



When a boat's cockpit just isn't enough, cruisers repair to alternative 'front rooms' such as the friendly beach bar at Grenada Marine

by Jim Hutchins and Ellen Birrell

The crew of *S/V Boldly Go* likes to go comfortably also. Aboard our 40-foot sailboat, the cockpit creates a spacious place to eat, visit, read, do small repairs, play games. But spacious is a relative term. More to the point, our lovely living room afloat is just that — afloat.

Living aboard 24/7/365 for two and a half years in the Eastern Caribbean, we want and need R&R time on shore. We chose Freedom (yes, with a capital F) over waiting to compile unlimited freedom chips. Therefore, a trade-off we accept is that we'll use our chips for things other than hotel rooms and apartment stays.

Periodically, we crave solid ground for sedentary, restful purposes. We look for a Front Room.

Generally, spending time in a Front Room is a daytime activity. Going ashore we search parks, cafés, restaurants, bars, hotels and other venues for a place that feels homey, that offers respite from the boat and shoreside errands. We're happy with parks or public spaces if they meet our criteria. In fact, the public square in the town of Isabel Segunda on the Spanish Virgin Island of Vieques has WiFi in its scenic, benched town square. On a non-rainy day, it is *muy tranquilo y perfecto*.

Many places have strong WiFi but the background music or other sources of dis-

traction are too loud. There may be shade but it will lack air circulation. We're all about an open-air Front Room where the wind blows through stoutly keeping it cool and bug-free.

We have a "6K" list of criteria. They are: Quiet, Comfy, Clean, Connected, 'ecomodating, and Cool. By cool we mean having good airflow. We like our Front Rooms natural and casual. This excludes AC. "Comfy" covers the gamut from offering creamy ice cream, to having ergonomic seating and a friendly atmosphere. When we say "clean" we're not talking sand-free. In fact, one of our favorites, The Reef in Vieux Fort, St. Lucia, is located on a sandy beach, quite rustic, lovely.

Being 'commodating means you are made to feel welcome without any expectation that big spending is a necessity. We often go on to take meals and spend money on services in a Front Room that 'commodates us. If we're to share the list of Front Rooms, this point must be understood and managed properly. All laptop packin', longtime chillin' cruisers need to retain a respectful relationship with their Front Room proprietor. No big trick, just pay attention and pay your way.

"Imagine," a friend said of a Grenadian marina owner, "how she felt when a cruising family arrived by dinghy from their anchored vessel outside her marina, marched past the 'Pool for Marina Guests' sign, and proceeded to spread their stuff out on the lounge chairs.

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"They pulled out drinks and food they'd brought ashore. Then, without patronizing the marina in any way, the mother approached the marina owner asking for complimentary towels."

Yikes!

Empathizing with business owners and understanding their business model is important: 'commodating goes both ways!

We are not claiming our list to be exclusive or comprehensive. It simply represents joy-filled places we've struck upon, about which we've become sentimental. Sometimes, so enamored do we become of certain hangouts that we let one of the six criteria slide.

Some places would have stayed on our Front Room list but they quit carrying our favorite menu item, or their wait staff was too talkative or obtrusive, or the mosquitoes became annoying too much of the time. Things can change. Good ice cream and happy employees can return as fast as the mosquitoes leave. So, we modify our list from time to time.

Here is the tiny list that remains dear.

Our Windward Front Room List, from north to south:

Mango Bay, Le Marin, Martinique

Quiet and comfy, with strong WiFi and delicious French plated meals. Mango Bay's salads and ice cream are *magnifique!* A French restaurant that plays non-stop British and US '60s and '70s soft rock is welcome for Jim's non-French-speaking



CHRIS DOYLE

Quiet and comfy Mango Bay overlooks the docks at Martinique's premier yachting hub, Le Marin

ears, and they play it softly. Whether you speak French or not, servers are friendly and the overall atmosphere conducive to WiFi-related work or drafting things out on the broad wooden tables that make up their WiFi Mostly Snacking section.

Jambe de Bois, Pigeon Island, St. Lucia

Snagging anchor on the northern edge of Rodney Bay, getting back and forth to this Front Room is a short swim or dinghy ride accommodated by adjoining beach and great dock.

If you love eclectic art and music, this is likely a Front Room for you. Roosting alone, Jambe de Bois is surrounded by Pigeon Island National Park. This adds to its charm and serenity. While a minimal charge is applied for plugging into their electricity, by patronizing the restaurant, WiFi is only a homemade tart or fresh juice drink away. You won't even mind when they convert your Front Room into Live Jazz Night every Sunday.



CHRIS DOYLE

Jambe de Bois is tucked among the trees by the dinghy dock in the center of the photo. Take time to hike to the top of Pigeon Island for this panoramic view

The Reef, Vieux Fort, St. Lucia

Its location within a 15-minute walk of Hewanorra International Airport (yes, I walked over to see if our friends' flight had arrived) or 25-minute walk from the anchorage, make it the hangout if you have time to kill awaiting your own or someone else's flight. It's a walkable distance but more comfortable as a bike ride through residential neighborhoods. To have a fantastic beach, be entertained by kite-boarders or try it yourself, play Frisbee and SmashBall or take a wavy plunge, it is a Front Room to which Ellen considers attaching a house!

