

WEEKEND UPGRADES: HATCHES / SHORE POWER CORDS / UNDERWATER LIGHTS

POWER & MOTORYACHT

CRUISING IN STYLE

NAVIGATING NEW ENGLAND
GOING COASTAL
ON A SWIFT TRAWLER 50
UNPLUGGING WITH FAMILY ON A
MARINEMAX 484



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Display Until April 18, 2016

Just Desserts

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF GEORGE SASS JR. DISCOVERS A WEEK ON THE MARINEMAX 484 IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS WITH FAMILY IS THE ULTIMATE WAY TO BREAK A ROUTINE.

I admit that I can be a bit of a snob, which is ironic since it wasn't that long ago I was living on a rotting wooden 32-foot Pacemaker with my smelly dog. My selection of hotels is certainly an example of snobbery. As odd as it may seem for an editor of a boating magazine, I commute between Boston and our parent company's home office in Boulder, Colorado, on a weekly basis. Depending on schedules, my wife Lindsay will try to join me over the weekend to make the trip more tolerable. So when we're traveling on our dime versus the company's, we upgrade our hotel to a little slice of heaven—the St. Julien on Boulder's Walnut Street. It's a magical oasis, the service is over the top, the rooms are stocked with all kinds of sinful treats, and the level of comfort washes away the harshness of the previous

week. Come Monday, I check out and return to a more pedestrian experience. Please don't judge me!

I consider our recent charter on a MarineMax 484 similar to my St. Julien experience. I've been cruising the Virgin Islands for two decades and have delivered more than 20 powerboats to the area over the past 10 years. I also own a fraction of a boat we keep in St. Thomas and I'm now more comfortable cruising the U.S. and British Virgin Islands than my home waters.

Every other year, my wife and I cruise the Virgins with my stepbrother Gordon, his wife Shanti, and their four boys. It's our treat to the boys and we ensure the trip is all about them, and they're incredibly appreciative of the opportunity.

Due to the regularity of our trips, we've fallen into a routine of

TIP #24

SOFT SEABAGS. Hardshell luggage is tough to stow and often damages cabinetry. —Capt. Bill Pike

TIP #25

GO WITH THE LIGHT IN THE TROPICS: Time navigation in tricky areas with the best possible condition for sighting the water. The sun fairly high and behind you is ideal. —Capt. Bill Pike

TIP #26

TAKE A HISTORY-LESSON. When cruising with kids, teach them one thing each day about your destination. —George Sass Jr.



sorts. Same boat. Same stops. Repeat. For our most recent excursion, we needed a way to spice things up a bit and keep the annual pilgrimage fulfilling. And our trip on the MarineMax 484 added a potpourri of flavors! From the moment we were greeted at the dock, we felt as if we were transitioning into that boutique hotel experience. After all, the base on Tortola is run by charter-industry veterans, the 484 was conceived by a team with serious experience in the charter industry, and they focus on service and quality as part of the MarineMax Vacations experience.

The 484 itself reflects lessons the management team has learned over years of running charter operations, lessons they've used to identify opportunities to dial up the onboard experience. Amenities include onboard Wi-Fi, entertainment systems, a complete galley, multiple social areas, and a flying bridge that rivals that of a 100-footer. "This is cool!" my nephew Torin declared as we stepped on board. Boy, was he right.

One of the major areas of distinction on the 484 is the forward cockpit, placed ahead of the deckhouse to capture tradewind breezes while anchored. It seems so obvious now, but what a spot. While underway, this became the most popular place for the boys to chill out with iPads and books.

Besides dialing up on our water experience with the 484, Lindsay and I reviewed our itinerary and activities and came away with a few

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tips we want to share with you. We'd also love to hear from you about any cruising tips you may have at gsass@aimmedia.com.

SLOW DOWN: After many years, we've learned that an aggressive itinerary where we pick up the hook every day and move to a new island doesn't allow for a relaxing vacation. Especially for the captain! Try to select a few places where you'll stay for at least two days, which allows for easy access for kids and adults alike so you're not trying to schedule every movement. This also eases entry into each new day.

