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WINTER CHARTER CURAÇAO



words:
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It's a rare and wonderful thing to be alone in an anchorage at the height of the Caribbean cruising season – the only yacht gently swaying from the only mooring buoy in the harbour. But this is the norm when chartering 26 metre sailing superyacht *Domicil*.

The Southern Caribbean route she follows from Bonaire to the western tip of Curaçao is off the typical winter cruising track. For those less interested in the 'see and be seen' and more intrigued by what there is to see in new cruising grounds, a charter in Curaçao beckons.

The Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao – an archipelago known as the ABCs – are regarded for their dive sites and average temperatures of 27 degrees centigrade. They also look unique: neither towering with volcanic peaks like St Lucia nor low and sandy like The Bahamas, the ABCs better resemble

desert land set adrift. Rocky cliff faces adorned in cacti are the backdrop to a spellbindingly blue sea, and the white sand, palm-fringed beaches are tucked into coves.

Domicil's owner Hans Robben traded his role as a captain of industry for a simpler life captaining his own yacht. After four years sailing around the Caribbean, he made it to Curaçao, instantly felt at home and noticed the lack of charter yachts based in the area.

Robben established a hotel on the island and sent his yacht back to Holland for a rebuild, extending her by 3.6 metres – then started a charter operation. Suites were reduced to make way for expanded living spaces, and the deckhouse was redesigned. The interior is decorated in art from Robben's private collection, assembled during business trips to Asia, featuring sculptures, paintings and a genuine samurai sword. With a spacious

Clear blue seas and an abundance of diving sites await those who charter the 26m, Curaçao-based *Domicil*. The island's Dutch heritage is evident on the waterfront of capital Willemstad, with buildings resembling Amsterdam's, albeit painted in bright Caribbean colours (below)





aft master and a guest cabin forward, *Domicil* is ideal for those craving an intimate charter experience.

That the yacht resembles a small Perini Navi is no accident as this was her owner's brief to designer PB Behage. 'I looked to buy a 33 metre [Perini], but I didn't want crew,' Robben says. He captains the yacht himself, joined by his partner and *Domicil*'s chef, Christine McAdams, who tempts with watermelon gazpacho, seafood dishes, quinoa salads and local delicacies.

An eight- or 11-day trip aboard *Domicil* starts on Bonaire, which welcomes guests with its picturesque town and numerous dive sites. Curaçao is no slouch on this point either, offering nearly 70 places to submerge. An optional itinerary takes in the Las Aves Archipelago, 30 miles east of Bonaire, where Robben guarantees guests will have the islands to themselves.

We depart Bonaire sailing 25 miles west to Klein Curaçao, arriving in time for snorkelling followed by cocktails and dinner served alfresco under a banner of stars. If it's an expanse of white sand beaches that inspire, a visit to uninhabited Klein Curaçao will satiate. An abandoned lighthouse is all that tells of man's imprint.

Next, we sail into Fuik Bay and anchor under Curaçao's very own Table Mountain, a miniature of Cape Town's. Options abound for exploration on land and in the sea, pampering and fine dining ashore, casino action and shopping, or sailing from one quiet bay to the next.

On the eastern end of the island is the Santa Barbara Beach and Golf Resort and adjacent Barbara Beach Marina, where *Domicil* has her home berth. The resort's Atabei Spa uses local ingredients and rooms with their own changing areas and experiential showers and patios to repose in the shade after treatments.

A Bentley will whisk guests from the dock to Curaçao's capital of Willemstad for sightseeing and shopping, or to any island activity jumping-off point. Curaçao's Dutch heritage is obvious on Willemstad's waterfront, which looks as though it was transplanted from Amsterdam and painted in bright Caribbean colours.

As we sail further westward, Curaçao's rocky coastline and quiet bays come into full bloom. An afternoon can be spent with a picnic on an empty beach or on a sunlounger at Playa Porto Mari beach club, yet more action is around the corner. Any diversion a guest could crave is available via rendezvous – from scuba diving to a submarine.

At the western-most point of the island, we enjoy our final night at anchor. This is the base for Go West Diving, which arranges private dive trips for *Domicil*'s guests.

Curaçao's low mountain range blocks the trade winds, protecting the southern coast and making for vibrant, healthy reefs and smooth sailing off the southern shore.

Robben enjoys introducing guests to Curaçao and changing their preconceived notions of what a Caribbean charter can be. It's worked for me. Now desert landscapes, diving and a sailing yacht sublimely alone in an anchorage will fill my Caribbean charter daydreams.

Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao

Getting there

Fly into Curaçao's international airport; then take a flight to Bonaire

Climate

Set outside the hurricane zone, Curaçao is lovely to visit any time of year – in traditional Caribbean high season or in summer, when trade winds keep temperatures moderate

Best for

Couples

Charter *Domicil*

Price

On request

Availability

Year-round

LOA

25.9m

Guests/crew

4/2

