

TALES OF  
ADVENTURE

# OCEAN ROWING

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO STARTING OUT IN THIS EPIC SPORT



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## How to prepare for and fund an ocean rowing expedition

Preparing for an Atlantic Ocean row is an extraordinary undertaking that requires meticulous planning, physical and mental conditioning, fundraising, and organisational skills. This epic adventure demands strong project management skills, planning ability, resilience, safety, and a strong support system. Here's an overview of how I would prepare for this incredible journey if doing it again.

**Please note:** The information in this guide is solely crafted to help you prepare for and fund an ocean rowing project – it does not cover any safety procedures. For this. You should consult an appropriately qualified expert or the event organiser.

This has been written based on my experience on an ocean rowing expedition, managing large, risky complicated projects in the Royal Marines and BBC, and working with big international brands in digital marketing and brand design so that you can get this expensive and complicated project off the ground.

To read about my first-hand experiences rowing across the Atlantic, follow <https://www.thetalesofadventure.com/ocean-rowing-adventures> to the articles, or click the image to see the [video on YouTube](#):



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## **Part 1: Pre-race**

This is undoubtedly the hardest part of an ocean rowing expedition, just getting to the start line!

By their very nature, ocean rowing expeditions are risky, expensive, uncertain yet a true adventure – and these are the things you need to think about and how to tackle them:

### **1. Team Selection:**

Ocean rowing is occasionally a solo endeavour, however far easier with a team of people to share the planning and fundraising burden!

Choosing the right teammates is crucial. Look for individuals with a shared passion for the adventure – and I mean adventure, not just the odd marathon from time to time, but actual uncertain, gritty, a project with a high degree of uncertainty and doubtful success, as these are the problem-solving skills you need in teammates.

Do also look for a strong work ethic and teammates with complementary skills – i.e., electrical skills, engineering, navigators and the like. Each team member should have a defined role, whether it's rowing, navigation, maintenance, or logistics so they know what their ‘part of ship’ is. Team compatibility is paramount, given the prolonged time spent together in a confined space and how easily it can go catastrophically wrong.

### **2. Defining the primary reason why you’re doing it**

Most people will do an ocean rowing expedition for one of two reasons (or a combination of the two); to raise money for a cause they believe in or set a new world record. Clearly you can also do both at the same time, however you’ll find these reasons can sometimes conflict with each other. Be sure to set one as the priority over the other so you’re clear which one takes primacy if they do come into conflict with each other.

### **3. Fundraising for the project:**

Let’s not beat around the bush, funding an ocean rowing expedition is a significant challenge!

The costs typically include the boat, equipment, safety gear, navigation tools, food supplies, communication systems, and race entry fees that are typically in excess of £100,000 (more if multiple people are involved).

To raise funds, be sure to brainstorm and explore all of potential avenues – as there are more than one or two. We’ll explore the main ones however consider a combination crowdfunding, sponsorships, partnerships with businesses, and seeking individual donations. These will all take time to start generating income so work on multiple to increase your chances of success.

Building a compelling story around the row. It is your purpose, your mission and the causes you wish to support can help attract donors and sponsors – as this needs to be highlighted in your marketing and whenever you're engaging with your sponsors.

**a. Engage with a qualified tax accountant to understand the potential impacts of accepting large donations or payments from businesses.**

In certain circumstances, accepting financial donations and payments from sponsors may affect tax liabilities – especially where the cost is substantially different from your annual income.

Setting up the team as a company, may make sense for protecting team members from this problem, however a qualified tax accountant that is knowledgeable about your region should be consulted for complete clarification.

**b. If you're doing it as a team, consider setting up a joint bank account to manage the funds**

Managing the operational costs as well as accepting donations and sponsorship from companies can get complicated if sent to different team members' bank accounts, so consider setting up a joint account to keep it transparent and manageable.

**4. Developing a team brand:**

For sponsors to get behind your expedition, they'll want to know the reasons you're doing it, the team members, the charities and any records you might be going for as they'll probably want to make content around in because it reflects well on them. Here's how to build the team brand:

**a. Start with a strong team name**

Take time choosing a team name as it should reflect the challenge and also your values, mission and spirit of the expedition.

