

BEGIN A NEW YEAR SAIL THE CARIBBEAN ABOARD THE WIND SURF

By Marilyn Litvak

As the tall white sails slowly, but gracefully unfurl, we know our adventure aboard the Windstar Cruise ship, Wind Surf, is about to begin.

Celebrating my daughter's 50th birthday is the reason for this elegant, but relaxing, sail through the Caribbean Sea aboard the largest sailing ship in the world. The Wind Surf is scheduled to make anchor at 5 islands in this area that are, or have been, controlled by the British and French in the course of the past several hundred years.

Our ship's departure point is from the port of Philipsburg on the Dutch side of the island of St. Maarten/St. Martin. (The other side of the island is controlled by the French.) This island is one of the most northern of the Caribbean's Leeward Islands. Our plan is to sightsee on the French side when our trusty ship returns 7 days from hence.

We both have always loved sailing, thus our choice of ship for this special occasion. But our previous experiences were aboard small, one-masted boats not more than 20 feet in length—day sailers.

This handsome sailing vessel is some 500 feet long with 7 sails, 5 masts, and is six decks high. It is capable of carrying 300 passengers plus crew, and is also motorized.

Our spacious cabin, mid-ship and on the lowest deck, has been carefully selected to avoid any motion sickness issues. Two portholes close to the water provide a good lookout for any passing fish. Our comfortable twin beds are good for sleeping, as well as sitting on while watching the overhead TV display fastened to the wall at the bottom of the beds.

There is a long, built in bureau with plenty of drawer space. Two large closets opposite provide more drawer space and ample room to hang all those tropical clothes we've packed. Two comfortable sitting chairs are also to be found in this area.

The bathroom is small, but adequate, with its only detraction being a required step up to get into and out of—a bit of a problem in the middle of the night. But we manage.

Upon departing St. Maarten, we have a reassuring lifeboat drill which requires all passengers to proceed with life vests, stored in our cabins, to assigned stations on the Main Deck. Here we meet crew members and fellow passengers whom, if the need arises, we will share Life Boat 3 with.

Our first night and all the next day finds us at sea sailing south through the Caribbean's beautiful blue, but rocky waters, passing numerous lush green, mountainous islands towards Dominica—our first destination on this 8-day/7-night cruise. Here we'll spend the day hiking to Trafalgar Falls and enjoy bathing in one of this volcanic island's sulfur pools. During the course

of the next few days, we'll also visit the islands of St. Lucia, Guadeloupe's Iles Des Saintes (where we'll be able to practice our French), Nevis and St. Kitts.

But first, we spend a day at sea, where, after a buffet breakfast, we participate in a morning galley tour led by the ship's Executive Chef. Here we learn how the ship's staff deals with the complicated task of feeding 300 passengers in an elegant, timely fashion while sailing the seven seas. Needless to say, we are impressed after the delicious meal we'd had the night before in the ship's luxurious main restaurant, Amphora.

We then adjourn to the Lounge on Main Deck for a presentation about our next day's destination and available shore excursions. This will be done each day by the ship's Destination Manager and will prove quite useful for making plans.

After a relaxing buffet lunch in the Veranda restaurant, where we'd enjoyed breakfast, we head to the ship's Bridge Deck to experience the majesty of the ship under full sail. While there, we visit the Bridge itself and meet informally with some of the ship's crew. They are the experts guiding us safely in a southerly direction using an array of modern gadgetry. But we pass on having our picture taken on the narrow bowsprit at the extreme forward portion of the ship.

We then descend to the aft part of the ship on Deck 2. We want to take a look at the ship's Watersports Platform. We've been told we can swim from the Platform when the ship is anchored and also take out little sailing dinghies. Here we also secure scuba diving equipment which we can use on any beach expedition we might make during the upcoming week

But before heading for late afternoon tea and cookies in the Compass Rose Bar back up on the Bridge Deck, we make a stop in the ship's well appointed store for a sun hat. Of course, we get diverted by the wonderful display of hand-crafted jewelry and lovely clothes. Who wouldn't?

Evening finds us enjoying the Captain's Cocktail Reception where we meet important ship's officers, hoist a glass of champagne, and enjoy the music of the talented foursome, Top Society. As we visit with other guests, we begin to realize how popular this cruise line is. Not only have many of our fellow travelers been on a Windstar cruise before, they've been on multiple cruises throughout the world that the line offers. Does that mean, we'll also be back? Sure Hope so.

Meanwhile, we are ready to enjoy what the upcoming week has to offer us.



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