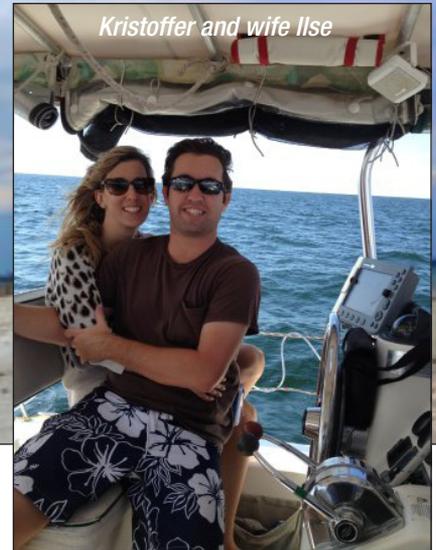


A Family Picnic Beside the Sanibel Island Light



Our recent charter cruise aboard the *Old Glory* was one that my family and I will never forget. It was the kind of day where everything goes just right, with a minimum of fuss, the kind of day that leaves a lasting impression for how remarkably fun it was. If you think about it, there are a lot of things that have to come together to create a perfect day on the water.

For us, it was all about finding the right charter boat for a family of six, being able to book a cruise on the day when it will work best for everyone's busy schedule (during season in SW Florida, no less) — and of course, the weather (including the temperature, wind direction and strength, and sea state).

Fortunately, all of these conditions worked out beautifully on the day of our catamaran charter sail in mid-February.



The 35-foot Lagoon catamaran, Old Glory, sails out of Salty Sam's Marina, near Fort Myers Beach.

The Right Boat

I have always appreciated catamarans for their special attributes that make them such a joy to sail, like their extra-wide beam which provides so much space for everyone aboard, the comfortable lounging area on the trampolines at the bow, and especially the lack of heel for a nice, level ride.

Trying to fit a party of six plus the boat's skipper onto anything smaller than a 50-foot traditional sailboat is going to make for tight quarters if everyone tries to gather in

the same spot for too long — and there aren't many sailboats of that size available for impromptu weekend charters around these waters, either.

At only 35 feet in length, the *Old Glory* catamaran feels like a much bigger boat. Its 15'9" beam makes it considerably wider than typical monohull sailboats which means everyone has more space to relax and enjoy the cruise.

On our trip to Sanibel Island, some of us were content to ride in the spacious cockpit in the stern which is covered and is the best choice for those looking to avoid the sun.

Others lounged around at the bow on the trampoline that stretches over the water at the front of the boat between the two hulls.

It's great to relax there and enjoy the breeze, the sound of the boat making it's way through the water, and the unobstructed view ahead.

And when it's time to get up and head for another drink or snack, the catamaran's side decks are very wide, making it easy and safe to walk from one end of the boat to the other.

For those who aren't accustomed to walking on a moving boat out on the ocean, fortunately there are plenty of hand rails to grab and keep hold of to steady oneself when you're walking around on deck and a big power boat goes by creating a big wake.

This is a 35-foot boat after all — not a big cruise ship — so if the boat does encounter waves higher than a foot or two, you will feel them. But the nice thing about a wide catamaran of two hulls is that the motion that you do feel if there are any waves is significantly dampened. The boat may still pitch quite a bit if waves are taken head-on, but the side-to-side roll one usually gets with a monohull when the seas are more toward the beam (middle) of the boat is less on a catamaran like the *Old Glory*.

For even the older folks in our party, the sail we took with Skipper Bud couldn't have been more comfortable. It's a huge benefit to

people who aren't used to sailing and being out on the ocean for hours at a time, the more space you have and the more comfortable the trip.

No Advance Booking Required

Skipper Bud is a terrific, easy-going, informal kind of guy who is both owner & operator of his catamaran charter business, and we found it easy to simply text him to see if he was available for the following day after the idea to go sailing came up over dinner (of course he's happy to take a phone call or e-mails work, too). We were lucky that no one else had reserved the boat for that Saturday from 11 to 4.

My wife's parents and other close family members had flown in from Holland to join us for our vowel renewal ceremony held on Wiggins Pass State Park beach and over dinner that night, her cousin Marco asked us for suggestions for a fun activity the next day.

Having already sailed with Skipper Bud aboard *Old Glory* many times and having had so many wonderful afternoon and sunset sails, I told Marco and the rest



Coco loves sailing aboard Old Glory with Skipper Bud.



of the family that a nice sail with lunch aboard the boat would be hard to beat. Although they weren't sailors back home in the Netherlands, everyone agreed to give it a try and we met up the next day at Salty Sam's Marina in Fort Myers Beach.

Skipper Bud offers charter cruises to fit most anyone's schedule and preferences, including everything from a quick trip around the harbor or back-bay waters when the seas are rough out on the Gulf, to full-day, private party cruises and sunset sails.

The rates are absolutely a bargain considering what you would pay on other charter boats in the area, whose vessels can't even match the Old Glory in terms of comfort, space and overall FUN.

Be Sure to Check the Weather Report First!

One bit of advice before contacting the Skipper to check for availability would be to definitely check your favorite online weather resource for the forecast conditions on the day you plan to sail. Especially if it's a spur-of-the-moment kind of thing like our charter was!

