



YOU CAN DEFINITELY CALL Kevin and Debbie Hopper active boaters. The Hoppers, along with their dog Tate, have logged thousands of miles aboard their 48 Ocean Alexander Sedan named

Island Hopper. Traveling 6,500 miles from St. Petersburg, Florida where they purchased *Island Hopper*, to their hometown of Cincinnati, then back down to south Florida, wintering in Longboat Key and cruising up and down the East Coast, the Hoppers have plenty of stories and adventures to share.

Joy McPeters, President of Marinalife, caught up with the Hoppers in Baltimore after they had completed their

the ICW and beyond

Marinalife members Kevin and Debbie Hopper share their experiences and adventures of cruising the Intracoastal Waterway

Intra-coastal Waterway (ICW) cruise heading north for the summer. Using Rock Hall's Haven Harbour Marina as their home base allowed them to thoroughly explore the Chesapeake Bay. Aboard *Island Hopper* you immediately feel at home with the warm colors and beautiful teak and holly sole throughout the inside. Joy was welcomed by their dog Tate, a Welsh Springer Spaniel, who loves his treats and



even managed to find one hidden in her bag. Tate began his boating travels 11 years ago as a week old puppy and still today he gets excited when his boat bag gets packed for a trip.

After roughly 35 years on the water Kevin Hopper has earned the title of seasoned boater. His love for the water began in the 1970's as member of a small sailboat racing club and then he bought a Cape Dory moored in Southwest Florida. He has owned a variety of boats both power and sail culminating with the purchase of his current cruising boat with first mate Debbie. Kevin says their Ocean Alexander is the best cruising boat – comfortable and dependable. Kevin and Debbie agree that setting realistic expectations about how they would use the boat was critical to their overall satisfaction. While they may complete the Great Loop over time, they were not interested in continuously cruising for up to a year. Kevin is still working thanks to cell phones and Internet connections, so they return to their home to Cincinnati for 2-3 weeks in between cruising and then happily return to *Island Hopper*. The Hoppers both enjoy exploring new ports and finding unique local restaurants so they can sample regional fare whether it is fried pickles in the mid-west, catfish in the south, low country cuisine

in South Carolina, or steamed crabs in Maryland. “We bought this boat to be a holiday and respite on the water;” says Debbie Hopper. “We also love to entertain our friends aboard *Island Hopper* and have them share the experience of our boating lifestyle.” In fact, they have recently hosted friends Ian and Joan Downs from Scotland who reciprocated by taking the Hoppers on their sailboat throughout the Mediterranean. “The Mediterranean was a totally different experience from boating in the United States”, said Kevin, “they do not even take advanced dockage reservations in most countries except France. You merely show up gesturing or speaking loudly to communicate “How many nights? My Turkish, Greek, Italian and French aren't polished to say the least, but we were always able to communicate the necessities for travel.”

Kevin is a very organized captain who believes that pre-planning for any boat trip is very important for safety and overall enjoyment. For safety he makes sure to have spare parts and he properly maintains his vessel. He also recommends that boaters take the available courses through the US Power Squadron on weather, charts, and boat safety and instruction. He holds a USCG 50 Ton Masters

ABOVE LEFT: ISLAND HOPPER UNDERWAY. ABOVE RIGHT: DEBBIE AT LITTLE PALM ISLAND RIGHT: TATE ON ISLAND HOPPER.

Captain's License. He also uses Cruisersnet.net for up-to-date information on the conditions of the ICW in trouble spots like Georgia and for bridge closing and construction information. To aid his cruise planning he turns to Marinalife, Kevin said, "And of course we use Marinalife to help plan our trip --they are your best friend on the water! With the time necessary to maintain the vessel underway and planing the next days journey our planning time for marina locating and booking was greatly reduced thanks to Marinalife." Marinalife helped put together an itinerary for the Hopper's ICW cruise that took into account their marina preferences and mileage requirements. The itinerary included personalized marina recommendations and reservations at pet-friendly marinas that offer accessibility to good restaurants. "It is huge relief to know that we have access to Marinalife. They have afforded us the opportunity to stay at exclusive clubs and helped us to receive discounts on our dockage at many marinas in beautiful locations with outstanding accommodations," relates Debbie.

