



Cruising in Southeast Florida By Chuck Purse

Hillsboro Club benefits from one of the best cruising locations in the world. Not only are there myriad places to go and see, there are many well-designed and staffed marinas and service centers to take care of a boater's every need.

The Intracoastal Waterway provides protected passage north and south for miles. The Okeechobee Waterway that connects Stuart to Fort Myers provides further protected and interesting cruising. And finally, Hillsboro Club represents a wonderful jumping off point for a trip to West End, Bimini or beyond in the Bahamas or further south to Key West and eventually Cuba!

We are by no means experienced cruisers in this region and are going through a steep learning curve at the moment. This entails all the elements of setting up a "Home Port" in Pompano Beach, including networking to find good people and businesses that can help store, maintain and improve a boat. Early in the process, I was advised to pick up a Dozier's Southern Waterway Guide. This detailed spiral bound reference book is very helpful when reviewing the characteristics of an inlet, looking for a marina, or anticipating bridge openings or manatee zones.

The manatee zones are important. These elegant creatures are slow moving, docile and friendly to humans. They deserve our respect and, unfortunately, are often injured by boaters and their propellers. As fellow mammals, they survive on fresh (or at least brackish) water. The main source for fresh water in the Inland Waterways comes from underground springs below the seabed. Manatees congregate around the sources of these springs. Most often, marked manatee slow zones protect known springs or key choke points through which manatees access these springs.

Our first cruise in early January included a trip down to Miami Beach Marina through the Intracoastal Waterway. The inland route south took a little over four hours to complete while the trip back via the Atlantic Ocean took an hour and fifteen minutes at roughly 30 mph. Miami Beach is filled with fun restaurants and distractions. The Perez Museum is always fascinating and there's a great place for lunch there. We were able to take in a Miami Heat game against the Brooklyn Nets. Miami does pro basketball like no other town.

Later this month, we will point our bow northward and head up to Vero Beach to visit with friends and do some fishing along the way. More on this trip and fishing from the Hillsboro Club will be covered in my next article.