

VENTURING MAGAZINE

Adventure in the Abaco Islands by Tim Bodendistel

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White sand, high winds, turquoise water, star filled skies, and welcoming islanders made for a sailing adventure of a lifetime. Crew 2286 out of Lenexa, Kansas is no stranger to adventure. We have hiked the rainforests of Costa Rica, climbed the Swiss Alps, swum in glacier lakes, explored the castles of Germany and backpacked in the great American southwest. Our expectations were high as we planned our high seas trek to the Abaco Islands in the Bahamas. The first and most important decision when planning a trek is choosing your guide. We could not have been happier with our choice of Sail School Bahamas (www.sailschoolbahamas.com). One of the great things about being a Venturing Crew is the ability to look beyond the traditional scouting sites to find unique outfitters and guides that provide a higher level of control and customization of your experience. Our bucket list for this trip included, fishing, snorkeling, beach combing, exploring the surrounding cays, and not just sailing but really leaning how to sail and crew a ship. Brian and his team at Sail School Bahamas helped us customize our adventure to meet, and exceed our goals, providing the flexibility to adjust day to day, if needed, to maximize great winds or clear skies.



Our co-ed contingent was made up of 16 participants broken into two crews of 8. One of the great hallmarks of Sail School is that it limits the size of each ship's crew to a max of 8 plus the Captain. This really added to the comfort, fun, and personal attention by the Captains. We had two beautiful ships; the 44' Admiral Chichi and the 54' Sunshine. The ships were very comfortable and a favorite feature of the youth was a well-stocked galley. The food was great and abundant. Sail School provided lots of fresh fruit, steaks, fish and burgers to grill and of course a sea full fresh fish that we eagerly caught, cleaned, and cooked up. It was no surprise that the fishing was going to be good the moment we dove beneath the waves we were surrounded by brightly colored tropical fish. The Abaco Islands are part of the world's third largest barrier reef, so the snorkeling was amazing. We saw sea turtles, dolphins, rays, octopus, fish of every shape, size, and color, even a shark or two. We dove for conch,

marveled at starfish as big as a dinner plate, and watched small fish hover along with our every move. While trolling for fish, we managed to pull in a nearly 3 foot Barracuda with razor sharp teeth. After a quick photo the fisherman was happy to toss it back. Within the protection of the reef the water was crystal clear, surprisingly calm, generally around 11 to 20 feet deep, and the most amazing shades of blue you have ever seen.

Each of the cays had a personality of its own with one common factor, the warmth and kindness of the locals. Our Captains knew the cays well and provided insider tips for each stop like the old couple that sold delicious home made cinnamon rolls on Man O War Cay or the scout friendly pool in Hope Town overlooking the ocean, and an ice cream shop on Great Guana Cay that gave discounts to scouts, was owned by a retired scoutmaster of over 30 years, and served the best homemade coconut ice cream ever. We often visited the beaches on the cays like Treasure Cay whose beach is ranked one of the top ten in the world, which was both amazing and nearly deserted. The beaches provided great shelling, sand castle building, and when the surf was up on Man O War Cay, body surfing!



Life aboard ship was great. Our Sail School Captains went out of their way to make us feel at home. Observing our hunt for a fresh coconut, they located one and chopped it open for all to taste. They taught us to make an amazing fresh conch salad, and blow a conch shell horn. Most nights we would sleep on deck under the richest star lit sky you have ever seen while slowly being rocked to sleep by the calm sea. One night we even watched colored lanterns launched from Man O War Cay float across the sky. A big focus of time aboard ship was the skill of sailing. Our Captains taught us the mainsail from the jib, how to work

as a team, plot a course, and even took time with each crew member to teach us basic navigation. Mealtime was always fun. The ships were stocked with lots of snacks and great meals that we would cook up, from French toast with bacon, to pasta with grilled chicken. However, nothing beat sailing from cay to cay and putting our new skills to the test. We experienced a range of weather from sunny and clear to windy and overcast. Each brought something new to the sailing experience. It was hard to beat heeling under a 25-knot wind. To add to the fun, our Crew burned a CD of sailing music that we played over the ship's speakers. So what beats sailing under a strong wind? Doing it to music from *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Consider the Abaco Islands for your next adventure. It was truly a trip of a lifetime. The famous pirate Captain Kidd once called the Abaco Islands home and a long time resident assured us that there had to be treasure stashed somewhere. We may not have found the gold but sure found a treasure.