The Hopper's trip north on the ICW to the Chesapeake began in May in Miami. It took them about 3 weeks to reach the Chesapeake Bay with a leisurely cruise averaging about 60-70 miles a day. In preparation for this particular cruise they provisioned their boat especially with heavy items like bottled water, soda and wine that could not be easily transported by bike so that if a courtesy car was not available they were not stuck.

They stayed at many of the ICW hot spots including Fernandina Beach; Hilton Head; Charleston, SC; Beaufort,

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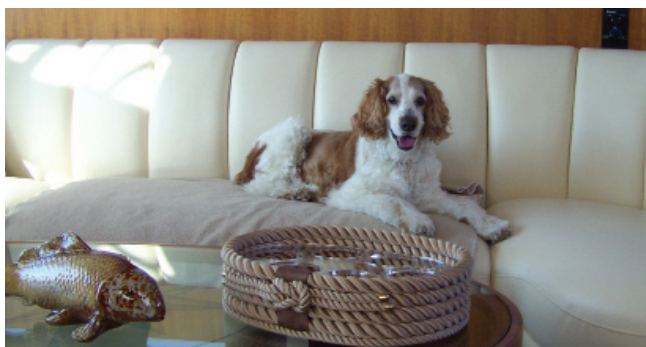
SC; Wrightsville Beach; Beaufort, NC; Coinjock, and Portsmouth, VA. They fell in love with Charleston because it combined beautiful architecture, rich history and exquisite food at restaurants such as High Cotton and Magnolias. They also loved the food at many boutique restaurants such as Plums in Beaufort, SC.

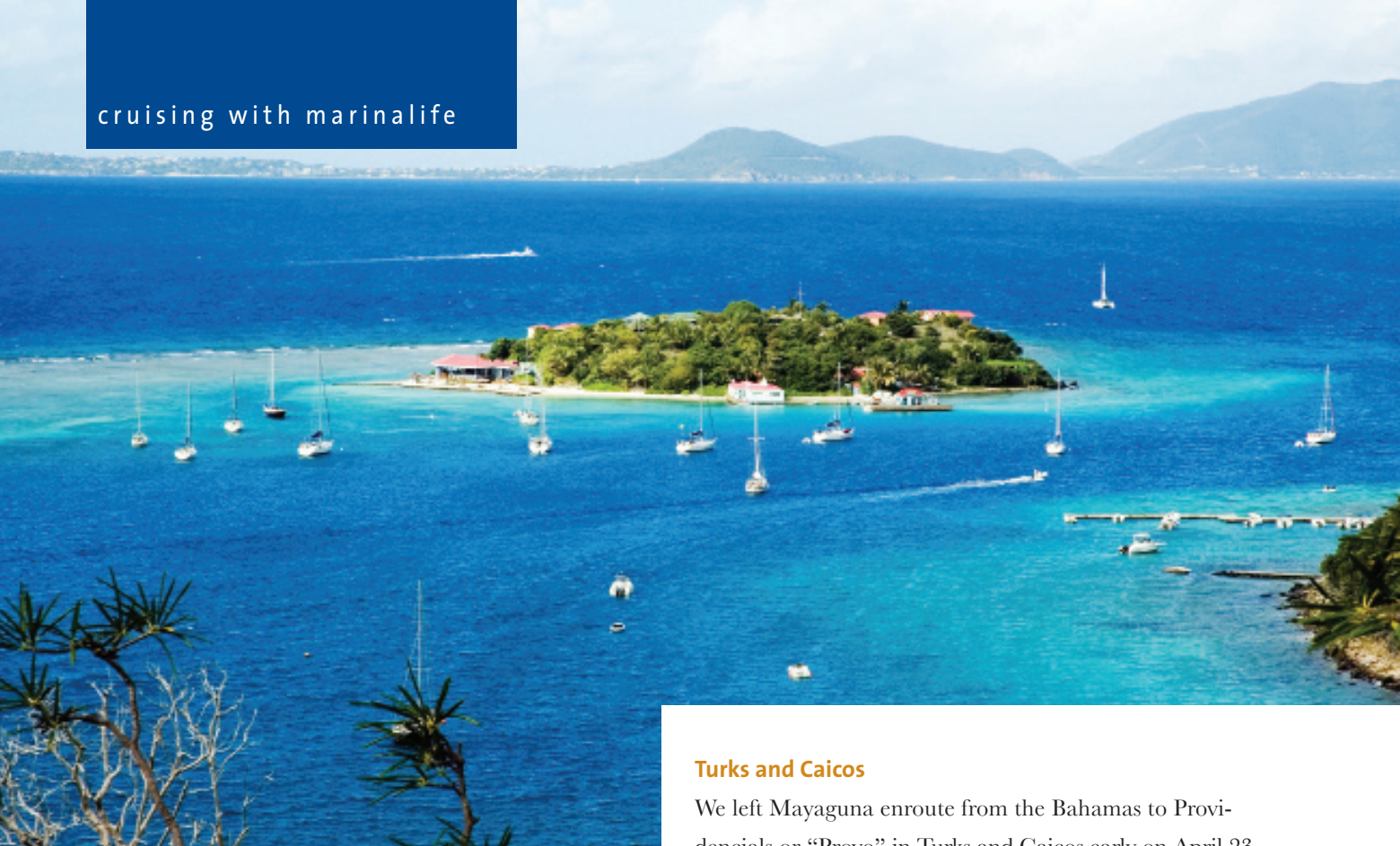
The Hoppers believe that marina courtesy cars are a great way to quickly meet your fellow boaters as you all pile in to get to the closest restaurant or grocery store for provisioning. Their courtesy car experiences also made for some good stories including Debbie borrowing a large pick up truck from one very nice marina manager. She got in and was barely able to reach the accelerator.