Fortunately for us, perfect weather and sea conditions were another few things that worked out for us to make our charter the perfect day.

With the wind out of the South at only 7-8 knots and seas of 1-2 feet just offshore, along with abundant sunshine and unusually mild temperatures for mid-February even for Southwest Florida standards, the weather and sea conditions for our cruise couldn't have been any better (although a little more wind would have been appreciated!).

Given the wind direction, our best option was to head West to Sanibel Island. And with the wind as light as it was, the swell from the SSW wasn't too bad, with the waves coming in periods of about 2-3 seconds or so.

Still, it was enough on a few occasions on our motor-sail over to the island that a firm hold on the hand rails was required when going fore and aft on deck.

On a traditional, single-hull sailboat or a small power boat, the motion probably would have been uncomfortable for some. On our catamaran though, the seas on this day were no issue at all, and the ride was generally quite smooth and the boat remained level for most of the trip.

But get the wind blowing long enough and hard enough out of the West, for example, or almost any time just before or after a powerful cold front sweeps through from the North West, and things can indeed get quite bumpy out on the open Gulf of Mexico.

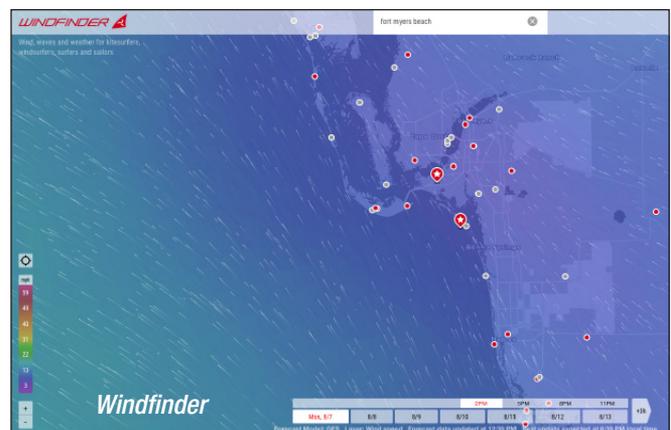
On some days when wind and wave conditions are like that, Skipper Bud will advise you re-consider and reschedule, or, as an alternative to leaving the protected inner waterways for the open Gulf, he may suggest just sticking to a harbor or back-bay cruise.

On the worst of days, like during times of a Small Craft Advisory or Small Craft Exercise Caution is issued for the area waters, he very well may flat out refuse to take people out into the Gulf. He's been doing this long enough to know when it's just not a good day to go boating, that's for sure!

The Skipper and I have found www.windfinder.com to be an excellent resource for checking local marine weather, wind and sea conditions for the day you're planning to sail. And if it looks like a windy day is forecast, don't be scared, as those days are indeed some of the very best opportunities to go out, hoist the sails, shut the engines off and enjoy the simple pleasures of true sailing!

The Perfect Day

Once we crossed San Carlos Bay, we made our approach to the famous Sanibel Light and the public





fishing pier nearby where quite a few people had something to offer the local marine life at the ends of their fishing lines and hooks in the water.

The Skipper spotted a nice quiet spot just down the beach from the lighthouse where we were able to drop our own hook into the water (the boat's 50 lb. anchor).

Here, in what's known as the lee of the island with the wind and waves on the opposite side, it was perfectly calm.

Several of us even donned our swimming attire and jumped in! With the water temperature at 75 degrees, it was cold only at first, but once you got used to it the water was quite nice.

The boat was anchored in about 10 feet of water, and it wasn't but a short swim toward the beach to where we could then touch the bottom of with our feet and walk to shore.

Marco had brought his Go-Pro waterproof camera with him, which he kept at the end of a telescoping selfie-stick, and took a stroll down the empty beach toward a group of pelicans sunning themselves on a boat dock of one of the private homes nearby.

The rest of us stood on the shore, admiring the view of the boat lying contentedly at anchor or looking for sea shells.

Marco returned in time to see a lone dolphin swim by, between us on shore and the boat, about 20 meters away.

This got everybody pointing, and we could see everyone on the boat was doing the same.

Once everyone was back aboard the boat, we had the nicest little picnic lunch of sandwiches and fried chicken that we had stopped and picked up at the grocery store on the way to the marina. I even had

a chance to try a little fishing myself after lunch; despite not catching anything, the fish ended up having a good lunch themselves with my bait.

If you plan to fish from Skipper's boat, just let him know beforehand that you'd like to find a good spot and make sure you bring your own tackle and rod/reel, along with a valid Florida saltwater fishing license (which are available at the Salty Sam's Marina's Ship Store for a small fee).

Then it was time to head for the dock, as the Skipper had a sunset charter lined up for later that evening. After the great time we just had, I think we all would have liked to have remained on board for that.

I have seen the sunset on Skipper's boat many times before, and watched it slowly sink into the Gulf of Mexico and melt away along the horizon as the light paints an Impressionist masterpiece on the canvass of clouds overhead... and believe me, it is quite a show.

After every single sail I have taken with him, I always look forward to the next chance I get to enjoy the Skipper's company and sailing again aboard *S/V Old Glory*.

For more information about SAIL SWFL or to book a cruise with Skipper Bud, visit www.sailswfl.com or call 239-200-9899. 



Marco brought his Go-Pro camera and selfie-stick.