EMBRACE THE SURF & TURF: "I can't believe we just took a vacation from our vacation," said Lindsay on our way back from the Little Dix Bay resort to the MarineMax 484 tied up at the Bitter End Yacht Club. She and I had just escaped to a little villa on the water, had a great meal, and there was a spa at the resort as well. True, the level of luxury on the 484 was more than adequate, but this little break during our trip gave our vacation another dimension.

LET'S EAT: Do yourself a favor, and go with the charter company's provisioning service. Provisioning on Tortola is fairly easy, but it takes away valuable time, it's a logistics pain, you need to get to and from the market, and the process can easily absorb your entire afternoon. Now imagine, showing up at the 484 and her fridges are stocked with fresh produce, and her cupboards are overflowing with food. Then after your systems briefing, you're ready to dive into vacation mode! Also, a common mistake we've made is over-provisioning. There are places to restock along the way if you need. Lindsay and I prefer the market within the Scrub Island Resort. There's a good selection of wine, cheese, gourmet food, and a host of glutinous treats. The market at Bitter End Yacht Club also offers a nice selection of the basics.

DIVE IN: If you're a diver, then you've come to the right place. Gordon and his son Gunner dove on the wreck of the Rhone one morning. The folks from Dive BVI picked them up from the 484 while we were moored off Cooper Island and brought them back. This is

a great beginner's dive, by the way, and allows you to weave a little history into your vacation. You can rent tanks from the dive shop at MarineMax base as well.

MOVIE NIGHT: One of the most enjoyable moments from our MarineMax charter was having movie nights with my nephew Carson. While everyone else slept soundly after a long day on the water, we camped out in the saloon with a different movie every night. This gave me an excuse to watch some movies laced with sophomoric humor revealing that I'm fairly in tune with a 13-year-old's sensibility. I suggest downloading movies onto a laptop before you leave the dock so that you can tie them into the television on board.

PACK LIGHT: For years I'd bring bags of clothes down to the islands and after a week realize I was in my bathing suit the entire time. So now it's two T-shirts for each day, flip-flops, a few bathing suits, and one nice outfit for a dinner out. That's it.

START THE DAY THE RIGHT WAY: On your way to the coffee maker, keep walking aft and take a dip. It's the best way to greet the day Virgin Island style. We keep some shampoo next to the aft shower and take a little rinse as well.

AVOID THE CROWDS: I'm trying to be less of a contrarian, but I still buck the trend and travel to the Virgin Islands at the opposite time as most folks. We prefer going in early August when the anchorages are empty, moorings are plentiful, and the cruising is easy. Sure, it's a little warmer, but the air-conditioning system and genset on the 484 kept us cool. If you go much beyond the last week of August, restaurants and some resorts start to close down for hurricane season. In July, there are crowds of boaters vacationing from nearby Puerto Rico. So that sweet spot seems to be the first week of August. Charter companies usually offer lower rates then as well.

STRAY FROM THE HERD: I need to tell you, the Baths on Virgin Gorda—the famous caves and rock outcroppings—seems to be evolving into a Disneyland ride. During each of our last four stops, we found tours and cruise ships with lines of pasty people backed up to walk through the caves. Last year, I actually saw two folks get into a shoving match. It's getting nuts. However, one little slice of heaven is the Top of the Baths restaurant. Bring some decent shoes though. The rocks on the path get lava hot. There's a pool too which is a great diversion for the kids.

"Wow, how do we top this trip?" asked my nephew Gunner as we returned to the dock after our weeklong cruise. I'm still thinking of the best answer, but I'm fairly certain it will include family, relaxation, and a luxurious ride such as the MarineMax 484. □

MarineMax Vacations, 813-644-8071; www.marinemaxvacations.com
Plan Your Trip: Seven days/six nights aboard the MarineMax 484 ranges from \$9,108 to \$14,820. Subject to change.

(Clockwise from top left): The Bitter End Yacht Club offers rustic cottages throughout the hillside. Torin is all smiles aboard the 484. Sportfishing boats take a break from the bite at Scrub Island Resort. Soper's Hole in Tortola offers world-class diving. The MarineMax 484 tugs on her mooring. The (aptly named) Soggy Dollar Bar claims to have invented the painkiller cocktail. Trey busts a move in the dinghy. Copper Island Beach Club looks as if it was plucked from a postcard.

