



Two girls walk across a sandy tidal flat surrounded by seagulls and boats.

## Traveling With Friends

Marinalife members Tom and Nyla Ulanski explore the Bahamas

Marinalife caught up with members Nyla and Tom Ulanski to hear all about their “Bahamas Dream Vacation” completed last summer. Accompanied by five other Southwest Florida Sea Ray Cruising Club boats the Ulanski’s spent six weeks exploring a variety of ports in the Bahamas. The flotilla of boats ranged from 38 to 56 feet with the Ulanski’s boat, *Nyomas* being the group average of 48 feet. The Ulanski’s used Marinalife and a couple of the experienced Bahamas cruisers to plan the trip. Read on to learn about a few of the group’s favorite spots, activities and tips for planning your own group trip!



40 days, 13 island destinations, 80 waypoints,  
over 1100 miles and a lot of diesel fuel

### Great Guana Cay

**Highlights:** Scenery and snorkeling  
**Day Trip:** Man-O-War Cay

Orchid Bay, Great Guana Cay's only marina, is home to beautiful beaches and reefs along the Atlantic. We all enjoyed the spectacular views of the Atlantic and the rugged coral rock formations from our padded chaises. The south side of the community is filled with picturesque views of the Sea of Abaco. The snorkelers of our group really enjoyed this stop. Some group members snorkeled off the community's beach pavilion while others explored the reef off the Western end of the island—both were given two thumbs up. The best meal was at **Docksiders** followed by a night cap at a **Nippers**. Our group really enjoyed a day trip at Man-O-War Cay which offered a unique experience. This well-protected harbor and friendly village offered delicious, homemade baked goods, and a feel for life in a true working maritime community

### Hopetown

**Highlights:** Cuisine and shelling beach  
**Day Trip:** Little Harbour

Hopetown is a quaint village with quality cuisine and a great shelling beach. Hopetown Hideaways is the preferred marina but has limited availability for transients.

To better serve our group, we stayed at Hopetown Marina which offers 14 large transient slips. Our dinners at **Harbor's Edge Restaurant** really stood out. As we dined next to the most photographed lighthouse in the world—Hopetown Light House—we watched an unforgettable sunset and filled ourselves with delicious food. A couple groups in our flotilla found a great shelling spot at Tahiti Beach. For a day trip all six groups rented small boats and went to **Pete's Pub** in Little Harbour. This infamous watering hole provided yet another "Kodak Moment" and makes 'Cabbage Key' look upscale in comparison.

### Harbour Island

**Highlights:** Setting, cuisine and great resort amenities  
**Day Trip:** Dunmore Town

We stayed at Valentine's Resort & Marina while exploring the Island, including the 18th century settlement of Dunmore Town. Like Great Guana Cay, the main form of transportation here was golf carts. Valentine's offered our group a variety of amenities including two restaurants, a dive shop, pool, and a hospitable staff. On the Atlantic side of the island there is a 3-mile tinted pink beach with particles of coral. Snorkelers can access the reefs directly from the public beach access point. Fishing is also popular in nearby waters and although we didn't catch any actual fish, we ate enough to know how good it was! We dined at several



From top left to right: Great Guana Cay; Eleuthera Island; Little Harbour; Hopetown Sunset; Navigating the Devil's Backbone; Beach at Great Guana Cay

*"By the end of our six week journey, not only did we work as a team, we began to feel like family."*

— Tom Ulanski

wonderful restaurants but **Rock House** provided an unforgettable dining experience—great food served in a truly romantic island setting. For lunch the group enjoyed **Sip-Sip**—a fun outdoor restaurant overlooking the waters of the Atlantic. From our table we could appreciate all the magnificent colors of the Atlantic—emerald greens, topaz and tanzanite blues. It is highly recommended to have a pilot to enter and exit Harbour Island. The lead-boat was driven by Little Woody, our local pilot, through some treacherous sandbars and coral-heads located between Spanish Wells and Harbour Island. To avoid straying into unsafe water, Little Woody asked each boat to stay on plane and as close as possible to the transom of the vessel in front of them.

