**Life Aboard *Surprise*: What to Expect**

Living on a sailboat is a special experience. Not only are you able to travel to places that are inaccessible by land, but you also become intimate with your environment: the winds that carry you from place to place, the waters that keep your boat afloat, the creatures that you share the ocean with. Life becomes simpler, and as time goes on you realize that your biggest dilemmas become increasingly tangible: what are we going to eat today? Should I wear an extra layer in case the weather changes? Would I like to snorkel before or after lunch?

The social experience on a sailboat is also unique. While we are fortunate that *Surprise* was designed to offer some privacy for everyone aboard, ultimately, we are sharing a 57-foot by 15-foot space. Everyone will become “shipmates” by the end of your trip, which is a special bond unlike any other. The friends and family members you choose to sail with are going to become your closest companions for the length of your stay. Keep this in mind while planning for your trip.

**Your Crew**

Hi there! We are Hannah and Erick. The words our friends and guests use most often to describe us are easy-going, friendly, and welcoming. We are also active, and enjoy finding the best places to snorkel, hike, and find beach treasures. We are full-time live aboard sailors, so sailing and living on *Surprise* is second nature to us. When we don’t have guests on board in the Bahamas, we spend most of our time sailing to hard-to-get-to islands, learning more about what the Bahamas have to offer in these remote areas.

Our ultimate goals while you are onboard is to make sure you are safe, comfortable, and having an awesome time. Safety is always a priority, and we take our jobs as mariners and guides very seriously. Whatever your interests and passions may be, we want to help make your dreams come true. We will also give you as much space as you need when it comes to personal rest or activity. Privacy is sacred on a boat, and we will always respect yours. We genuinely want to make sure your time aboard *Surprise* is memorable, relaxing, and fun.

**The Environment**

If you haven’t been to the Exumas before, you are in for a treat. The Exumas are comprised of a chain of 365 “cays” (islands) that are accessible only by plane or boat. This chain of cays runs roughly North to South, dividing two bodies of water known as the Exuma Bank (shallow) and the Exuma Sound (deep). These bodies of water are connected by numerous “cuts” that run in between the Exuma Cays, begging for an incredible diversity of ocean life around the islands, and jaw-dropping beauty. Air temperature in early spring averages between low 70s and low 80s, and water temperature averages mid-70s. At this same time of year, we experience the prevailing easterly trade winds, which provides for excellent sailing on the Exuma Bank side of the cays. We occasionally experience a “cold front”, which consists of a cooler blast of wind and rain, followed by several days of strong N-E winds. One of our favorite areas in the Exumas is the [Exuma Land and Sea Park](https://bnt.bs/explore/exuma/exuma-cays-land-sea-park/), which has been protected as a no-take zone since 1958. The waters and islands within the park are mostly publicly accessible, allowing us to enjoy its pristine nature in full. While we are in the park, we do not fish or collect anything from these islands. Outside of the park, we can visit a combination of private and public islands that offer a wide variety of activities, based on your interests.

**Activities**

We will sail most days to move from island to island, but the length of our sail depends largely upon your interest in sailing, and the weather. We find that a nice balance for most groups is to sail for a few hours in the morning or the afternoon, then spend the rest of the day at anchor, with a variety of activities to choose from. If you like to snorkel, we will find spots every day for you to explore underwater. Erick is a diving instructor and has been diving in the Bahamas for over 30 years, and will put you on the best snorkeling spots based on your skill and interest. If your goal is to find the coolest shells in the Exumas, we will bring you to some great beaches where you can comb away. If all you want to do is lay on the deck and enjoy the sunshine and a good book, we can give you cushions to relax with. There are some really cool trails, caves, iguanas, mangroves, and Bahamian villages that we can introduce you to. We will send out a preference sheet in preparation of the trip to get a feel for what everyone in the group wants to do, then base our general itinerary around your interests.

**The Weather is the Boss**

As much as we can plan, the weather has the final say in where we go, and when. We watch the forecasts and plan around what the weather hands us on any given day, but there may be days where a sudden shift in weather means a sudden shift in plans. Please arrive to your trip being flexible, and trust that we always make decisions with your safety and comfort in mind. We try to be as transparent as possible when it comes to weather forecasting and changes in the itinerary.

**Glamping on the Water**

We often say that living aboard *Surprise* is like “glamping” (glamorous camping) on the water. While she is equipped with many modern amenities that make your life aboard comfortable, you are not going to find the same kind of luxury that you would find on a large catamaran or mega yacht: no large-screen TVs, no fluffy bathrobes, no air conditioning. The kind of luxury you will find on *Surprise* is authentic and real: eating fresh-caught seafood, exploring the natural environment around you, and having two guides who are there for you every step (and sail) of the way.

*Surprise* is a very comfortable sailboat to live on, but our systems do not provide unlimited resources. We practice resource conservation in our daily rhythm, particularly when it comes to water and electricity consumption. Please read through the following list of amenities and conveniences to fully understand how we balance comfort with conservation:

Watermaker – Yes, we can make our own fresh water! This is a game-changer in the Bahamas, allowing us to stay longer in remote areas and not rely upon marinas or towns for water. Our watermaker can produce up to 30 gallons of fresh water per hour, and makes delicious and clean drinking water. We use a generator to power the watermaker, which can be noisy, so we typically try to make water while guests are ashore or off the boat. We encourage guests to stay hydrated, and bring your own reusable water bottle so that you can refill it from our water tanks.