A lot of teams start with an idiom or pun and add a maritime theme, this will dictate the team's personality, so it's worth pausing to research what other teams are calling themselves and think about this rather than diving in with the first idea that springs to mind (it's tempting to do, but take your time!).

**b. Design a logo**

Your team's logo is like a visual storefront, if it looks terrible, your sponsors will be reluctant to support you.

Get in touch with the team at [Haus of Hiatus digital design studio](#) for an affordable quote on designing a great logo that you'll want to get printed onto merchandise, like t-shirts, stickers, business cards, and everything you'll need to get people hyped up.

Remember, the thing with a free logo, is that it looks like a free logo – so choose wisely!

**c. Build a website**

A great looking website to show a professional front to potential sponsors and engage your followers is crucial to getting support!

They are complex and time consuming to build, so if you've got no experience making websites, get in touch with the team at [Haus of Hiatus digital design studio](#) for an affordable quote for a professional looking Squarespace, WordPress or Wix one that you can easily manage.

Be sure to get in touch with the team at [Zero Six Zero](#) to build you a custom map that you can embed on your website to keep all of your friends, family and followers updated on your progress (be sure to add your sponsors' logos to the page as it will get the most impressions, which is a selling point when pitching to sponsors for support).

#### **d. Get on social media and start generating interest**

As well as a website, social media plays a crucially important part in showing sponsors that you're serious about the expedition – as the traffic going to your account is a vehicle to increasing their brand awareness (the thing they're paying you for).

As a minimum, be sure to have a presence on LinkedIn (to get business sponsors), Instagram (for millennial supporters), and Facebook to keep your family and grandparents updated on your progress. Be sure to secure the social media account handles once you've settled on a team name.

#### **e. Create a pitch deck to open conversations with companies**

A pitch deck is a PDF document of between 4 – 8 pages, detailing what the project is about, the benefits of supporting it, sponsorship tiers, what you hope to achieve and what you can offer – to get your foot in the door and secure a call with potential sponsors.

A pitch deck is what makes you look more like a serious project and less risky to potential sponsors – which are mainly businesses with enough marketing budget to get value from supporting you. Along with a website and well managed social media profile, a strong pitch deck helps to get awareness for funding by being the initial entry point when you send it to marketing managers (top tip: if you have connections with businesses that might be able to support you, ask them to share it with a marketing manager as you'll get a better response than sending a 'cold' email).

#### **f. Look professional with official email addresses**

Official email addresses to make you look more professional.

Free emails won't convey the legitimacy you need to convince marketing managers that you're a serious expedition and worth their time and attention – so invest in email addresses for the entire team once you've secured the website address.

### **5. How to get sponsorship**

Sponsorship for an expedition comes from 2 main sources: companies and individuals. They both need different approach strategies so that you don't scare them away at the first exposure. Here's how to engage them:

#### **a. From companies**

Companies will help in one of two ways: making a monetary donation or donating a product (or service) in return for affiliation - where they will expect to be tagged in your posts or to make content around your expedition.

Whilst monetary donations are the preferred option, don't ignore product or service donations as this will often save you vital money and attract other companies who're interested in supporting (whilst business psychology isn't the main focus of this guide, it should be noted that the first supporter is the hardest to get, however once you've got them, it assures other companies that you're worth talking to and you'll find it easier to get conversations with them). Products can also be raffled off to increase fundraising for your selected charity.

If you take nothing else away, do understand the route to business sponsorship is through the marketing team, specifically the marketing managers – they’re the gatekeepers as to whether your expedition gets funding from the marketing budget.

You can often find the names and email addresses through the official website and through LinkedIn. This isn’t always easy for bigger companies as they get a lot of expeditions looking for sponsorship, so it’s better to start small and work your way up to bigger companies. Support from companies will take a long time, so don’t count on the support coming quickly. If it’s outside their annual marketing budget, you’ll need to wait for the next financial year, so be sure to plan for that!