### Bimini

**Highlights:** Waterfront and fishing

**Day Trip:** Fishing excursion

While at Bimini or “Mother of Many Waters,” we docked at Bimini Bay Resort and the entire group rated this stop our top destination and an unanticipated gem. The scenery surrounding the two marinas and the resort was breathtaking. The resort has more landmass than Alice Town and Bailey Town combined and was one of the few Bahamas spots that actually had green grass despite the dry conditions. The staff was very accommodating and although our group had a few missteps this was an overall great experience. The island was experiencing a lack of gasoline while we were there and diesel was only available at Bimini Blue Water Marina.

We had a great time, learned a lot about traveling with other boaters and look forward to our next adventure! ❖

## TIPS WHEN TRAVELING IN GROUPS *Camaraderie and Compromise*

We looked out for each other, compensated for individual weaknesses and leaned on others individual personal strengths. As in life, boating with a group is a learning experience. You find that other members of the group have found ways of doing things that make life on the water easier, safer and very logical. To have a successful and enjoyable group boating experience everyone needs to have common objectives, destinations, timetables, and compatible personal interests. —Tom Ulanski

### Tips from Marinalife:

- Spend extra time in the planning stage. This is typically the most challenging and most important phase of planning. All disputes on destinations, timetable, etc. should be resolved here.
- Be prepared for anything and consider the facilities available at your destination(s).
- Divide up storage of commodities on different boats.
- Make sure to distribute your float plan to friends and family. (Marinalife members can print float plans through their online profile).
- Designate a backup VHS channel on which to communicate in case of an emergency.



# Exotic Pursuits: The Life of a Yacht Captain

BY KATIE O'CONNELL

Captain Eli, a Marinalife member for two years, has traveled to some of the most exotic yachting destinations in the world. His job as private yacht captain has allowed him to explore anchorages in desolate areas of the U.S. and the Canadian West Coast, and the crowded areas of the Southern U.S. and Mexico. Captain Eli runs an 80-foot Ocean Alexander with his girlfriend, Bailey, who serves as Chef/Stewardess/Purser and second Captain. Eli and Bailey are just one of the hardworking world-traveling duos making a living within the yachting industry. In eight years of yachting they have cruised the foggy coasts of Maine, crossed the Atlantic, been anchored off St. Barths on New Years Eve, navigated the currents of Clayoquot Sound on the Western side of Vancouver Island, and ridden the Northwest swell deep down into Mexico.

When asked how he got into boating Captain Eli says, "I graduated in 1999' and their weren't any job fairs for English majors." Glad to be done with school, he backpacked in Asia and Indonesia for a year, finally ending up in San Diego. Following the path of many college grads, he waited tables for a while and eventually ended up working

as a diver at SeaWorld. Bailey worked for a time in the office of a shipyard in San Diego. It was there the couple was introduced to yachts, and more importantly, the crew. Intrigued by the lifestyle of the yacht crew, (i.e. world travel to exotic locales, room and board paid for etc.) in fall of 2001 Eli and Bailey put their belongings into storage and drove cross-country to Florida, and to the yachts that waited for them.

Being completely green to the industry made it tough for Eli and Bailey to get their first job, but a growing demand for American crew helped them along. Eli says, "The industry is all about experience, reputation and word of mouth recommendations." And word of mouth is how he found out about Marinalife and its services to yachts transiting a wide variety of areas on both coasts. Marinalife has helped Eli get long-term and short-term dockage in Mexico and other hard to reach/hard to know areas. Once he got his foot in the door, work became a bit easier to come by, and with the option to work on yacht charters, the money got better as well. Crewing on yachts still provide the unique opportunity work in an extremely demanding and fast

“Watching the sunset on the water, everyday is the best part of my job.” — Captain Eli

paced industry that, once you get established, will usually welcome you back if you decide to take time off. Eli has worked as a ski instructor in upstate Vermont when he needs a break from the warm weather, and has worked as a scuba instructor when he needs a break from the yacht work. “It is very hard work, but it is also the adventure of a life-time that I could never pass up,” says Eli.

