

Exploring the Northern Caribbean Islands:

A Captain's Perspective

WRITTEN BY ROD SILVA



I recently had the pleasure of sitting down with Captain Jose Otero of Miami, FL to discuss a trip that has always intrigued me. I find that when talking to boaters, especially Marlow owners, one of the trips that is on most bucket lists is cruising the Caribbean. Sure, you can fly down to the BVI and charter a boat for a week and have a great vacation. But making this trip aboard your own vessel is a completely different experience!

Captain Jose has over thirty years of maritime experience, including the last decade spent as a full-time captain aboard Marlow Yachts. For nearly 9 years, he was a private captain for a 97E Marlow Explorer out of Miami, FL. For the last year and a half, he has had the pleasure of captaining a brand new 66E Marlow Explorer. When asked what makes him the right fit for this vessel, he replied, "my deep familiarity with Marlow Yachts, developed over these many years, means I know these yachts as well as my own home"

Given Captain Jose's extensive experience and knowledge of not only the Marlow Yachts but cruising South Florida, the East coast of the US, South America, and the Caribbean, I found this to be the perfect opportunity to ask him about cruising the Northern Caribbean Islands as they did just a few months ago aboard the 66E Marlow. Not all Marlow owners employ a captain, but many still plan on making this trip. I wanted to get his input from a captain's perspective, so whether you are an owner or a captain, this information will be just as useful when planning your very own Caribbean trip.

Although the trip did not officially start until December of 2023, the planning began in the summer of the same year. Being a new vessel, Captain Jose and the owner of the 66E took a few months to learn the vessel, take a few short "shakedown" cruises, and truly

get comfortable with it before taking off on this trip of a lifetime. Initially scheduled to be just a few weeks or a month, it turned into a 3+ month-long trip as it became increasingly difficult to leave the beautiful islands of the Caribbean!

First things first, I asked Captain Jose how he prepared and provisioned the Marlow for departure. Since they would be gone and cruising for days at a time without seeing land, he wanted to ensure that all the proper maintenance had been completed on the main components of the vessel before leaving the dock. This included engines, generators, air conditioning systems, water makers, head systems, etc, etc. He also ensured that any spare parts necessary for the trip were sourced and neatly stored in the boat. Parts such as filters, fluids, cleaning supplies, etc.

Once these key preparations were completed, groceries loaded, and the vessel fueled up and ready to go, the adventure began! On average, the captain and crew cruised at roughly 10 knots during the day and 8 knots at night. Occasionally, they would bump up to 20+/- knots to outrun foul weather or make it to a certain destination within a certain timeframe.



The trip began at the Ocean Reef Club, where this 66E resides. From there, they made their way through the Bahamas and all the way down to Turks and Caicos where they made their first stop. Due to inclement weather, Captain Jose, the owner, and his guests decided to spend a week there and wait for the rough seas to calm down before getting back underway. Once able to resume their trip, they cruised and visited several islands along the way for the next few weeks. Islands such as St. Thomas, Tortola, St. John, Jost Van Dyke, Norman Island, and Anegada just to name a few.

I asked Captain Jose about anchoring out vs. finding dockage during their trip. He mentions that they mostly anchored out because many of the islands lacked large marinas, and/or anchoring out was more cost-effective. So, when planning a trip like this, you should consider the size of your vessel, plan ahead, and have a reliable tender if you plan on anchoring out. He did have a few recommendations for marinas along the way that they found to be quite comfortable: Yacht Haven Grande in St. Thomas, Nanny Cay Marina in Tortola, Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour, and Peter Island Resort and Yacht Harbour.

As a captain, Jose was responsible for not only running the vessel but also planning ahead and making sure the trip was enjoyable for all aboard. So, I asked him a few questions regarding the trip and concepts that should be considered by an owner operator or a captain.



1 *What are some pointers you would give to anyone planning to take this trip?*

- Plan your route carefully considering fuel consumption
- Know the local regulations for anchoring and fishing if you plan to do either.
- Secure mooring in advance, as spots can fill up quickly, especially during peak season.
- Keep your itinerary flexible in case of weather changes or limited anchorage/docking availability.
- Always monitor the weather and have a backup plan ready if conditions deteriorate.

2 *Sounds like weather is the big factor in planning this trip. Is that accurate?*

Yes, the unpredictability of the weather is certainly my number one concern. Additionally, a couple of other concerns were:

1. Anchoring during strong storms or in strong currents due to the possible unreliability of other vessels' anchors.
2. Equipment reliability and failure. You always want to make sure your equipment is operating properly, as it is essential when navigating foreign waters.

3 *Being so seasoned in the maritime industry and having thousands of nautical miles under your belt, how does Marlow compare to other vessels you have captained?*

The Marlow made this trip more enjoyable compared to other yachts due to its exceptional sturdiness and smooth ride. Its reliable performance and comfortable handling in various sea conditions significantly enhanced the overall experience for all aboard.

Captain Jose and this gorgeous 66E returned to Ocean Reef in late March 2024 and have since taken a few more short trips, including up the west coast of Florida and the Bahamas. The planning has already begun for their next big trip. Destination TBD...