Kevin and Debbie loved the different experiences and the people they encountered along the ICW. They met so many interesting people along the way including a couple (baby boomers!) on a 17-foot sailboat who were doing the Great Loop. One night, when they were at the same marina, it started to rain heavily. The couple just brought out a tarp for a boom tent and said this was part of their adventure. "It was great to see people totally committed to the adventure of cruising the Great Loop," said Kevin.

The Hoppers are committed cruising boaters and love the cruising lifestyle. It is inspirational to hear them talk with such passion about their adventures on the water and their plans and ideas on where to explore next. Look for *Island Hopper* on the waterways and stay tuned for where their next adventure will take them.

The Hopper's ICW itinerary can be viewed online: www.marinalife.com/icwnorth. ❖





living the dream

Marinalife member **Burton Beitz** chronicles the many stops on his dream vacation

TWO MONTHS AND 18 DAYS AFTER departing from our homeport in Houston, Texas I couldn't believe *Open Time* was about to enter it's third country- Turks and Caicos. My 60 foot trawler had gotten myself and wife Alejandria through the Gulf Intercoastal, around the west coast of Florida and through the Bahamas- definitely earning its name as a long range cruiser. I was on a "dream vacation" as many have called it and my ultimate goal was to make it to Trinidad. *Open Time* would make it to St. Maarten before bad weather and high fuel prices forced an earlier-than-expected end.

Turks and Caicos

We left Mayaguna enroute from the Bahamas to Providenciales or "Provo" in Turks and Caicos early on April 23. The passage, although long, was smooth and relatively easy. Marinalife had set us up with a reservation at Turtle Cove Marina in Provo and to ensure we arrived safely, a guide boat brought us into the harbor.

Turks and Caicos was one of my favorite stops during my "dream vacation". We immediately began exploring the area, trying out the great onsite cuisine and taking advantage of the dingy. The island had a European twist and the grocery stores, which were accessible from the marina, had an assortment of foreign wines and cheese. We rented a car to venture into town. Surprisingly, renting a car was easy; the challenge was driving on the left side of the road and doing the many roundabouts in reverse!

After several days of exploring hidden coves, swimming in the crystal clear water, lounging on lush beaches and watching the abundant wildlife, we cast off our lines and headed towards Sapodilla Bay on the south side of the island. Ironically to walk from the North side (where we docked) to the South side is about one or two miles, to boat is about 46 nautical miles.

ABOVE: VIEW TO MARINA CAY AND VIRGIN GORDA, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS. [ANDREA HAASE]



Dominican Republic

After a long nights crossing into the Dominican Republic, we arrived in Puerto Plata and docked at Ocean World Marina. The marina, although pricey, was close to the airport and the high level of service and security we received matched the price. We used the marina to store our boat for a week while traveling back to the US.

