshore Sailing School at its Fort Myers Beach location. This intensive course

blends classroom and practical training, and provides US Sailing certification to those who pass.

Steve Colgate, a former Olympic competitor and America’s Cup sailor, founded the school in 1964. He even designed the training boat we were using, the Colgate 26, with the help of a naval architect. Doris Colgate, Steve’s wife and also an accomplished sailor, founded the National Women’s Sailing Association, wrote “Sailing: A Woman’s Guide” (International Marine/Ragged Mountain Press, 1999), and developed the school’s women-only programs for beginners to seasoned sailors.

“I took enough elbows in my ribs to find out I could handle a sailboat as well as most guys,” Doris Colgate said. “That’s why I’ve been so involved in getting women out on the water, so they can be in charge of their own des-

tiny while aboard.”

Offshore has 11 schools, located in New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Florida, the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, and St. Martin. It offers instruction for children as young as 7, but there’s no upper age limit.

“A couple of years ago, we re-taught a 92-year-old woman who lives near here,” said Steve Colgate. “She was 79 the first time she took the course. She had said to me, ‘Next year I’ll be 80 and I thought I would be too old.’”

For the Fort Myers Beach program, students stay at the Pink Shell Beach Resort & Spa, where all rooms overlook San Carlos Bay, the training ground for the course, and seven-mile-long Fort Myers Beach. Classes have a maximum of four students per instructor, but Kiss, 52, a local scuba-diving instructor, was the only other

student the week I was there.

The first two days were the most difficult, as we filled our heads with new terminology. Students receive a 90-page textbook, “Basic Keelboat,” in the mail several weeks before their course. Reading it in advance is essential.

Cook explained the parts of a boat, how the sails work, and how a boat reacts when it’s sailing toward, away from, or perpendicular to the wind. The writing on his whiteboard, at times, looked like a teenager’s text-message shorthand, with notes on LOA, LWL, CE, and CLR, referring to a boat’s “length overall,” “length at waterline,” “center of effort,” and “center of lateral resistance.” Eventually, I understood what Cook meant when he said, “A boat is balanced when the CE is over the CLR.”

“At least English is your first language,” Kiss said to me one afternoon, speaking in perfect English but with a Hungarian accent. “You at least have a reference point.”

But I stumbled over the language, too: “It’s pronounced ‘starbird,’” Cook said to me with a grin. “If you say ‘starboard,’ people will know exactly how long you’ve been sailing.”

By day two, I felt I just needed to figure out how to put everything together and use it. As if to make us feel better, Cook said, “Martina Navratilova took this course and said learning to sail was one of the hardest things she’s ever done.”

That afternoon, we sailed out of Matanzas Pass and into San Carlos Bay in the Gulf of Mexico, where we had views of the hotels and palm trees lining Fort Myers Beach and the barrier islands that protect the area from the open seas. Bottlenose dolphins darted through the water in front of our boat, playing off the bow waves. We also spotted a green sea turtle floating on the water’s surface, snowy egrets and great blue herons along the shore, and only two other boats.

Kiss and I took turns steering and working the jib and mainsail, while Cook gave us pointers.

“Here comes a burst,” Cook said, pointing at the water, but when I looked, I couldn’t see anything that distinguished a gust of wind. “Riiight, now,” he said, and a sudden puff of air made the boat tilt and leap forward.

It took a lot of repetition and practical time on the water for things to begin sinking in. Thankfully, the training boat had little labels next to each rope (or “line,” as it’s called). That way, when Cook said, “Secure the halyard and tighten the boom vang,” I knew I was supposed to grab the red rope, release it from the thing-amabob and hoist the mainsail, and then grip the rope attached to the silver tube and give it a tug.

Over the next couple of days, we practiced tacking and jibbing up and down the coast, and



Student Charles Kiss at the helm and Beite Cook trimming the spinnaker in the school’s “virtually unsinkable” training boat.

If you go . . .

