

Multihull Vacations by Kristoffer Stewart

Featured Charter Company:



Kristoffer concentrating

Personally, I can't think of a better way to spend a late Florida spring evening than sailing at sunset.

And what better way is there to sail, than by catamaran?

When my girlfriend Liz booked a sunset sail off of the beautiful coastline of Fort Myers, FL, aboard the Lagoon catamaran *Old Glory* as my birthday present, two other couples had also made reservations to join us.

I guess they were able to think of a better way to spend their evening, or maybe something just came up, because they never showed. Oh well. Their loss.

It was a stroke of fine luck as we ended up having the whole 35-foot catamaran almost entirely to ourselves.

Our delightful host for the evening, Captain "Bud," owner of *S.V. Old Glory* and Sail SWFL charters, did manage to pick up one other lucky, paying passenger from a dock near Salty Sam's marina where we had cast off about 20 minutes earlier.

The Captain first asked us if we minded coming about to head back for this johnny-come-lately, but Liz and I had no problem sharing what had become our private sunset cruise.

The old adage “two’s company, but three’s a crowd” might apply well to a candlelight dinner, but not to sailing aboard a catamaran.

That’s the best part about these types of sailboats—at more than twice the width of a traditional “monohull” sailboat of the same length, there’s just so much more space on a catamaran.

That means the aft cockpit is much wider, allowing three (or the total of four people like we had on our evening charter) the room to get up from the cockpit table and go into the main salon for another beer or a visit to the head without having to shuffle past anyone’s feet the way you do at a movie theater or a baseball game.

Prior to leaving the dock, I had mentioned to our captain that I had some experience steering more than a few large catamarans, so it was no surprise to me that I soon found myself at the helm.

Still, when the boat actually belongs to someone present, you kind of end up with that feeling of being behind the wheel of the family car when you’re practicing for your learner’s driving permit—and your dad is in the front seat cringing at your every move.

Liz snapped a picture of me while I steered us down the Intra Coastal Waterway (on the left), first underneath the San Carlos Blvd. bridge, and then out into the San Carlos bay beyond where we cut the dual Yanmar diesels and hoisted sail.

She told me later that I looked upset. “Nah, not at all,” I reassured her. “I was just concentrating.”

And that was the truth, because between watching the tell-tales on the jib through the helmsman’s window in the roof of the hard-top bimini, along with our heading, wind direction, speed over ground, and our depth on the chart plotter—all while watching out for other boats, crab pot floats, and the channel markers—I had my hands full to say the least.



But inside, I was reveling in the glory of being at the wheel of a Lagoon catamaran once again.

I love the easygoing lifestyle of the catamaran sailor. I’ve dreamt of doing what Captain Bud does all my life, having grown up reading *Sail* magazine, *Cruising World* (and now *MULTIHULLS*), and going to boat shows with my parents.

I also love fresh seafood. Captain Bud treated us to a pound of some of the freshest-tasting Gulf shrimp I have ever had, which he bought right off the dock of a local shrimper earlier that day.

Maybe I should try earning some extra money as a magician because let me tell you, that bag of fresh peeled jumbo shrimp vanished (okay, I said magician, not comedian)!

During our feast, our third guest enjoyed a glass of chilled chardonnay, Liz and I

each had a nice cold beer (all of which had no trouble remaining upright in their containers on the cockpit table because catamarans sail level-flat—unlike single-hulled sailboats which tend to lean or “heel” over on their sides under sail), and we were able to literally put our feet up or recline to our liking without even coming close to invading each other’s personal space.

Once we washed down all that tasty shrimp with another beer and had gotten to know our charter companion, Jerry, since this was Liz’s first time on a catamaran (and incidentally, her first time sailing) I suggested to her, “why don’t we go fo’ward for a bit?”

My sudden bilingual lurch into pirate language produced a quizzical expression to her lovely face and a reply of, “huh?”

Silly me, I thought to myself with a smile. Only real “Old Salts” like me and



Captain Bud keeping a close eye on Kristoffer

Captain Bud knew that kind of nautical lingo I realized, so I just repeated, “let’s go up to the front of the boat,” to which she understood to mean, “let’s get some private time,” and happily agreed.

Now anyone who’s ever been on a “regular” sailboat with only one hull while sailing a reach in 16 knots of wind and seas of 2-3 feet understands that making your way forward even in fairly tame conditions like those requires a bit of attention to balance.

Well, here again is where that benefit of level sailing on a catamaran with side decks that are plenty wide enough to walk normally on (much like you would down the sidewalk in front of your house) is a big benefit.

Though Liz admitted to me later that she admired my sea legs (whoops—lapsing into Pirate again) during this little maneuver, she still had no trouble at all making her own way to the bow even with the breeze whipping up the white caps.

I glanced back and caught her cautiously guiding herself along with a steady grip on the handrail atop the coachroof, but this was far from the tight-rope walking sensation many newcomers to sailing discover when traversing the side decks at an angle on a monohull.

True enough, this was a completely new experience for Liz, but in no way was it ever a struggle for her to maintain her balance.

Once we reached the foredeck, I introduced her to perhaps one of the most comfortable seating areas on the boat: the bridgedeck trampolines.

Liz instantly loved this spot.

With the splashing water rushing by underneath us between the two hulls and the breeze on our faces, we enjoyed the



Captain Bud



Come sail Cape Coral aboard Old Glory

unique sensation of gliding along a few feet above the sea, suspended in air, like on a magical seafaring flying carpet.

But like all good things, our four-hour cruise eventually had to come to an end, and Captain Bud brought *Old Glory* about, to head back to the dock.

The sun was sinking quickly to the horizon, glowing deep orange and unencumbered by clouds.

I led Liz aft from the trampolines and up the step to the coachroof deck where the main mast towered above us, its wing already folded along the length of the boom, where we watched the sun slip behind the flat peninsula of Sanibel and Captiva to our West.

It was a striking display of color in the sky that held our complete attention while it slipped below view, leaving behind a brilliant pink aura afterward.

We spotted a pod of dolphins breaching the surface, who seemed to also be bidding adieu to the light and another gorgeous Southwest Florida day.

Then we made our way back to Bowditch Point Park where we returned our new

friend Jerry to the dock where we had collected him, but not before Captain Bud buzzed the Fort Myers Beach Pier for the onlookers there to get a good look at the giant phone number of his charter business emblazoned along *Old Glory*’s sides.

A few waved, some snapped pictures with their phone cameras, but I’m sure, every single one of them would have preferred to be in our shoes to watch the sun down at sea aboard a catamaran.

With about as perfect an initiation to the catamaran cruising lifestyle (and sailing in general) as I could have possibly wished for, Liz already wants to come back to *Old Glory* and do it again.

And after we helped Captain Bud tie his catamaran to the dock back at Salty Sam’s, said goodnight to our host and paid him his well-earned bargain fare, I knew too that we would soon be back.

If you would like to charter southwest Florida’s waters like we did, be sure to give Captain Bud a call at 239-200-9899 or visit <http://sailswfl.com>...you’ll be glad you did!