



After making a spectacular approach by catamaran to tiny Sandy Island, experience a tropical paradise of soft white sand, palm trees, hammocks and a beach bar. **BARBARA TAYLOR**

FLOATING IN PARADISE

Tour the Caribbean in a 60-foot luxury catamaran with fun stops and gourmet dining

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Greeted with smiles, treated like royalty and floating on a turquoise paradise. Welcome to the world of luxury catamaran charters by TradeWinds.

Oh, how I loved sailing from Marina Fort-Louis on the French side of St. Martin to secret coves and fun port stops along the sandy shores of Anguilla.

Let me count the waves ... er, ways.

1. Sweet seclusion

A remark by a fellow guest sipping champagne aboard our catamaran garnered knowing looks from the rest of us. How often had we been on a crowded beach and envied the serene look of guests aboard a passing luxury yacht?

They don't jockey for position around a pool, or line up for a buffet, or negotiate a hotel room with a scenic view. They just relax and enjoy the sea breeze.

2. Dream team

South African Captain Andre de Klerk and German first-mate and gourmet chef Mareike (Micky)

Eichhorn shone as a dream team from the moment we were welcomed aboard JimJams, their ocean home.

Andre and Micky not only provided expert sailing, they joined us on snorkelling forays, ferried us to interesting ports of call, prepared gourmet meals, and even made our beds.

Andre has been sailing catamarans for five years and has more than 100 charters under his belt. He's also a qualified dive master, as is Micky. She has recorded 3,000 dives.

3. Gourmet dining

Sumptuous best describes our dining experience aboard JimJams, with chef Micky at the cuisine controls and Captain Andre on duty as a fun fruit-platter stylist.

Think lobster, shrimp, mahi mahi, barbecued-on-the-deck steak, Mediterranean salad flush with prosciutto and melon. Imagine Caribbean salad of chicken and mango styled to resemble an island, with a palm tree fashioned from a carrot, and topped with a halved green pepper. The frittata and pavlova were delicious.

Of course, a selection of wine is served with meals as well as pre-dinner cocktails.

We gathered to dine at an elegant teak table under a canopy on the middle deck, surrounded by the deep blue, often turquoise sea.

4. Pristine privacy

Moored for meals and overnight, travel writers that were guests of TradeWinds were able to dine privately and leisurely while enjoying the Caribbean ambience.

A 60-foot catamaran with a 30-foot beam, JimJams is one vessel in a TradeWinds fleet of about 45 luxury yachts available for charter.

It includes four modern staterooms with ensuite bathrooms and showers. Queen-sized beds are provided in three cabins.

The fourth is a master suite with a king-sized bed.

A seven-night, five-star inclusive package for two guests sharing one stateroom costs US\$7,375.

The entire catamaran can be chartered for about US\$37,000 per week.

Visit trade-winds.com for more information.

5. Sense of adventure

We were pampered by our TradeWinds crew, but once we stepped aboard the catamaran we were, to some degree, all sailors.

With wind in our hair, we faced down ominous clouds, rain, rocky waves and a slippery deck.

6. Diving right in

It's cool to dive from the catamaran and swim to shore, or hitch a ride in the dinghy. Snorkel gear is available, plus paddleboards and kayaks. Deepsea fishing and scuba diving are also options.

7. Spectacular scenery

TradeWinds' professional crews pride themselves on an intimate knowledge of the area.

We visited secluded coves and enjoyed spectacular views not reachable by larger vessels. A bonus: close-up encounters with pelicans and yellow-footed boobies.

8. Passport, please?

It's exciting to traverse four countries in four days. From Canada, we landed at Juliana International Airport on the Dutch side of

St. Martin, grabbed a cab to Marina Fort-Louis on the French side, and sailed aboard JimJams to the British overseas territory of Anguilla.

9. Appealing ports

A brief stop at Sandy Ground, Anguilla, while Andre checked in with the British island's customs office, provided a fun opportunity to roam the colourful village and mingle with the locals.

Our approach to tiny Sandy Island was spectacular. Even better was setting foot on the tropical paradise of soft white sand, a few palm trees, some hammocks and a beach bar.

10. Magical nights

The combination of a soft-hued sunset and seasonally lit Marina Fort-Louis upon our arrival in mid-December was a good omen for what were to be three enchanted evenings. A favourite moment for me was climbing a ladder to what I took to be a lighting platform at Bankie Banx bar.

Above the trees, barefoot and with my dress a little wet from the waves, I toasted one very sweet sunset.