### Cruising on the West Coast

When Eli took a long-term Captain’s positions on his current boat, he brought with him years of maritime experience. While not the “old salt” that many other boaters can claim to be made of, Eli says, “I’m still learning as I go, and the West coast offers plenty of textbook examples of how to evaluate and handle sticky situations that one may find themselves in. My first summer cruising as a paid Captain, we took the boat to the West side of Vancouver Island. Enough said.” When it comes to boating on the West Coast US/Canada/Mexico, Captain Eli said the biggest challenge was adapting to the long passages between ports and the unpredictable local weather conditions that may pop up. “If you run into some rough seas, you can’t just pull into a port along the way like on the East coast.” He quickly learned planning ahead, and having a solid backup plan are the most important tools when boating on the West coast. Also, he says, “Only go when YOU are ready.”

Traveling north or south on the West coast can be like night and day. Southbound boaters are often treated to wonderful downhill ride on the prevailing Northwestern swell and since the California currents may add speed it is easy to imagine why this is called ‘riding a magic carpet’. Boaters going this route will cruise under brightly lit stars while schools of pacific white-sided dolphins dance in the boats wake, glowing in the oceans phosphorescence. But, the way home for the Northbound crowd can and is often very different as you buck and fight the Northwest swells and late spring weather systems that have formed in the North of the Gulf of Alaska. Eli explains, “This is where timing and experience make all the difference. Since many boats make the trip around the same time, it is easy to make friends with other “north-bounders,” even if it’s only when chatting on the VHF. There is an absolute camaraderie among boaters. Everyone is usually willing to help out the other if possible.” ❖

The last names of Eli and Bailey have been withheld for privacy reasons.

### CAPTAIN ELI RECOMMENDS:

#### His Favorites

- Fish for Salmon on the West side of Vancouver Island and spend time in the Canadian port city of Victoria. Also, observe pods of Killer whales hunting salmon or swimming with their calves.
- Cruise across the Columbia River bar past Astoria and head towards the river city of Portland, Oregon.
- Enter under the span of the Golden Gate into San Francisco Bay and head up the Sacramento River into downtown Sacramento to catch a Kings game. Dock right in front of the Golden Gate Bridge and explore the famous San Francisco waterfront. Take a cruise around the infamous Alcatraz prison island or hop over for a tour.
- Tie up in Monterey Bay and visit the world famous Monterey Bay Aquarium. Visit John Steinbeck’s “Cannery Row” or go wine tasting in the famous wine vineyards of Santa Barbara.
- Pull in to Marina Del Ray in Los Angeles and hit up Hollywood and stroll down the famous avenue of the stars.
- Anchor out in the Channel Islands. See whales and dolphins and catch your first marlin off of Catalina Island. Scuba dive amazing Kelp gardens and be visited by curious sea lions.

### Magdalena Bay (Mag Bay)

Praised by Captain Eli as “the best fishing spot in the world,” Magdalena Bay encompasses the best of the sea and sand. A true 140 mile stretch of banks and high spots make this a sportfisherman’s dream. Captain Eli says every time he visits he catches fish, and usually gets at least one marlin on board. “It is so easy to fish these areas around Mag Bay because the abundance of fish is fantastic. Even the most inexperienced fishing enthusiast might land a blue marlin on his first day.”

If you do venture out into the waters of Magdalena Bay, don’t be surprised to see pods of gray whales entering into the bay via the two mile wide entrance. “If you can’t figure out your way in, follow the whales,” says Captain Eli. The bay also offers immense mangrove forests to explore, huge sea bird populations and resting spots for the resident sea lion colonies. There are also many miles of beaches to stroll down while collecting sand dollars and watching the sunset out on the Pacific.