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Bahamas catamaran trip is like living on a floating villa

By Steve MacNaul, For The Vancouver Sun



The Sea of Abaco, which is in the northern Bahamas, roughly 280 km east of Florida, is a favourite with sailors.

Photograph by: Archive photo , Postmedia News

It's day two aboard the Believe, the sails are at full mast and she's starting to giggle. It's the term given to that blissful state when a catamaran hits cruising speed and the boat "giggles" in a trifecta of wind, water and sail vibration.

"See, I told you sailing forces you to relax," Captain Greg Marlo reiterates to us. We don't even have to answer. Our contented lounging on the foredeck is response enough. The champagne that was popped for the sail-away party is still partly sloshing in the glass and we are soaking up the sun en route from Man-O-War Cay to Great Guana Cay in the Bahamas' Abaco Sea.

This experience is the farthest thing from traversing the water in one of those mega cruise ships.

The Believe is a 39-foot catamaran and we're already likening it to our own private three-bedroom, two-bathroom floating villa.

On board there's only my wife and I, another couple and Captain Greg, who's also doing double duty as chef on this vacation dubbed 'Cays to Paradise'.

While it sounds expensive, elitist and exclusive, this holiday is actually affordable and accessible.

Later that night over barbecued strip loin steaks and shiraz at the Believe's aft deck dining table the captain tells us more and more people are choosing this bespoke way of seeing the world.

"It's unique and customized and personalized."

No kidding. We're on an itinerary that takes us to small islands accessible only by small boat and the mode of transportation we're using is as much an attraction and novelty as the places we'll visit and explore.

This week of specialty cruising starts at \$800 per person based on a group sharing a three or four bedroom catamaran.

Flights, food and booze are all extra.

We flew down to Nassau from Toronto on WestJet and caught the island hopper SkyBahamas flight to Marsh Harbour on Grand Abacos island to begin our adventure at Moorings headquarters in the Bahamas.

Captain Greg Marlo has a Toronto-based business called Yacht Solutions that hooks people up with customized catamaran and sailboat vacations using the internationally renowned Moorings and its sister company Sunsail.

If you're an experienced sailor or motor boater you can skipper your own boat or you can abdicate all responsibility and book your ride complete with captain and chef.

We, of course, chose the latter and took full advantage of the situation.

While Captain Greg manoeuvred in and out of ports we indulged in the aforementioned champagne sail away parties.

We put in a lot of hours lolling on deck being whisked over turquoise sea while the sails billowed above us.

And we discovered little cays with quaint villages, deserted swaths of beach and one-of-a-kind restaurants and bars.

Not to say we didn't have some boat duties.

My job was making sure the cooler was full of ice so the beer and wine was cold.

And all of us took turns winching to hoist the main sail when the wind was right and tying and untying lines when we docked and departed.

The best discovery was Nipper's, a clifftop bar overlooking a spectacular beach on Great Guana Cay.

Johnny Roberts, the great grandson times 10 of the first white man to step foot on the island in 1773, is the proprietor and he makes a mean Nipper's Tripper.

The drink comes in an innocuous plastic cup and is a pretty pink colour, but it's secret frozen blend of four types of rum and various fruit juices is lethal.

Man-O-War Cay, population 350, is a small boat building and maintenance port where the Albury ferry service that operates between the Abaco islands is based. There we wandered the town - there's only a few streets - marvelled at the empty beach and ate blackened fish for lunch at Dock N Dine on pilings over the water.

Note: Man-O-War is a dry island, meaning no liquor is sold there.

Elbow Cay is home to cute little Hope Town, it's candy cane striped lighthouse and Tahiti Beach at the southern tip of the island, which is considered the best strip of sand in the Abacos.

When not in port, the snorkelling off the boat in clear shallow water revealed a multitude of shells, sea urchins, sand dollars and plump starfish.

The sailing was easy and the sea calm.

The islands in the Abaco chain are all close together and protected where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Abaco Sea and the Caribbean Sea beyond.

By the way, overnighting on a gently rocking catamaran with only the sound of lapping water falls into the category of best sleeps ever.

IF YOU GO ...

Toronto-based Yacht Solutions can charter your group a catamaran (sail-motor combination or motor only) or sailboat from Moorings or Sunsail for vacations in not only the Bahamas' Abaco islands, but also in other great sailing destinations around the world such as The Virgin Islands, Mexico, Seychelles, Thailand, Tonga and the Mediterranean.
TheYachtSolution.com and Moorings.com.