

Media Kit: Sailing

The Sailing Capital of the World

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS -- The undisputed Sailing Capital of the World with fair weather and constant winds, the British Virgin Islands boasts more than 60 islands for anchorage, most reached by line of sight navigation and contained within an 80 nautical kilometre radius. Sailing adventures begin on Tortola -- the sailing centre of the Caribbean and the backbone of the protected Sir Frances Drake Channel. With safe passage, it is a mystery where the BVI will beckon -- west to the laid-back Jost Van Dyke, east to the natural beauty of Virgin Gorda, south to the storied respites of Norman and Peter Islands or north into the open Atlantic Ocean towards the remote Anegada.

Modern day sailors envision what it may have been like to chart the first course alongside Christopher Columbus or promote a mutiny against the infamous Blackbeard. Channelling their inner pirate, sailors face safer conditions now, but still share the same spirit of discovery as their predecessors. Choosing to forego standard hotel rooms, these adventurers opt for "floating rooms" aboard catamarans, mono-hull sailing yachts and motor yachts. Bareboat charters (Tortola houses the largest fleet in the Caribbean at 700) appeal to the self-sufficient senses leaving boat provisions, schedules and sailing courses up to individual captains.

Novice boaters, and often even seasoned sailors, choose the ease of crewed charters allowing a professional captain and chef to navigate waters through the mystical chain, upkeep the cabin and prepare authentic island meals such as sweet banana pancakes for breakfast. Chefs on board prepare up to four meals a day, many in gourmet fashion with culinary experience at such prestigious schools as the Culinary Institute of America in New York and the Cordon Bleu in Paris.

Captains are seasoned, knowing the secrets of the islands, from the nooks and crannies that provide some of the most spectacular snorkelling to the whitest beaches on deserted islands, some just a few hectares in size.

Days at sea begin as the rising sun casts an amber-tinged hue, illuminating the peaks of distant islands and silhouetting the nearer points. More than just accommodations, these hotel rooms that float provide ever-changing scenery. Along the southern edge of the chain and just a quick sail from Tortola, Norman Island offers a welcoming first stop for sailors at The Bight -- a large anchorage that once was a hideout for pirates and swashbucklers. A sailing landmark, the schooner William Thornton II -- affectionately known as Willy-T -- is a floating bar and restaurant that offers authentic island fare served literally in the middle of nowhere. Most sailors do not leave Norman Island without snorkelling or diving through the mysterious Caves. Four vacuous tunnels, one extending nearly 80 meters under the island, provide the sensation of a night dive even in the shining sun.

From Norman Island, boats drift slightly northwest to visit The Indians and drop anchor for some of the best snorkelling in the BVI. Swimming along the coral encrusted rock formations, the highly evolved parrotfish is both seen and heard as it uses its beak to chip away at the living coral. Here, marine life reciprocate curiosity, such as the violet Creole wrasse that seemingly appear from nowhere to scrutinize snorkellers and then quickly dash off again.

Just east of Norman Island, Peter Island beckons boats with the most romantic beach in the BVI (despite its name) -- Dead Man's Bay. Moving northeast along the speckled southern border, sailors bump into Salt Island -- home to The Wreck of the Rhone. Anchorage here is a must see as the infamous ship calls divers to pay respects to the perished crew and catch a glimpse of her new deckhands inside the bow --

colourful snapper and soldier fish.

Continuing on a northeastern course, Virgin Gorda elegantly appears, her southwestern tip home to The Baths. Large granite boulders stacked and strewn across white sand beaches form caverns and grottoes filled with shallow wading pools of the crystal sea, even more glorious in stature when approached from the water. Sailors must manoeuvre around the rocks with a careful precision, waiting for the ebb to subside then propel to the shore with the flow.

By contrast, the North Sound on Virgin Gorda offers near perfect sailing conditions with protected waters and close proximity to several tiny islands including Mosquito overlooking Colquhoun Reef, Prickly Pear with cacti-covered hills, Eustatia, Saba Rock and Marina Cay.

Moving west, back towards the point of departure on Tortola, sailors sneak past the main island and hit White Bay at Jost Van Dyke, known for blinding white beaches and the infamous Soggy Dollar Bar named for the drenched dollars handed over by sailors who swam ashore for famous libations such as the Painkiller.

Positioned outside of the sheltered Channel, Anegada sits remotely north, challenging seasoned seamen to venture into the open Atlantic Ocean to discover her secluded shores. Upon anchorage between Pomato and Setting Points, visitors bask on 23 hectares of uninterrupted beaches of the drowned island.

The renowned sailing is showcased every year during the BVI Spring Regatta and Sailing Festival -- the premier sailing event of the Caribbean. The signature blue waters come alive with colourful spinnakers flying high as sailors try to tack and jibe to victory. The three-day event calls both avid sailors and novices to test their skills in a series of courses set in the Sir Frances Drake Channel (the four tracks set cater to those who prefer windward/leeward, round the island racing and design sailing).

A three-day warm up for the Regatta, the BVI Sailing Festival is a no-pressure event racing boats from Nanny Cay on Tortola to Bitter End Yacht Club on Virgin Gorda and back. Nighttimes are just as lively during the festival with authentic island rum flowing freely.

The BVI, consistently recognized as one of the most breathtaking destinations in the world presents 60 islands for exploring its secrets. The BVI is rich with the storied islands of Norman (the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island,") Dead man's Chest and Anegada, while the islands of Peter, Necker, and Guana anchor luxury resorts and sun worshippers find a haven on Jost Van Dyke, Cooper Island and Virgin Gorda. Whether it is discovering the natural phenomena of The Baths or diving the Indians, Sandy Spit or fabled Wreck of the Rhone, the BVI is bountiful with Nature's Little Secrets.

To discover these secrets and create new ones, call the British Virgin Islands Tourist Board toll free: 800.835.8530 or visit www.bvitourism.com.