

Stuck on a boat in the Caribbean not the worst way to spend isolation

• Enora Borgnon

Enora Borgnon is a journalism student from the University of Brest in France, currently working as an intern with the Bega District News.

She has been reaching out to friends and fellow students who are also interning in various locations around the world, and all caught up in the COVID-19 pandemic. This is one of their stories.

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Family isolation

on a boat in Martinique, a French region in the Caribbean. Picture: Renée and Christian Commenge

In a pandemic-induced isolation, it can be a challenge to stay occupied and upbeat while spending a lot of time indoors.

Some may feel lucky or privileged to be able to enjoy time outside.

Christian and Renée Commenge are a married couple from France and living in Guadeloupe, a French overseas region.

When French President Emmanuel Macron announced the isolation of France and its lockdown due to the coronavirus, they were on holidays on their boat sailing around nearby island of Martinique (also a French territory), along with Renée's siblings Monique and Patrick, and their partners Alexandre and Joëlle.

Currently, Mr and Ms Commenge are still in lockdown on their 12-metre sailboat. They still can go for a swim from their boat as they are at anchor and not in a port.

Even though they are on a boat, they have the same restrictions as if they were on land. They are only allowed out to go grocery shopping, to go to work (if not able to work from home) and exercise no more than one mile away from "home".

They go shopping twice a week to search for fresh produce, with a letter mentioning their names and why they are going out, the date and the time they left. If no paperwork, they would face hefty fines.

A Facebook page has been created for those on boats to keep in touch with people. Like every city in France, at 8pm they are showing their solidarity for the healthcare workers with a foghorn concert.



Not the only one isolating in a boat. Credit: Renée and Christian Commenge.

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Unfortunately there are two major problems for the Commenges - and others on their boats - clean water and energy.

Some people have to go back and forth with cans to fill up the tanks if they do not have water-making facilities in their sailboat.

Electricity is via a battery that needs to be regularly recharged - wind and solar panels are there so as not to use the motors too much.

"We have to save energy, constantly monitoring the state of the batteries, as we are self sufficient in energy, but now we are, as everybody else, on our phones to talk with our families" Ms Commenge said.

They do not have access to movies, but they have plenty of books to read!

Days are passing by with only the sound of the sea and the wind.

"We are still taking care of the boat, we cook and we swim around the boat, knitting and drawing for me and obviously a glass once in a while for the both of us!

"We are waiting for the end of the isolation with a positive philosophy, and we hope to go back home by mid-April.

"It's true that with 29 degrees and the sea at 26, it's not uncomfortable!"

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