#### **b. From private donors**

Friends and family will want to help get you to the start line, and you can do this by running a ‘250 club’, whereby everyone that donates 250 of your chosen currency, will get their name or mark on the boat. This is a great way of getting awareness out about the expedition as it is for raising funds for the project. Be sure to thank them publicly (with their consent, obviously) on social media as this will amplify the opportunity to back your project to a wider audience.

### **6. Boat Selection:**

Selecting the appropriate rowing boat is a pivotal decision. Ocean rowing boats come in various designs, including traditional fixed-seat boats and modern sliding-seat boats. The boat should be well-equipped for the journey, with features like self-righting capabilities, communication systems, and adequate storage for supplies.

One of the biggest names in the sport is definitely [Rannoch Adventure](#), who are understood to provide the majority of the boats for competitors – they’re conveniently located near London with easy access to the sea.

### **7. Safety and Emergency Protocols:**

It goes without saying, safety is a top priority on an Atlantic Ocean row.

Whilst the race execution isn’t the subject of this guide (again, be sure to consult with an appropriate expert on this), it goes without saying that should ensure your team is well-versed in emergency procedures, including man-overboard drills, equipment checks, and communication protocols. Adequate life-saving equipment such as (but not limited to) life rafts, satellite phones, EPIRBs, and first-aid supplies should be on board. As a reminder, this guide won’t be considering the full spectrum of safety, therefore be sure to consult an expert on this.

### **8. Logistical Planning:**

A successful ocean row requires thorough logistical planning. This includes arranging transportation for you and your boat to the starting point, organising the return journey from the finishing point, coordinating with local authorities for permits, and securing berthing at marinas for pre-race preparations.

### **9. Training and Conditioning:**

Physical and mental conditioning is essential for the rigorous challenges of an ocean row. Our training regimen would encompass strength and endurance exercises to prepare for long hours of rowing, including cross-training activities such as swimming and running. Mental training would focus on stress management, psychological resilience, and conflict resolution, given the demanding conditions.

### **10. Nutrition and Meal Planning:**

Maintaining proper nutrition at sea is vital for energy, endurance, and overall health. Dehydrated meals require minimal preparation however can get quite bland when used for more than a month – so consider taking sauces and

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spices to liven them up, however pay consideration to having a sensitive stomach on the expedition. The diet should ideally also provide essential nutrients, including proteins, carbohydrates, and fats. Proper hydration strategies are also critical, as is adapting to heating the water and eating in the boat's compact area.

### **11. Communication and Navigation:**

Navigating the planet's vast oceans requires robust communication and navigation tools. We would have GPS, charts, and electronic navigation aids. Satellite communication devices like Iridium phones would enable us to stay in touch with our support team, provide race updates, and, most importantly, call for assistance in emergencies.

### **12. Race Regulations and Rules:**

Understanding the race regulations and rules is vital for a successful ocean row. I'd thoroughly study the race organiser's guidelines, safety requirements, and reporting procedures. This ensures that we adhere to all the race's standards and expectations.

### **13. Equipment and Technology:**

The boat would be equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including solar panels and desalination systems for generating power and freshwater. We'd also have weather monitoring tools to track meteorological conditions, enabling us to make informed rowing decisions.

### **14. Medical Preparations:**

Prior to embarking on the journey, a comprehensive medical check for all team members is a must. The boat should be equipped with a medical kit that includes basic first-aid supplies, as well as medications for common ailments and injuries. All crew members should be trained in basic first aid.

### **15. Team bonding**

Not having harmony on board an ocean rowing expedition can, at best, make for an uncomfortable experience, and at worst, be fatal (if one of the team goes overboard and no one notices due to poor alerting procedures).

Renowned psychologist Bruce Tuckman developed a model for describing how teams bond. His model suggests the four stages a group goes through before it's able to work together optimally are: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing.

### **16. Testing and 'Shakedown' trips:**

Before the race or expedition, it's essential to conduct testing and shakedown trips to ensure that the team, boat, equipment, and navigation systems are functioning correctly. These trips also help the team practice rowing in the open ocean, refine their routines, and identify any issues that need attention. The aid of an appropriately qualified skipper should advise on this.

