

Extended Cruising in the Caribbean

Introduction and Planning the Cruise

Most sailors dream about doing an extended cruise in the islands of the Caribbean or the South Pacific or maybe even a circumnavigation. This year the dream will become a reality for me as I take Windward Passage to the Caribbean for a seven month cruise. Discussing this trip with Pam Orris, Lubber's Line Newsletter editor, we decided that a chronicle of this adventure would be of interest to readers of the Lubber's Line. I plan to write a series of seven articles that will cover the trip following this outline:

Lubber's Line Edition	Subject
Sept. 2007	Introduction and Planning the Cruise
Nov. 2007	Preparation for Departure
Dec. 2007	The Ocean Passage to Tortola
Jan. 2008	Cruising in the British Virgin Islands
Mar. 2008	Sailing Down Island to St. Vincent and the Grenadines
May 2008	Cruising in the Grenadines and back to the BVI
July 2008	The Ocean Passage to the Chesapeake Bay

I have been sailing for over 30 years and have owned Windward Passage, our Beneteau 445, since 1995. We had her in a charter fleet in St. Lucia for 5 years and sailed the islands of the southern Caribbean extensively during this period. Following my retirement, I sailed her in 2000 from St. Lucia to Bermuda then to the Chesapeake Bay where we have kept her for the last 7 years. For the last four years we have sailed her to Maine for the month of August, always electing to sail offshore as much as possible on these trips. I have a captain's license with a Near Coastal upgrade and have sailed from the east coast to the Caribbean more than eight times.

Offshore sailing requires equipment not usually found on boats that are doing bay or near coastal passages. In addition to the equipment required by the Coast Guard, we have a 6 person life raft, a 406 EPIRB emergency beacon, a single sideband radio, man overboard retrieval equipment, a storm jib and a storm trysail.

The crew for an offshore passage should be competent sailors and at least two should have offshore experience. One of my joys in sailing is providing offshore opportunities to friends who may not otherwise have such an opportunity. I maintain a list of people who have asked to be considered for an offshore passage. This year I will be joined by John and Mary Polk, Joe Irr, Donna Zimmerman, and John Ingram. All except Donna have done offshore passages with me and Donna has done one passage to the Caribbean on another sailboat. My wife, Susan, does not enjoy the ocean sailing so she will fly to Tortola and join me for the island cruising.

Initially, I had planned on visiting each of the islands between the BVI and Grenada. However, Susan and I enjoy having friends join us for the island sailing and it quickly became apparent that we would need a rigid schedule established in August or people would not be able to buy airline tickets in advance and would end up paying a high premium price and, perhaps, not be able to get a seat during the peak season. This led to the decision to spend December and January in the BVI then sail down island to St. Vincent and the Grenadines for February and March then sail back to the BVI in April and May. Though we will miss stopping at some of our favorite islands this plan simplifies the logistics and we enjoy both locations enough to spend two months in each.

It is said "the Devil is in the details" and, I must admit that the details of planning an excursion of this nature can be intimidating. The internet has solved many issues for cruising sailors. Almost every island now has internet cafes from which one can communicate via email and can do financial transactions. I have converted all of our service providers to electronic billing and payment so that I can pay them via the internet. Still, there needs to be someone who checks the snail mail occasionally to ensure that issues that were not anticipated are tended to. Also, there is the matter of filing tax returns that must be addressed. One must provide for maintenance of the house including having someone check in once in a while to make sure that there have been no system failures.

Clearing the boat and passengers in and out of the U.S. has always been easy for a documented yacht and a phone call to customs usually would suffice. However 9/11 changed that. Now one has to appear in person with all crew at the customs office at your first port of call. In addition, Homeland Security may elect to inspect the vessel so it must be at a location that is convenient to them. I have

registered the boat with the Department of Homeland Security for clearance purposes and this should facilitate the customs process.

The custom requirements and the amount of time one can remain in one of the Caribbean islands changes frequently. It is imperative that you obtain the latest information and that you have the documents that are required for each island. Once again, the internet will facilitate this as one can log on to the government web site for the islands that you intend to visit and read the latest requirements.

In the next segment I will discuss the equipment that we have added to Windward Passage to make the time in the Caribbean more comfortable and the provisioning process. If you are interested in more information on the boat and our trip please visit our web site: <http://mywebpages.comcast.net/windwardpassage/windward/index.htm>. I intend to post pictures of the trip on this site as we progress.

Randy Williamson