

# Ladies, lunch and laughter – living it up with Miramar Sailing

Life doesn't get much better than when it's pondered from the deck of a classic sailing yacht against a backdrop of resplendent Caribbean sea. Throw in a cluster of fun-loving females, some enthusiastically-poured rum punch and it's the perfect recipe for a delightful day out with a difference.

Those are just some of the reasons Miramar Sailing's 'Ladies That Lunch' day charters are proving such a hit. Little wonder then that when invited to sample one of these marine-themed excursions I jumped at the chance.

Beautiful 'Hawnalea' – designed by world renowned Ted Brewer – is a double-masted 47ft vessel, with space for up to 12 guests, and a paragon of elegance. For just US\$99 each, lunching ladies can have her all to themselves for a six-hour private jaunt along Antigua's stunning coastline. Hawnalea's congenial crew – Captain Kevin and Chef Acare – help create a wonderfully insouciant on-board ambiance. Before setting sail, we're given a thorough demonstration of safety equipment followed by some navigational techniques. Personal ones that is. ('One hand for yourself, one

for the boat' turns out to be remarkably useful post-rum punch.)

A font of local knowledge, Kevin points out the landmarks as we cruise up the north coast headed for Deep Bay. The intimacy of the shaded cockpit aids the flow of conversation, while sun goddesses are free to soak up the rays on deck.

A few nautical miles later, we're informed the boat will soon start 'heeling' and not to be alarmed. Thankfully I am not the only one woefully ignorant of sailing jargon. We find out seconds later this refers to the vessel leaning sharply to one side, like a daredevil biker. A quick recce of Kevin's face for signs of impending disaster – in the same way you might check a flight attendant's during a moment of unexpected turbulence - reveals none, his blithe expression happily still in tact. Hawnalea's specifications make her ideal for gathering the requisite pace to appease on board thrill-seekers, without compromising the comfort of those who prefer something closer to an aquatic meander.

The yacht's shallow draft means she's able to manoeuvre close to Antigua's

abundant coral reefs. At picturesque Deep Bay, we drop anchor to while away a blissful couple of hours snorkelling, relaxing on the beach and enjoying a spot of lunch.

Served buffet style, the latter is a sumptuous assortment of international and Caribbean fare – pigeon peas and rice, pasta and green salads, fresh garlic bread, steamed fish, chicken wings, and vegetable kebabs, topped off with mouth-watering homemade banana bread.

For energetic types there's enough time for a hike up to the nearby 18th century ruins of Fort Barrington which afford spectacular panoramic views of the open ocean and pristine environment beneath. Ranked one of the country's most popular attractions, Miramar Sailing's excellent team, service and fleet has just earned it a Trip Advisor certificate of excellence for the third consecutive year. And it's easy to see why as we later roll back into Jolly Harbour, bellies full, new friendships forged, grins firmly on faces and wind in our hair.

'Ladies That Lunch' cruises include buffet lunch with wine (on or off the boat), rum punch and soft drinks. Minimum party number is six, maximum is 12. Charters leave 10.30am and return 4.30pm. ☼

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