### **17. Weather and Forecast Monitoring:**

Constant monitoring of weather conditions and forecasts is imperative during the row. Changes in weather patterns can have a significant impact on rowing progress and safety. Having access to accurate, up-to-date weather information is crucial so be sure to have this in order early.

### **18. Support Team Coordination:**

Behind every successful ocean row is a dedicated support team onshore.

This team would be responsible for logistics, race updates, weather conditions, communication, and emergency response coordination. Regular communication with the support team is essential to ensure the safety and well-being of the rowers.

A personal kit list:

**a. A mobile phone and / or tablet for audio books and keeping a row journal on**

It goes without saying that you'll be taking your phone with you either way for co-ordinating with your shore team, however, do think about downloading audio books from [Audible](#) to keep yourself entertained during the expedition.

I used it as an opportunity to study for a master's degree and so downloaded enough audiobooks and podcasts to teach me loads of new concepts.

The notes app also serves as a good place to keep a journal on for this project.

**b. Lightweight waterproof jacket**

For hot nights where full foul weather gear would cause you to overheat, however repeatedly soakings over a prolonged period may cause a cold weather injury. [A cheap spray top used by sailors](#) is just the job.

**c. Rowing shoes - Vivobarefoot Ultra III shoes**

I really love [these aquatic shoes](#), so much so that they're still going strong some 7 years later (they come out on bikepacking trips with me from time to time!). They work well in the sun, when it's raining, with waterproof socks and don't ever smell (because they're waterproof obv!). Check out my specific [review of these shoes here](#).

Other team members wore trainers that ended up stinky and manky after a few weeks. Once they got wet, it was impossible to get them dry again on an ocean rowing boat and so they stayed that way, meaning that infection could get into the body through small cuts on the feet. When combined with inadequate nutrition, a polyphasic sleeping pattern and poor daily hygiene, it's a recipe for disaster. Avoid wearing trainers if you can!

**d. Dry bags for keeping stuff in**

You will get wet on an ocean rowing expedition, there's no doubt about it – and if you're a team, there may not be space to get dry on the deck (especially whilst wearing a leash). Keeping delicate and important items protected is therefore a challenge, hence the need for [different coloured waterproof bags](#).

**e. Waterproof notepad**

There may be occasions where you need to make notes on something other than your smartphone. Take a [waterproof notepad](#) and use a lead pencil in case of emergency note making: GPS co-ordinates; radio frequencies; timings etc.

**f. Head torch**

You'll need to see where you're going when moving around the boat, to ensure you don't get caught up in the lines or step on something important. Whilst the moon does illuminate most nights, you'll still find some that are completely dark (either through cloud cover or the limited visibility) so be sure to take [a headtorch](#).

**g. Waterproof socks**



I wore these [Sealskinz waterproof socks](#) with the Vivobarefoot aqua shoes listed above and had nice, dry feet even when it's super cold (and it does get super cold at night).

#### **h. Foul weather jacket and trousers**

A full set (i.e., jacket and trousers) of 'foulies' is a must on ocean expeditions to preserve your ability to row.

#### **i. Headphones**

Whilst I used the standard Apple ones that came with the iPhone, I would use Bluetooth sports headphones such as the [JBL Endurance run](#) so that I can keep my phone fully enclosed in a waterproof bag (attached to me so the Bluetooth connection can reach).

#### **j. Waterproof phone case**

This is a no-brainer. You want to communicate with friends, family and supporters before and after the expedition. Make sure your phone makes it to the finish line with you.

I used the [Aquapac waterproof case](#) due to the robust closure – you can read [my review of it here](#) (and see my phone underwater inside it!)

#### **k. Waterproof action camera**

I would take an [Insta360 X3](#) thanks to its waterproofing and ability to shoot high resolution 360 video (meaning you're more likely to find a great angle for social media and any videos you publish) with the use of the [invisible selfie stick](#).

#### **l. Power bank**

I recommend taking a power bank so you can manage your own power consumption of your camera, phone etc. Whilst I used a load of cheap ones at the start, I now use [the Anker Powerbank](#) for all my adventures and can recommend it as an affordable and robust unit (do be aware that it's not waterproof). You can read my review of it [at this link](#).

