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A catamaran is a great way to see the Abaco islands in the Bahamas.

Sailing the Cays to paradise

Steve MACNAULL *Canadian Press*

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 trifection of wind, water and sail vibration.

"See, I told you smiling 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 deck dining table the captain tells us more and more people are choosing this bespoke way of seeing the world.

"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



The top of the catamaran is the perfect place to catch some rays.

of ports we indulged in the aforementioned champagne sail away parties.

We put in a lot of hours toiling 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 vouching 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 cliff-top 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 1774, is the proprietor and he makes

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 sauvignon blanc for us to enjoy with lunch.

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

Treasure Cay was perfect for another swim stop at Coco Beach and dinner of grouper at Treasure Cay Resort's Spinnaker restaurant.

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

TRAVEL IN BRIEF

Bjork, Rush, B.B. King to headline Bluesfest

OTTAWA — Icelandic singer Bjork, New York rap collective Wu-Tang Clan, Toronto power trio Rush and the legendary B.B. King are among the acts who have been announced for this year's Ottawa Bluesfest.

It's a typically diverse roster of artists for the 10-day fest, which runs July 4 to 14 in the nation's capital.

Other acts scheduled to perform include Dixie Chicks, Zac Brown Band, Weezer, Belle & Sebastian and fun.

Among the Canadian talent expected to perform are Tragically Hip, Tegan and Sara, Great Big Sea, Cold Specks and Matthew Good. B.B. King heads up a closing-night lineup that also includes Skrillex, Alejandro Escovedo and Los Lobos.

Movies to bring you Manet and Munch

LONDON — Art exhibitions abroad are coming to a cinema near you.

Art lovers who can't travel to London to see Edouard Manet's portraits at the Royal Academy of Arts will now be able to watch a film about the show at movie theatres from Argentina to India. Arts documentary maker Phil Grabsky, who made the film, said Wednesday the initiative will let global audiences experience art from some of the world's best galleries.

The movies will show the paintings and be narrated by experts who guide audiences through the exhibitions.

Smithsonian vows to keep doors open

WASHINGTON — The world's largest museum complex is bracing for a \$40 million cut in funding due to the budget stalemate in Congress, but the Smithsonian Institution vows to keep the doors open at its museums and National Zoo. Smithsonian spokeswoman Linda St. Thomas says the attractions will maintain normal visitation hours. Instead, the Smithsonian is preparing to absorb the funding cut in other ways. Maintenance and new construction will be delayed. Hiring will be frozen. Use of outside contractors will be reduced, as well as training, research and travel. Smithsonian Secretary Wayne Clough (cluff) wants to avoid a furlough of the institution's 6,000 employees.

E.U. lawmakers back carbon tax freeze

BRUSSELS, Belgium — European lawmakers are backing a proposal to freeze charges on carbon emissions for intercontinental flights, in a move that helps prevent a global trade dispute.

The EU Parliament's Environmental Committee on Tuesday overwhelmingly voted to exclude all flights travelling to or from