

Zeezwaluw' Hurricane season in Grenada



The Hurricane season in the Caribbean is from June to mid-November, that's the summer and part of autumn. The crew of Zeezwaluw has to find out how that will affect daily living as cruisers.

Luckily they have been in the Caribbean for a while, before hurricane season starts. The first and most important concern is, to find "the perfect anchorage" where Zeezwaluw will be safe and is able to sit out these 6 months at anchor.



Prikley Bay and True Blue

Bay turned out to be too roly due to the easterly swell. Woburn Bay the third bay they anchored, suits them best. Although Woburn bay is open to the S-SE, the entrance is protected by a long reef which keeps (most of) the easterly swell outside the bay. So Woburn at the SE side of Grenada is the bay where Zeezwaluw will stay put until the end of Hurricane season. Far to the north in de main bay, the crew drops the anchor and 45m of chain. That will do for the moment.

From their anchor place the crew is able to dinghy over to the quay of Lower Woburn to catch the bus to Saint George, or dinghy over to Whisper Cove marina to do the laundry or buy some fresh whole weed bread (the French ones). It's not too far to reach the other bays, like Mount Hartman Bay, Benjy Bay or Hog Island to have a beach BBQ or visit friends who are anchored there. So they have endless opportunities, so to speak.



It is still strange to prep Zeezwaluw for a 6 month's stop, from sailing boat to living-on boat, while its summer. But the headsail goes off the furler and is stowed below on the V-berth while the 3th portable and adjustable solar panel goes topside to assist the other 2. Even performing "winter projects" like maintenance or preparing for the next season seems odd wearing only shorts or a bikini.

Nevertheless the Zeezwaluw crew enjoys the beautiful blue skies dotted with or without white clouds. Sometimes dark interesting thunderclouds line the sky followed by tropical showers/downpours and rainbows



At the end of the day, sitting in the cockpit with a sundowner they enjoy the most striking sunsets. The weather stays perfect, until the middle of September.

Around September the 20th a nasty tropical storm is developing at the Atlantic Ocean. Normally a storm or potential hurricane is formed as a tropical disturbance near Cape Verde Islands and moves slowly on a NW-course across the Atlantic Ocean towards the Caribbean. Not this one. From the start this one moved on a flawless Westerly course, straight aiming for the Caribbean Islands. When this "disturbance" travelled across the Atlantic Ocean, it slowly gained more and more strength and grew from a disturbance into a tropical depression and storm.

The many live-aboard boats at anchor in the many bays in Grenada were following the forecast with great concern and took their decisions wisely. No panic at all but there was many concerns. "What if the depression would become a hurricane? Would they be safe? Can they stay at anchor or do they have to grab a mooring buoy or get into a marina?" "If the storm canter would pass over Grenada is it safe to stay or would the boats be safer in Trinidad, 80km more to the south?"

Also the Zeezwaluw crew was following the forecast day by day and interpreted the wind speed carefully. To endure a Hurricane is not something to joke about they knew by experience although they sat that one out in a harbour and marina in the Azores. There hurricane Nadine came, went over the Azores and came back again. So to predict the path of a Hurricane is difficult they knew.

Luckily a few days before reaching the Windward Islands, the storm moved bit by bit more to the NW. On this new path, Grenada would be out of the way of the still growing storm. Due to the wind forecast of 35-40 kn max. during the passage of the storm, the Zeezwaluw crew decides on that information to stay put in Woburn Bay at own anchor.

They moved Zeezwaluw a bit to the west of the bay to be able to put out 60m of chain while having enough swinging space during wind-shifts as tropical squalls would pass over. Once in the new spot, Zeezwaluw is prepped for storm conditions. Head sail was already off the furling. The main was secured with a rope where after it looked like a sausage. All halyards were secured off the mast, Dan-buoy and 2buoys were stowed below. Dinghy hoisted topside and lashed to the boat, outboard at the push pit and secured, bimini, side panels and sun-tent removed.



During the stormy night, the crew scheduled an anchor watch, 1,5 hour each. In shorts and with a pan of soup on the stove it turned out to be not too bad!

The tropical storm was not as bad as forecasted or expected. The wind, from the SE never exceeded the 40kn. Not even in gusts and they were not as nasty as anticipated. Even the swell was hardly entering the bay while Zeezwaluw rode the wind waves very gentle. So this time, Grenada and her people got off a Hurricane threat easily, as the live aboard community.

After the storm the wind stayed a couple of days in the S-SE while rain squalls came and went. The positive side of all the above was, catching rainwater by the hundreds of liters was easily manageable!



In hindsight Grenada had been very lucky to escape the still growing Tropical Storm (TS) Matthew. Just a day after passing Grenada, the TS became Hurricane Matthew, where after in 2 days' time it became a Category 4 Hurricane. This hurricane went straight over Haiti, causing a dreadful disaster in death and destruction. Also Cuba, the Dominican Republic as well as the Bahamas suffered before Matthew made landfall in Florida where after he lost some strength traveling across North and South Carolina where he finally lost his power.



So, Hurricane season, due to its unpredictable conditions, is not the "normal" winter conditions the Zeezwaluw crew was used too in the last 14 years of cruising. No way of forgetting about checking the weather forecast day by day, during the 6 months staying put.

— / —