#### **m. Inflatable pillow**

Sleep is a precious and rare commodity on board an ocean rowing boat so make yourself as comfy as you can - I never realised how good these are until I used it on my Atlantic crossing!

[An inflatable pillow](#) is an unexpected necessity that I would not leave behind.

#### **n. Anti-chafing cream / barrier cream**

The wooden oar handles will dry out and blister your hands (as you can see from my articles. Take a [medium-sized tub of Vaseline](#) to provide a barrier and keep your hands hydrated from the combination of salty sea water and wooden oar handles.

#### **o. Lightweight base layers**

I used [Rab's excellent factor base layer](#) to keep cool yet protected from the sun thanks to its 50 sun protection rating.

**p. Aeropress**

An odd thing to include however making a filter coffee for yourself and the team can be an incredibly powerful thing when you've come off a cold rowing shift in the daytime. [The Aeropress](#) does this brilliantly and gives you a moment of home when the nearest humans to you are up on the international space station.

**q. Cold weather hat**

During the first week, it'll still be quite cold – especially when rowing at night – and when you get splashed by waves, it can quickly deteriorate your ability to row. Therefore, to combat this, I took a waterproof mountaineering hat for the times when I needed it – [this one by Sealskinz](#) will keep your head warm and dry in those hard early days.

**r. Sun sports hat**

When the weather got warmer, my cold weather winter hat go put away and my summer baseball cap came out. Try to get one with some neck protection also, try a baseball cap (such as this [Regatta one with a stowable neck cover](#)) with neck cover so you don't look as dorky as those with big, floppy sun hats that fly off when a gust of wind catches them.

**s. Personal first aid kit**

Whilst the boat should hold a first aid kit for any major injuries, you'll need your own for any personal problems.

**t. Talcum powder**

Take some [talcum powder](#) for keeping things hygienic and dry after numerous soakings. Use sparingly so as not to form a paste (remember Ross' predicament with the leather trousers for how this might play out..!)

**u. Microfibre towel**

To dry yourself before getting into dry clothing and the sleeping bag, you'll use when coming off between shifts so getting [a microfibre towel](#) instead of a normal pile one means it'll absorb more water and smell less.

**v. Sunglasses retaining strap**

The boat can get really jerky during big swell so it's good to minimise the likelihood of losing your glasses with [a universal retaining strap](#).

**w. Factor 50 Lipsalve**

Keep the lips in good order to prevent them burning and peeling (if you've ever experienced it before, you'll understand how irritating it is!) – [take a few of these](#) to keep your lips in tip top condition.

**19. Be sure to hold some kind of pre-race event before you embark on this epic adventure!**

Be sure to hold some kind of pre-expedition event to thank your friends, family, sponsors and supporters. They're very much in the expedition with you, so be sure to show your appreciation to them for everything they've helped you with!

**Part 2: During the race**

## **20. Social media and communications management**

Keeping your sponsors happy is something that can be done by having a shore-based support team to manage your social media communications. You'll have an internet system on board that can send images and reflections back to your shore team so do plan time in to get these experiences back to keep your audience engaged.

## **21. Take a camera and document this epic experience for your post-race video**

This experience is hugely defining, therefore be sure to capture the moments – such as the wildlife that you might see (such as flying fish, whales, dolphins, marlins (hopefully no problems from them though!)) and a video diary for documenting the emotions of something so huge.

## **22. Conflict aboard the boat**

Personalities will inevitably rub up against one another during the crossing and might result in conflict (depending on the relationships before the project).

We all behave differently when under stress and so do be patient with each other, especially when you're tired. That said, the crossing can also take a long time, and it's unhealthy to hold grudges with each other – as this will affect the entire team. Cultivating an open and honest environment on the boat from day one will maximise your chances of success.

## **Part 3: After the race**

## **23. Hold an event to say thanks to your sponsors and supporters**

It's good to publicly thank your sponsors and supporters by holding an event. This could be an opportunity to share videos of your expedition, hold a raffle to increase fundraising for your chosen charity, and maximise any exposure that you might hope to get from it.