I arrived back at *Open Time* with an old buddy, Mike Penn, to continue the trip for a few days while Alejandria caught up with family in the US. After paying \$20 so the “navy” would ensure a safe voyage we left Ocean World and anchored one night before tackling the Mona Passage enroute to Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico

The Mona Passage was a 32-hour trip. Although six-foot seas and 25 knot winds made for a bumpy ride, I’ll never forget the 200 lb. Marlin we almost caught. Mike had hooked a 25 lb. Mahi-Mahi when all of the sudden a Marlin grabbed it! Typical of the great fishing stories, there wasn’t enough time for photos but it didn’t matter. Being on the swim platform I could see the 200 lb., 7 ft long Marlin come out of the water right next to my boat. Needless to

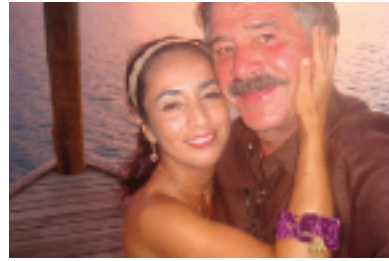
say he took our line and the Mahi, but it’s a story I’ll be telling for years. We couldn’t mope for long as we soon caught a 50 lb. Wahoo.

On May 19th at 6 pm, we arrived in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. We anchored so we could see customs and waited until morning to go check in. The people in Puerto Rico couldn’t have been nicer, and their customer service was wonderful.

From Mayaguez we had a calm ride down the west coast of Puerto Rico towards Ponce. Once we turned the corner going east on the Southside we got bumped around quite a bit. Going along the south side of Puerto Rico we had good open water and saw nice islands along the way.

Once docked at Ponce Yachting and Fishing Center, the only real option, Mike headed back to the states. I used the next couple days to explore the area which was very similar to the states. As in any city, Kmart and Wal-mart were a short car ride away and everyone had cell phones. The facilities in Ponce were minimal, as Marinalife had cautioned, but a huge plus was that there are nonstop flights from the US right into town.

After several days in Ponce my first mate, Alejandria, arrived back on board and we headed to St. Thomas. On



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BURTON BEITZ

the way, we stopped and hooked onto a mooring ball at Vieques. The Island looked great and seemed to be an area worth exploring on another trip.

Virgin Islands

Arriving in Red Hook at St. Thomas on June 3rd was very exciting as I had been looking forward to it since Texas. We stayed at American Yacht Haven in the U.S. Virgin Islands which was good and comforting. We indulged in the upscale boutiques and unique stores around the marina and also brought on fuel (cringe) for the going rate of \$5.49 per gallon.

Crossing over into the British Virgin Islands, I reminisced of my last trip here in 2006. We stayed on a mooring at Sopers Hole the first night, even though the moorings are made for smaller power boats and sail boats.

Next we traveled to Norman Island and stayed at the Peter Island Yacht Club. We only stayed one night as I was anxious to get to my favorite Caribbean spot, and BVI facility- Bitter End Yacht Club. Along with excellent service and a good, reasonably priced restaurant onsite they maintained three beaches. Of the three beaches, all named by the color of the beach chairs- blue, green, and yellow, we fell in love

with Yellow Beach. It was the furthest from the boat but worth every step as we were two of the three people on the beach all day. This was easily our favorite beach of the trip.

Our Unexpected End

We made it to Simpson Bay Marina in St. Marteen in one day and in time for the third and final bridge opening at 5:30 pm. The island had a lot to offer in terms of culture. It is the smallest island to be shared by two countries and we were on the Dutch side. We rented a car and did some siteseeing on the French side. With our dingy we were able to access a variety of activities on Simpson Bay. One of the prettiest beaches in the Caribbean, Orient Bay is accessible by car about 30 minutes away. This beach was an “all in one” there were nude parts, topless parts and then the “regular” part.

After a month at Simpson Bay Marina we decided to head to St. Bart’s. However, after our third failure we called it quits. In addition to increasing fuel cost, we couldn’t compete with 8 foot seas and rough winds. Although *Open Time* never reached its final destination of Trinidad it was still the adventure of a lifetime and perhaps one that we will try to finish another year. ❖