We feel particularly at home here because there is a mix of people patronizing the place, ranging from St. Lucians on lunch break to Floridian surfer/kite-boarders, and the covered tables and chairs nestled in sand or on a wooden deck create a sporty energetic setting. WiFi is strong. Our whole-foods meals of raw fruits, vegetables, nuts, and occasional meat and fish on *Boldly Go* make indulging in the artery-clogging food at The Reef a treat.

We got to know a middle-aged German corporate-activities company owner who, while visiting the area with his ballet-studio-owning wife, did handstands in between kite-boarding lessons, played SmashBall with us and even came aboard *Boldly Go* for a sundowner. We also included a 30-something financial-analyst Londoner who was moving back to his family's roots in St. Lucia. Oh, the wonderful people you get to know when you find Front Rooms that meet your sensibilities!

The Gingerbread, Admiralty Bay, Bequia

Only a B- grade on the WiFi, but A+ for its peaceful shady patio, Adirondack chairs, yummy homemade gingerbread and cakes, and Maranne's Ice Cream. We find ourselves frequently zooming over to tie up at their dinghy dock. A plus here is that locals may invite you to a game of Scrabble, backgammon or checkers.

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Yacht at Rest, Mind at Ease

Photo by Onne van der Wal

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L'Aquarium, Union Island

An arrangement of overstuffed chairs and sofas create a lounge off the bar beside L'Aquarium restaurant in the Bougainvillea Hotel. Limited in size, it feels expansive because of commanding views over Clifton Bay. It is quiet, and the WiFi signal is strong. Some of our best Skype calls have occurred here. Taking into consideration the rough edges of Union Island, taking sanctuary by walking the mix of sidewalk and waterfront trail on the north end of Clifton past the town dock to find L'Aquarium is time well spent.



CHRIS BOVIE

L'Aquarium restaurant provides a Skype-friendly sanctuary looking out over Clifton Harbour, Union Island

The Slipway, Tyrrel Bay, Carriacou

Time is short between lunch and dinner service, but mid-afternoon one finds a pleasant Front Room here. WiFi is unreliable but when the yachting community of Carriacou congregates here for happy hour around 5:00pm, any WiFi woes melt away. Ah, you have that feeling that your Front Room has just been invaded by hip and wonderful friends and family. If you like dogs, all the better. They arrive as regularly as their owners.

Jim sat with architectural guru Don Hanson from Marsvinet as he explained how he designed the Slipway building for commercial boat building and repair 20 years earlier. In 2010, it was



converted to a restaurant and bar, retaining its maritime presence and showcasing a lathe, saw and other machining tools.

Daniela plays eclectic jazz, pop and other relaxing tunes at volumes that allow conversation and tranquility. The charming presence of the owner permeates. Her lyrical Italian, interspersed with French or whatever language you'd like to converse in, wafts through this open-air sanctuary.

Whisper Cove Marina, Clarke's Court Bay, Grenada

Not the best air circulation, but the owners have installed fans. They make a real effort. The French sensibilities reflected in landscaping, décor and procedures are sensible, soothing, inspiring. They continue to innovate the place. "Tomatoes and lettuce are inconsistently available in Grenada, so we grow our own," said Marie. They added "Meet & Meat" this past year, a tiny market featuring fresh local meats. On a hillside, pleasing views out over Clarke's Court Bay allow you to rest your eyes from your book or keyboard.

Le Phare Bleu Marina, Phare Bleu Bay, Grenada

Crisp, clean, comfy, *avant-garde* décor and furnishings create a peppy yet relaxed atmosphere. With healthy foods from their mini-market that include fresh baguettes, veggies and cheese, during non-meal hours we purchase a few drinks from the bar



The chef here is innovative and we gladly buy meals for the privilege of hanging out in the bar or poolside

and, *voilà*, we're in Front Room heaven. The chef here is innovative and, with any abundance of freedom chips, we gladly buy meals for the privilege of hanging out in the bar or poolside.

Grenada Marine, St. David's, Grenada

If you take your boat into St. David's Bay, it is sometimes so rolly you'll see why you have particular incentive to spend some time ashore. And, you won't be disappointed. Removed from cities or suburbia, take a hike to the next bay, La Sagesse, and return to this Front Room, endorphins flowing, ready for R&R.

Not only is the setting quaint, intimate and special, the people of Grenada Marine like Jason, Raquel and others are friendly and 'accommodating. Serving a hamburger and fries, they are even willing to give Ellen raw veggies to go with. "I'm always after that!"

The wooden decks are quiet with a steady breeze and the most reliable WiFi we've found in the Windwards. Heck, if you haul out here, you've got an easy walk to your Front Room each morning.

Not all harbors or even all islands have a Front Room — or at least we haven't found them. Your cruising experience will ignite thoughts of Front Rooms that you have grown to love. Do share if you know some, like we're sharing with you now.

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