

# Travel

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A catamaran sits off one of the Sea of Abaco Islands in the Bahamas.

## Small boat, small islands, many delights

Catamaran tours the Sea of Abaco in the Bahamas

Steve MacNault

**MARSH HARBOUR, the Bahamas** — It's day two aboard the Believe, the sails are at full mast and she's starting to giggle.

That's a 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 his passengers.

We don't even have to answer. Our contented lounging on the foredeck is response enough.

Some of the champagne that was popped for the sail-away party is still 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 furthest 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 are 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 that more and more people are choosing this way of seeing the world.

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



STEVE MACNAULT

Captain Greg Marlo pilots the catamaran Believe in the Bahamas' Abaco Sea.

"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 starting 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 Sky Bahamas flight to Marsh Harbour on Grand Abaco island where we began our adventure at the Bahamas headquarters of The Moorings, a yacht charter and sailboat rental firm.

Captain Marlo has a Toronto-based business called Yacht Solutions that hooks people up with customized catamaran and sailboat vacations using The 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 a 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 duties aboard the catamaran.

My job was making sure the cooler was full of ice so that the beer and wine were cold. And all of us took turns winching to hoist the main sail when the wind was right, that 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 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 its 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 Albany ferry service that operates between the Abaco islands is based.

We wandered the town and ate blackened fish for lunch at Dock N Dine, a restaurant.

Note: Man-O-War is a dry island, meaning no liquor is sold there. Luckily, we had stocked up at Topp's Liquor Store in Marsh Harbour and Dock N Dine was happy to

### If you go . . .

Toronto-based Yacht Solutions can charter your group a catamaran (sail motor combination or motor only) or a sailboat from Moorings or Sunsail for vacations in the Bahamas' Abaco islands, and also in other great sailing destinations around the world, such as The Virgin Islands, Mexico, Seychelles, Thailand, Tonga and the Mediterranean.

**Online:**  
www.theyachtsolution.com  
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open our sauvignon blanc so we could enjoy it with our lunch.

Elbow Cay is home to cute little Hope Town with its candy cane striped lighthouse and to Tahiti 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.

The sea was calm throughout our trip. 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 is an experience that falls into the category of best sleeps ever.

Steve MacNault is a Kelowna, B.C. travel writer. He travelled as a guest of Tourism Bahamas.

### WINES & SPIRITS

## Top-notch California wines have intense ripeness and crisp acidity



Dan Kislenko

This is the second of a two-part column focusing on California wine.

Today we'll examine the central theme of the new Vintages release, the one called State Of The Art. It features a dozen top-notch offerings from across California, offering grape varieties and styles of wine most people don't normally associate with

reputation. This is creamy, rich, muscular Chardonnay, beautifully polished by toasty oak at the end and tropical flavours such as pineapple, passion fruit and guava.

**Liberty School 2010 Syrah** (\$19.95, code 942383). Consistently one of the best values coming to the LCBO (Canada accounts for about 20 per cent of all Liberty School sales), this Syrah is a general California appellation even though the winery itself is in Paso. Look for ripe cherry and blueberry flavours here.

**Bonterra 2010 Pinot Noir** (\$19.95, code 317685). We'll go to Mendocino in northern California for this one. The grapes are

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