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# West End Bahamas for Dinner

By Jeff Merrill



[Nordhavn 68 in its slip](#)

One of my “jobs” is seatrialing new boats to make sure they are ready for their new owners. In December I flew from California to our Florida Nordhavn office to take a newly commissioned Nordhavn 68 over to the Bahamas for a shakedown overnight cruise. My partner on this adventure was Nordhavn Florida commissioning manager, John Hoffman.

We met the night before our crossing to go over the boat and to hit the local Publix grocery store to provision. On the morning of

Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, we met early for final preparations and then departed the dock at 9 am to meet the high tide necessary to leave Stuart and clear the St. Lucie inlet. John took command and expertly piloted us out of the channel – a tricky piece of water with a rock breakwater and an encroaching shoal that, without local knowledge, would be a very difficult pass to navigate. Common sense usually says to stay in the middle and in the darker water, but to leave Stuart we had to hug the southern break wall rocks and squeeze through what sure seemed like a narrow opening.

Out on the Atlantic horizon we could see “galloping horses” of white frothy breakers letting us know that once we cleared out we’d be in some big water soon. The trip across from Stuart to the West End of the Bahamas is about a 70 mile crossing and we did have some large swells and a steady 20 of wind, but these were following seas and a following breeze that made for a dry ride, however not without some good rolling around. The new 68 was handling it beautifully and I soon made my way down to the galley to get some snacks, only to find a large and widening puddle of water on the floor. I always travel with my own towel (something I learned from reading Douglas Adams’ *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* series. He claims it is the single most important “tool” for a traveler.) and I put my towel to use sopping up water and stemming the flow. Turns out that someone had inadvertently turned off the breaker to the pantry icemaker and all of that hard ice had returned to its original form and was seeking lower ground. I bailed out the freezer depositing the remainder of the cubes into the galley sink and supplemented my drying with a roll of paper towels to clean

everything up.

Back in the pilothouse John and I had a nice cruise chatting about various trips aboard Nordhavns and marveling at how well the 68 was gliding across the Atlantic. I've taken a sister 68 up the coast from Stuart to Charleston, SC before. That was a twin and this is a single – they both provide an exceptionally comfortable ride. As with any new boat there is also new gear, all had been commissioned before we left, but this was the first real test to see how everything performed. Another common issue with a new boat is getting accustomed to the Nav/Com. This 68 had the latest NavNet 3D which is really great, but about 3 hours into the trip the alarm went off with two error messages – one said “no heading data” and the other said “no position data” – but we weren't in a place where we really felt we needed to or wanted to turn back. So the alarm kept on ringing. I played around pushing buttons and right clicking my way through the screens to finally get us quiet while John kept us on course. It turned out later that for some reason the Airmar controls had overridden the satellite compass and GPS which Brian from Celtic Marine fixed the following day, but it was a bit unsettling to have alarms going off and thinking that our sophisticated modern nav/com was suddenly uncertain about exactly where we were or what direction we were going. I suppose Columbus, Magellan and all those well before us were better equipped to sense direction from the sun, stars and waves. Fortunately for John and me the plotter was fine and we had a magnetic compass to confirm our direction.



[John Hoffman](#)



[Jeff Merrill](#)

As the day wound down we wondered if we would pull into West End in time to clear with Bahamian Customs. John told me they normally closed at 5pm and it looked like we would arrive in the harbor about 30 minutes after that. I went aloft to hoist our yellow Quarantine flag – kind of exciting in a big breeze – and John skillfully guided us into the fairly well marked channel where we appreciated the flat protected waters of the harbor after bouncing around for most of the previous nine hours. We motored up by the Customs



[Marina office](#)



[Gorgeous beach](#)

house, the light was on and we were directed to tie up on an end pier. John soon had us along the end tie, we tied up and the local marina manager took us over to Customs in his open Jeep. The Customs agent had seen us in the western horizon and had stayed open to receive us – what a great and welcoming gesture. After clearing in and getting our cruising permit we went back aboard, struck the Q flag and headed to the local marina restaurant, *Bonefish Folley's* for a nice dinner.

Enjoying Kalik Bahamian beer we started with conch fritters and then each had a local fish specialty. I've never been to the Bahamas before (John has been over many times) and I like to try the local recommendation...which in this case was a side of rice and peas – delicious! Only one other couple was dining and there were hardly any boats in the marina – too early for the season. I'm sure during the summer both the marina and restaurant are packed with enthusiastic boating tourists on their first stop to adventure in the islands.



[Beautiful walk to town](#)

We double checked our lines and called it a night, both sleeping well and rising shortly after the sun came up. Some Hawaiian coffee (a treat that I packed with me) stoked our fires and we had a quick breakfast before deciding to walk into town. The walk was about a 3-mile hike and I was amazed at how beautiful the coastline is and also at the number of conch shell piles mounded up along the side of the road. Conch is king in the Bahamas and they harvest it in abundance. We found a liquor store where we each purchased a bottle of local rum (for consumption back at home) and also bought fresh pastries at the bakery. My iPhone rang and the owner and navigation supplier had landed in Freeport by plane and were taking a taxi to meet us at the boat for the test ride home. After a nice lunch (more conch fritters for me) we took off to sail back home to Florida.



[Conch shells](#)



[Conch fritters](#)

Our return passage found the electronics quickly adjusted to work beautifully by Brian and we ran into the swells and breeze with our windscreen constantly salted by spray. Since St. Lucie is such a tricky inlet we steered south for Palm Beach and arrived at the sea buoy at dusk, rounded Peanut Island and began the long trek back to Stuart through the ICW. Several bridges had to be opened and I felt a bit like a caged beast not able to romp and frolic like we would if we were still offshore, but the beautiful Christmas lights of the waterfront properties provided a delightful border as we wound our way up hill. The 68 has two helm chairs in the pilothouse and while the skipper connected the dots from channel marker to channel marker I trained the Carlisle and Finch spotlight up ahead to visually verify each intersection that we approached. It was very cold outside, and very toasty inside. Florida was in the middle of a frost warning for the citrus crops and the cool night air was in the 30s, but above freezing.



[Florida holiday lights](#)

After several hours we came upon the last obstacle, the train bridge that would permit access to the Stuart, FL Nordhavn commissioning facility. It was 3am and when we called the bridge operator for an opening, a mere formality and something richly deserved after our long day of wandering, he informed us that we were going to have to wait, a train was on the way and after another 30 minutes and losing count at 100 train cars we

finally got the go ahead. We tied up in the cold, called Customs who accepted our arrival, but because their system was down at that hour was told to drive up to their office in Fort Pierce the following day.

I'm sure that this Nordhavn 68 is now ready for many years of wonderful cruising. John Hoffman's commissioning team got everything tested and Ta Shing has constructed another beautiful Nordhavn for PAE. My only regret is that we didn't get to stay in the Bahamas longer. It's kind of a tease to do all of that sea time for only an overnigher, but the intrigue of the islands is too much to resist and I look forward to a future adventure where I, too, can explore the islands. In the meantime, I can say that it was a wonderful excuse to travel over for dinner.



*Jeff Merrill is a salesman with Nordhavn in California. He has logged over 10,000 miles aboard Nordhavns in his 11 years at PAE and is especially fond of the Nordhavn 68 aft pilothouse design.*

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