

What clothing will I need?

There is a Scandinavian expression that goes something like: “There is no such thing as bad weather only the wrong clothes.”

The first thing to look at is the weather forecast as this makes all the difference to what you will need to wear. Heavy rain and winds in the UK will require different attire to a scorching hot cruise in Turkey. For the purposes of this article we will look at sailing in the UK.

There will be days, OK maybe not that many in the UK, where the sun shines and you drift along in a zephyr of a breeze, then you need shorts and T-shirts. But bear in mind that you are going out on the water so shade will be minimal. If you have the typical pale but interesting English complexion you will need to cover up to avoid getting sunburnt. Good quality sun cream is very important even at the beginning and end of the season ... you can use up the remainder of your sun cream from when you went skiing.

If you need further advice just ask some of the more experienced sailors at the club who will be more than happy to chat.

First Time Out

For your first time out it's probably not necessary to buy any major specialist sailing clothing (especially if outside of winter months). Dress in comfortable casual clothes and wear non-slip, non-marking, closed toe shoes. Denim is not recommended as once it gets wet it will not dry out and will make you feel even colder. A waterproof/windproof coat is a must as even in fine weather the wind chill can cool you down. If wet and windy weather is forecast you are going to need to be waterproof from head to toe but fortunately most of the charter companies we use will rent you a waterproof jacket and trousers and more often than not a pair of sailing wellies as well. Please let the event organisers know your size in advance.

Gloves, Hats and Sunglasses

Sailing Gloves are a must investment. Most people prefer the fingerless gloves but if you really suffer from cold hands you should consider fingered gloves. The gloves keep your hands warm and protect them from rope burns and abrasion when handling lines on the boat. Fingerless gloves allow you to undo knots easily.

Sunglasses are needed as the sun can glare off the water on bright days. Polaroid sunglasses are best as they cut down the reflections and sparkle in the water. Wraparound sunglasses will protect your eyes from side glare.

Hats can keep you cool and protect you from the sun in summer and the cold in winter. A woolly hat will keep your head warm as 50% of your body heat is radiated from your head. Peaked caps and fishing hats can keep the glare out of your eyes and the sun off your head.

Getting Serious – Layering

What will you need if you want to keep sailing? The answer is layers, and if you are sailing in the UK, lots of layers.

Whilst you may not get wet (from the rain or the sea) you will be out in the wind. Standing on a boat doing 8 knots into a 20 knot breeze generates more than 25 knots of apparent wind. It's the apparent wind that makes you cold. Saying that the moment that the boat turns downwind the apparent wind drops to virtually nothing and on a sunny day the layers will start to come off again.

Most of us wear boots, an outer waterproof layer and thermal layers underneath. Ski thermals are very good so we recycle those for the sailing season..

Specialist sailing waterproofs tend to be made of heavier material than those made for climbing or walking extra features built in like reflective marking, life jacket anchors, and spray hoods there are a lot more things to snag a lightweight jacket on a boat. Most sailing trousers have reinforced knees, seats and ankles.

If you are just starting sailing and not doing any Ocean sailing then walking/skiing waterproofs will probably do for your first couple of outings but don't skimp on the base layers.

When you decide you are going to invest in some sailing apparel you should look to the big names like Henri Lloyd, Helly Hansen, Musto and Gill. See [Read More](#) for more details on layering.

The 3 Layer System

Base Layer – mops up damp and sweat to keep your skin dry

Mid Layer – traps in heat to keep you warm

Outer Layer – shields you from wind, rain and abrasion.

This is often achieved with technical clothing but it can also be applied to normal clothing.

The Base Layer

- The base layer or first layer is to keep body moisture away from the skin.
- The base layer is worn next to the skin for maximum wicking of sweat and to keep your body heat as regulated as possible.
- This layer must be protected from the elements, if it gets damp it can chill you and can be responsible for causing colds and at the very worst, hypothermia.
- Base layers are great for activities like gym work or indoor climbs as they can be worn alone, will help mop up sweat, and should transport moisture away from your body.
- However outdoors, often a base layer alone won't cut through the cold.
- This is why layering is so important. Your base layer will do all the hard, unappealing work next to your skin, soaking dampness from your back and armpits, whilst your fleece gets the better job of keeping you warm and your outer jacket fights of rain and wind.

- Without a base layer, your fleece would soon cause you to overheat, and you would be pretty uncomfortable.
- Typically base layers are made from Merino Wool, or Synthetics.
- Merino wool is comfortable and odour resistant, but is a less effective fabric at wicking sweat
- Merino is ideal for extreme cold conditions as well as polar routes.
- Synthetics are lightweight and wicking, but are less efficient at resisting odour.
- Synthetics are ideal for summer use.

The Mid Layer

- The mid layer or second layer is to keep you warm,
- Worn over your base layer, this traps the heat in and keeps you toasty and warm during your outdoor activity.
- This layer should be quite tight to your body allowing minimal air movement for maximum heat retention.
- Fleeeces and similar garments are ideal.
- Hoodies and other jumpers may be great for periods of low or no activity, but mid layers designed with cotton or other natural fibres won't protect you from moisture build up and are no use when you start to create sweat or heat.
- Keep your insulating layer close rather than loose. It should be trapping heat close to your skin. Most are cut smaller to accommodate for the layering system.
- Synthetic fabrics such as polyester fleece are ideal for the mid layer because they are great at resisting moisture and retaining heat.
- Fleeeces can be micro, lightweight, mid-weight or heavyweight. Choose a weight that goes with the weather of your destination as well as the breathability you need. As a rule, the more weight/insulation within the item, the less breathability

The Outer Layer

- The outer layer or third layer is to keep the wind and rain off you.
- Your outermost layer is designed to keep you comfortable while having the tough job of keeping you safe from the wind, water, and abrasions from rigging.
- It is literally your outer shell against the world!
- If you don't have the protective outer layer on, then this could lead to your skin becoming wet and cold.
- You need to look for a layer that's waterproof, windproof and also breathable enough for your chosen activity so you don't 'steam up' inside your jacket.
- The break down on just how breathable, waterproof and windproof can vary massively- dependent on the weight of the jacket, the brand, the fabric it's made from, how well it's lined, if it has venting points....