



WORDS / LEO BEAR

# All the Blue Hues

## The extraordinary power of water

While those who own or charter a yacht with Fraser will likely be familiar with the concept of 'blue mind' (even if not by name) a growing body of evidence suggests that spending time in or around water reduces stress, increases happiness and enhances creativity – some even speak of epiphanies, says Leo Bear

*"The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever."*  
Jacques Cousteau

**THESE WORDS**, written by the renowned French oceanographer and conservationist Jacques Cousteau, sum up how many of us feel about the water. The ocean has a unique allure. It captivates us, transports us, calms us. Anyone who owns or charters a yacht will tell you of their deep appreciation for the ocean; their respect for it – it's something we all share.

"I cherish the times my husband and I spend on our yacht every year," says the American owner of a 30M/98' sailing yacht. "They are quite possibly the only real occasions when we truly disconnect and can be in the moment together and with our family. Being at sea, even when we are within eyeshot of land, has an incredible ability to clear the mind. Life takes on a different, refreshed.. and refreshing new perspective."

If you've ever felt a similar sense of profound contentment while gazing at a seascape of blues, you've probably experienced what psychologists are calling 'blue mind'. It's a relatively new concept that goes some way to explaining the emotional and psychological benefits of being near, in, on or under water. Originally popularised by the American marine biologist and author, Dr Wallace J. Nichols, a decade ago, the notion has been gaining traction; creating waves from Monaco to Mexico.

"In a state of 'blue mind', people are calm, creative, compassionate and cooperative. Breathing and heart rates slow down. Brain waves change from focused attention to meditative, and the body's stress hormones decrease," explains Nichols, speaking exclusively to Fraser.

Growing up on the east coast of America, Nichols admits he was a shy introverted child who often stuttered when he spoke. But he soon discovered that when he was near or in water he felt relaxed and happy. It was this powerful mind–water connection that led him to obtain a doctorate in Evolutionary Biology and to pursue a career in Marine Biology. More than 200 published papers later, the awards and fellowships started pouring in. In 2007, the Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio invited Nichols to collaborate on his environmental documentary-film The 11th Hour and in 2013, Nichol's book Blue Mind was published and went on to be translated into Russian, Italian, Korean and German. As is often the case with big new ideas, the book wasn't immediately well received by the scientific community. "There was a lot of eye-rolling and skepticism," recalls Nichols. However, thanks to a huge volume of research on the subject, his 'blue mind' theory is now widely – if not, universally – supported.



# DAILY PRACTISE

Five ways to practise blue mind when *not* at sea  
by Dr Wallace J. Nichols

**1 Go wild**  
Make a list of all the sources of wild water in your area and schedule time in your calendar for visiting them daily, weekly or monthly. Lakes, rivers, waterfalls, creeks and ponds are all sources of blue space. Believe it or not, even fog counts.

**2 Book a spa day**  
Make a point of enjoying the water facilities at your local spa. These include swimming pools, hydrotherapy pools, hot tubs and cold plunges.

**3 Stretch your legs**  
Is there a waterfront, boardwalk, river walk or pier near to where you live? If so, make a point of including it into a daily or weekly walk.

**4 Seek out virtual H2O**  
Access your blue mind through art, film, poetry, photography, literature or music. For example, try listening to a recording of waves, a moving river or the patter of rain. Better still, make your own recording next time you are at sea and play it back when you're feeling stressed.

**5 Use your imagination**  
Something you can do literally anywhere, anytime, is simply closing your eyes, taking a few slow deep breaths and picturing one of your favourite blue spaces. Push yourself to go deeper, to really taste, smell, hear and feel a cherished place from your memory bank and you're likely to feel the effects immediately.

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“Our affinity with water is said to be reflected in our attraction to the colour blue. As well as the sea, blue is the colour of the clear sky and it is associated with open spaces, freedom, intuition, truth and depth.”

SUZANNE DUCKETT, AUTHOR

According to Nichols, the best way to properly understand blue mind is to start with 'red mind', a mental state whereby people are anxious, distracted, prone to over-thinking and in all likeliness caffeinated – aka 'the new normal'. "In today's fast-paced world, we process massive amounts of information from multiple sources, screens and 24/7 global news feeds," says Nichols. "Our fight or flight response is being constantly triggered and most people don't know how to turn it off. While, red mind can be useful – helping us to reach our goals, compete, defend ourselves and strive – if we stay in red mind with elevated stress levels for prolonged periods, we begin to damage our bodies on a cellular level and will end up suffering burnout, breakdown or deep exhaustion."

One 50M/164' motor yacht owner based in Sweden revealed: "I'd not heard of 'blue mind' before but, now that I have, I would tend to agree entirely. I think it's part of what is so addictive about being on board boats and yachts. We especially notice the change in behaviour in our children – even from the moment we step on board. There's an excitement about what's to come and yet a stillness."

Natural wellness expert and author of Bathe, Suzanne Duckett, is in firm agreement saying: "Being around water allows our brains and senses to rest from overstimulation. Essentially, it's a holiday for our brains. Our affinity with water is said to be reflected in our attraction to the colour blue. As well as the sea, blue is the colour of the clear sky and it is associated with open spaces, freedom, intuition, truth and depth. We are innately enticed by aquatic hues because they make our body and mind relax and exude feelings of tranquillity, order and calm. Time and again in research, blue is cited to be the world's favourite colour."