Hot Water – We produce hot water whenever we are plugged into shore power (i.e. on a dock), running the engine, or running the generator. While we will do our best to make sure there is enough hot water daily to meet everyone’s needs, there may be days where our hot water supply is light. We communicate with guests to let you know when might be the best time of day to shower, so that you get the maximum supply available.

Showers – We have two showers on *Surprise*: one is a regular, stand-up shower in the head (bathroom), and the other is a shower hose on deck. Both are supplied with hot and cold water. We want everyone to feel clean, but we also request guests keep showers as short as possible, using the technique of “rinse, turn off water while soaping up, final rinse”. Most days we enjoy swimming in the ocean, then doing a quick rinse-off with the deck shower, with or without soap.

Solar Electricity – We have 340 watts of solar panels on *Surprise*. This helps keep our batteries charged so that we are not solely reliant upon our engine or generator.

USB Ports – We have several USB ports that you can use to charge your phone, camera, or other electronics you choose to bring for your vacation. If you have a device that requires a normal/AC plug, we can charge it with our invertor, located in the galley.

Lighting – *Surprise’s* cabin has plenty of interior lights. Please turn off lights when you are not using them to help us conserve energy. Bringing a headlamp or small flashlight can be helpful.

Refrigeration – *Surprise* has a large refrigerator, and a medium sized freezer that are both chest-style. While cool storage is precious in the tropics, we will always make sure there is room for a cold beer for you ☺. Ice is available, but limited. We try to ensure that there is enough ice for every guest to have one icy cocktail at the end of each day.

Laundry – We do not have a washing machine onboard *Surprise*. Please pack accordingly. There is a laundromat on Staniel Cay if you would like to wash your clothes at the end of your trip. You will receive one pair of sheets for your bunk, one large towel, and one face towel, which will only be changed once upon request. For extended trips (more than 6 days), we will offer a change of linens halfway through the trip. We have a large stock of clothespins on board to hang up wet items, such as bathing suits, on our lifelines to air-dry.

Cleaning – We will do a general tidy of *Surprise* once a day. Typically, this is done in the morning once everyone is awake and out of the cabin, although the timing may vary depending on what our activities are that day. The daily tidy will include the deck, the cockpit, the main cabin, the head, and the forward cabin. The head will be thoroughly cleaned, and all floors will be swept. If you prefer that we do not tidy your personal spaces (main cabin bunk and forward cabin), please let us know and we will respect your privacy.

Dinghy Transportation -- Most activities away from *Surprise* will require us to transport you in our dinghy, a 10-foot inflatable boat with a 15hp motor. We can fit 5 people in this boat, so it’s usually one of us driving and up to four guests as passengers. The dinghy is kind of like our “car” for doing local activities. You will become used to the ritual of getting on and off the dinghy by climbing *Surprise’s* swim ladder.

Radios – We have two VHF radios that we use to communicate with other boats and marine traffic. We also have two walkie-talkies that we use for shore-side excursions. We may send you with a walkie-talkie if you want to go for a walk or exploration without us. This way you can call if you need anything, or are ready to get picked up by dinghy to come back to *Surprise*.

Communications – Cell service is scattered throughout the Exumas, and you should not rely on being able to contact home every day. We use a Bahamian SIM card in our cell phone to communicate locally and to the U.S. Short-term SIM cards can be bought on Staniel Cay if you would like to have data or cell communication for your time in the Bahamas. You are also welcome to borrow our phone to make quick calls or texts to the U.S whenever cell service is available. In the event of an emergency in a remote area, we carry a satellite system that can be used to contact help.

Safety & Medical – Please be aware that we will be navigating in waters that are far from medical assistance. Your honesty with us regarding any medical conditions you have is essential to your safety. You will need to pack all medication and personal toiletries that you will need for the entire trip. We carry all the required U.S. Coast Guard required safety equipment, including PFDs, flares, smoke & carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers. We also carry extra safety equipment for offshore and remote passages. We have a well-stocked medical kit that includes items such as antibiotics so that we can administer early first aid to most incidents in remote settings. If you have any questions regarding our safety equipment onboard, please let us know and we will provide you with more detailed information.

**The Galley Scene**

We both love to cook and eat fresh, healthy food, and find inspiration from cooking regions around the world. We will provide three full meals a day, and will always have snacks and drinks available that are self-serve. Prior to the trip, we will send out a preference sheet for you to complete that will help us prepare the menu. The more information you provide us, the more we can plan the menu accordingly. We typically do an extensive provisioning in Florida before we cross over to the Bahamas, so we can get certain items that are unavailable in the islands. Once we are in the Bahamas, we focus on sourcing local fish, fresh fruit & veggies, and perishables such as milk, cheese, and meats. People who live in the Exuma Cays rely upon mailboat to deliver almost everything. While fairly reliable, this service is occasionally interrupted and choices may be limited. We try to be self-reliant in the kitchen by baking our own bread, growing sprouts, and keeping a few cooking herbs in pots. We have become familiar with Bahamian cuisine, and cook a lot of Bahamian-style dishes. This helps us use the foods that are available, while also exposing you to Bahamian food and culture. We plan to cook all meals, but if you are interested in helping in the galley or learning how to make certain dishes, you are very welcome to participate. We can also teach you how to process local ingredients, such as conch, lionfish, lobster, and plantains.

Questions? Clarifications? More information? Do not hesitate to contact us: info@eastendcharters.com OR 631-268-6528.

See photos on our website: [www.eastendcharters.com/bahamas](http://www.eastendcharters.com/bahamas).