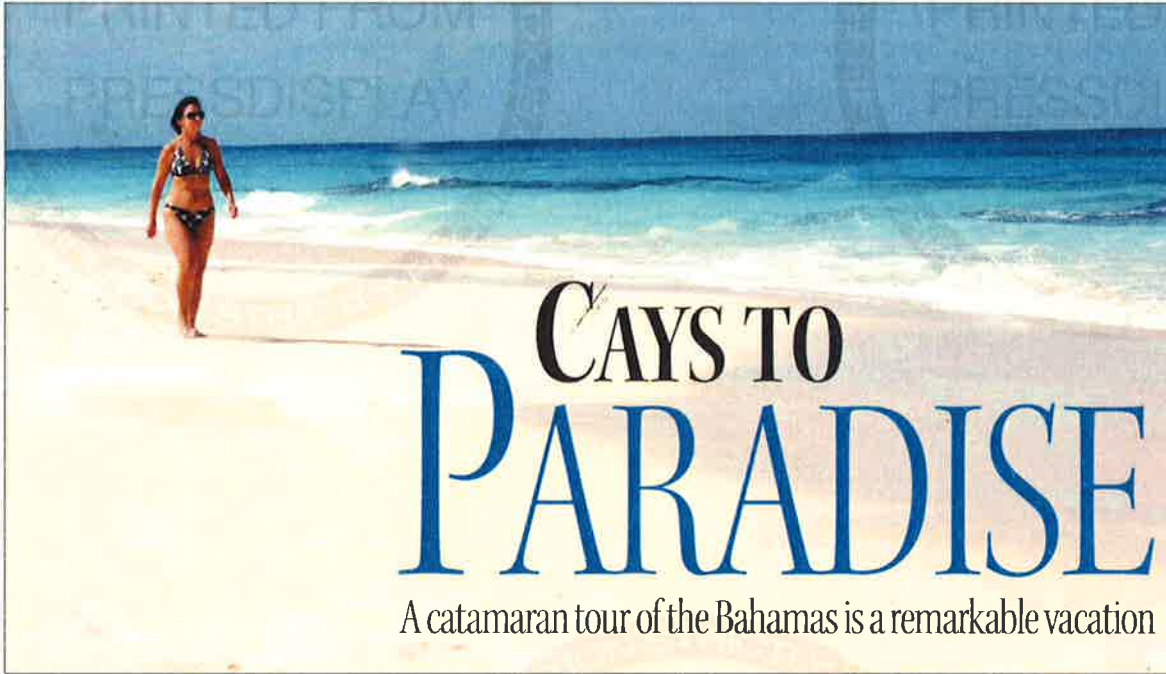


Getaways

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CAYS TO PARADISE

A catamaran tour of the Bahamas is a remarkable vacation

Nipper's Beach and its remarkable tract of sand is a sight to behold and should be a part of on any tour of the Bahamas. And even moreso if the journey is by catamaran. Submitted photo by Steve MacNaull

STEVE MACNAULL

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY HERALD

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 partially 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

"It's a step up from the regular all inclusive resort vacation most Canadians go on," he says.

"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 (Air Canada does it too) 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.

While Captain Greg maneuvered in and out of ports we indulged in the aforementioned champagne sail



Catamaran is a great way to see the Abaco islands in the Bahamas. Submitted photo



building and maintenance port where the Albany ferry service that operates between the Abaco islands is based.

There we wandered the town — there's only a few streets — marveled 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.

Luckily, we'd stocked up at Tupp's Liquor Store in Marsh Harbour and Dock N Dine was happy to open our