In her book Bathe, Duckett cites among many, the German composer Ludwig Van Beethoven who often relied on water to boost his creativity. "As well as a host of fantastic, health-boosting scientific benefits such

as stimulating the immune system, improving sleep and balancing hormone levels, being around water liberates the mind. It allows our minds to wander freely. It triggers ideas, revelations, some even speak of epiphanies that can be potentially life-changing."

Having had his own epiphany relatively early on, Nichols now campaigns tirelessly for marine conservation. A keen surfer and diver, he spends as much of his free time as possible on his cousin's yacht LATIFA (a 24M/77' 1936 Ocean Cruiser built entirely from teak). Even when he's miles from any sign of coastline, he makes a point of searching out rivers, lakes, ponds and waterfalls, such is his commitment to the cause.

Blue mind theory is supported both scientifically and anecdotally. Exeter University in the UK conducted extensive research on the subject with countless studies showing clear psychological, emotional, social and spiritual wellness benefits associated with 'blue space' (water). A recent study published in The Lancet speaks to the merits of floating in water, finding that float therapy can be positively beneficial for people with anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress, depression and anorexia. Furthermore, when the University of California Irvine looked into the science of 'awe and wonder', their findings suggested that these emotions can boost empathy, compassion and pro-social behaviour.

A connection with nature lies at the heart of blue mind theory. It feeds into the current trend for biophilic design, a concept that encourages incorporating nature into our man-made environments to enhance wellbeing. Vertical gardens, indoor waterfalls and sky gardens are increasingly being seen in today's office buildings and luxury hotels. Doha's Hamad International Airport is a great example. Biophilia, as a concept, isn't anything new though. It was introduced back in the 1980s by the biologist E.O. Wilson who wanted to explore the idea that humans have an innate and instinctive affinity for nature and living organisms.





# INTO THE BLUE



## LA DATCHA —

Damen Yachting 77M/252’  
Location: Sea of Cortez, Mexico / Charter from \$740,000 per week



## ZEXPLORER —

Newcastle Marine 40M/132’  
Location: French Polynesia, Fiji / Charter from \$150,000 per week



## ASKARI —

Sermons 33M/108’  
Location: French Polynesia, Fiji / Charter from \$97,500 per week



## ACAIA —

Southern Wind 30M/99’  
Location: French Polynesia, Fiji / Charter from \$55,000 per week

Commenting on her own experiences, Fraser yacht Owner Ginevra Moretti, says: "It seems to me that 'blue mind' is the natural state of any human mind. Taking to the open waters brings us back to a primordial state; it returns us to an innate feeling of balance and peace." For Moretti, sailing her yacht CURIOSITY around the Aegean – the Turkish coastline, in particular – is how she resolves any problems she might be facing. It's also how she comes up with most of her ideas for future voyages.

Likewise, a frequent Fraser charterer and father-of-three, commented: "Some of my greatest life decisions have been made whilst vacationing on board yachts. I'm not sure I can pinpoint exactly why, though I'm sure being out there, away from the daily noise of life with just the distant uncluttered horizon, vast skies, the sound of the sea and the birds has some sort of relaxing influence on me. Either way, for as long as it works, I am not about to question it"

Can being at sea boost intelligence? Counselling psychologist Dr Ritika Suk Birah, who holds a consultant position at three private hospitals in the UK and counts Lloyds Bank among her corporate clients, thinks so. She discovered the benefits of blue mind whilst chartering a yacht in The Bahamas. "Restoration theory posits that spending time in blue spaces replenishes cognitive resources; it restores our ability to concentrate and pay attention," she says. When her clients complain of feeling emotionally 'stuck', she encourages them to seek out their nearest body of water. "Working in Canary Wharf, many of my clients are high-level executives,"

she says. "I often invite them to sit with me facing the water. It provides a dose of blue mind that allows us to tap into a deeper therapeutic state."

Of course, the billion-dollar question is: what are the best destinations for blue mind? According to Nichols, it's Moorea in French Polynesia or the Sea of Cortez in Mexico (see box for recommended Fraser charters). But no matter where you set your compass, the most crucial thing is that our precious blue spaces are preserved for future generations. Micro-plastic pollution, temperature change and overfishing are just a few of the things threatening our oceans today. "It's down to each and every one of us to do our part," says Nichols. His life mission is for every school-age child to learn about the benefits of blue mind, and for doctors, nurses and therapists to routinely prescribe blue mind activities to their patients (this is already happening in the USA). Ultimately, what he's hoping for is a ripple effect. A positive global movement that starts at the individual level.

Let's face it. We all know someone who could do with a dose of the blue stuff. Maybe it's time to extend them that long-promised invitation to step aboard.

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Contact Fraser at [yachting@fraseryachts.com](mailto:yachting@fraseryachts.com) for more information.



Take the 'blue mind' idea further and immerse yourself in relaxation by listening to our recommended playlist for on board yachts on Fraser Spotify.

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