What to do
Offshore Sailing School
16731 McGregor Blvd.
Fort Myers, Fla.
800-221-4326
offshore-sailing.com

Rates vary: three-day course for New York-area locations (Chelsea Piers, Fort Schuyler in the Bronx, and Liberty Landing, N.J.), \$995 per person; three-day/five-day course in Maryland (St. Michaels) and Florida (Fort Myers Beach, Captiva Island, St. Petersburg, and Duck Key), \$1,550-\$2,145 per person; four-day/six-day course in the British Virgin Islands (Tortola), \$1,775-\$1,950 per person; \$1,930-\$2,175 per person (all but New York-area programs include accommodations).

Where to stay
Pink Shell Beach Resort & Spa
Estero Island
275 Estero Blvd.
888-222-7465
pinkshell.com
Four-star hotel overlooks the ocean; one- and two-bedroom suites have a full kitchen, living room, washing machine and dryer, and a screened-in balcony.

ny; deluxe studios have a kitchenette.

Where to eat
Snug Harbor
1131 First St.
239-463-4343
snugharborrestaurant.com
Overlooking Estero Bay, has an outdoor deck and mainly seafood menu, plus some pasta and meat dishes. Entrees \$13.99-\$23.99.

Crü
13499 South US-41
Bell Tower Shops
Fort Myers
239-466-3663
crufoodandwine.com
Sits in the middle of a shopping mall but could blend in perfectly on Newbury Street. Tapas, sashimi dishes, and a creative selection of entrees, from sea bass to duck breast, \$16-\$39.

Doc Ford’s Sanibel Rum Bar & Grille
975 Rabbit Road, Sanibel Island
239-472-8311
docfordssanibel.com
Named after the main character in Randy Wayne White’s mystery books, this sports bar serves surf and turf with a tropical flair. Entrees \$10.95-\$24.95.

learned how to react more instinctually. As our skills improved, we practiced man-overboard drills, learned what to do if we grounded, and reviewed basic navigation, right-of-way rules, and safety issues.

“How do you know you’re not on a collision course?” Cook asked, as we steered toward a channel at the same time as another boat. “If the land behind the other boat appears to be moving, then you’re OK, but if the land isn’t moving, you’re on a collision course,” he explained. “It’s geometry.”

Unlike the classroom sessions, which got easier each day, the practical part of the course grew more difficult, as Cook encouraged us to make more decisions and sail on our own. Rather than telling us what to do, he would ask

questions to get us to think and react. He was preparing us for our last day, when Kiss and I would take the \$39,000 boat out on our own.

“The ‘free sail’ is the graduation,” Steve Colgate said.

“We’re one of the only schools in the country that does this, and we’ve done it since the beginning,” Doris Colgate added. When I mentioned that it seemed like a great leap of faith to let students do the free sail, she said, “We know we have given you the skills to go out and sail without an instructor. Some students are apprehensive, but come back all smiles.”

Kiss and I both passed the 80-question, multiple-choice test on day four, joining the more than 100,000 people the school has certified in nearly 25 years. We went for another afternoon sail with Cook, to get more practice maneuvering the boat in and out of the slip and through the narrow channel into the bay, and to boost our confidence.

The day of our free sail, we inched away from the dock, waved goodbye to Cook and then eased the boat into San Carlos Bay. The wind was relatively calm but shifty, blowing to about 15 knots. Tentatively, I took the helm, and I soon realized it was the idea of sailing without an instructor that spooked me, not the sailing itself.

For the next four hours, we zig-zagged up and down the coast, making minor adjustments to the lines or tiller as the wind shifted. As I relaxed and tuned into the boat, I was surprised at how “alive” it felt: I could feel the wind as it vibrated down the mast and buzzed in the rigging, I could hear the waves coursing over the hull.

“Ready to tack?” Kiss said, when it was finally time to head in.

“Wait a second,” I said. “I think I see a puff of wind coming.”

We sat for about 15 seconds, staring at the ocean’s surface and listening to water slap against the hull. Then suddenly we felt the boat accelerate as a small gust of wind crossed the sails and swept across our faces.

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