

Little Dix Bay on the west coast of Virgin Gorda boasts pristine white sand and crystal clear water

Virgin cruising grounds

With a balmy climate, steady easterly trade winds and an abundance of sheltered anchorages, the US and British Virgin Islands were made for the waterborne. This ten-day cruise steers you to some of the finest ports and anchorages in the Caribbean.

BY MIRIAM CAIN



A fragmented jigsaw of green isles lying in the northern Caribbean, the Virgin Islands have long been a yachtsman's haven. Discovered by Columbus in 1493, throughout the centuries the Virgin Islands have attracted everyone from pirates to opportunist Europeans, but today they attract a more sophisticated type of seafarer. The archipelago of over 60 islands and islets is split between the cosmopolitan US Virgin Islands and the neighboring and relatively unspoilt British Virgin Islands. The former are known for their bustling activity, whilst the latter exude a low-key ambiance and get-away-from-it-all feel.

Throughout the islands, coral reefs and stunning beaches provide every opportunity for all manner of watersports, from snorkeling to sea kayaking and sailing. Furthermore, abundant fish in these waters make them ideal for sports-fishing enthusiasts. On land, there are also ample opportunities for golf, tennis, hiking and horseriding.

British Virgin Islands

Distances between the islands in the British Virgin Islands are short and provide the perfect cruising grounds for first-time charterers or family charters. Lying at the centre of the archipelago, the most popular cruising area is the Sir Francis Drake channel. Stretching east from St John, in the US Virgin Islands,



The British Virgin Islands make the perfect destination for honeymooning couples

to Virgin Gorda to the far west of the British Virgin Islands, the scenic channel is surrounded by hilly green islands and islets, many of which are uninhabited.

The archipelago is a canvas of natural beauty leavened with an enticing mix of old-world charm and modern facilities to lure luxury travelers. The must-visit stops include the mountainous island of Tortola and the beach party island of Jost Van Dyke. But in between these lie many more compelling isles; Norman Island, Virgin Gorda and Peter Island, to name but a few.

Itinerary

Day 1: Tortola

The largest island in the British Virgin Islands, Tortola is the ideal place to embark on your charter and begin your cruise. Board in Road Town at the Village Cay Marina and spend a few hours onboard before jumping into the tender and taking a refreshing dip in the waters around Cane Garden Bay. This long stretch of white sand is the most popular in the British Virgin Islands and is great for people watching. For those wishing to venture inland, the best hiking is through Sage Mountain National Park.



Lady Britt

Length | 206'8/63m

Guests | 12

Rate | From €445,000 per week

Contact | Charter Broker Christopher Craven at Edmiston and Company, +377 93 30 54 44, cec@edmistoncompany.com, www.edmistoncompany.com.

Icon

Length | 205'/62.5m

Guests | 12

Rate | From US\$475,000 per week

Contact | Charter Broker Agnes Howard at Camper & Nicholson's International, +1 954 524 4250, ah@ftl.cnyachts.com, www.camperandnicholsons.com.





Half of Peter Island is devoted to its yacht club

The British Virgin Islands have several dive sites that are amongst the most celebrated in the Caribbean. One such site is the sunken 270'/82m *Chikuzen* lying just off Tortola. The steel-hulled ship sank off the island's east coast and is now home to an array of tropical fish, including yellowtail, barracuda, black-tip sharks and drum fish.

Recommended restaurants

The British Virgin Islands are not known for fine dining opportunities, but there are a few notable exceptions. Fresh seafood dishes and an influence of French cuisine can be found at a number of resorts. On Tortola, there are several good restaurants serving up native specialties, such

as Jamaican jerk chicken, conch and flying fish. Beachside shacks also offer a taste of the Caribbean in a casual setting, and Tortola is home to a handful of quintessentially Caribbean beach bars including Pussers, Quito's Gazebo and the Bomba Surfside Shack. The latter is known for its riotous all-night full moon parties.

Day 2: Tortola to Peter Island (9 nautical miles)

Cruise across the channel to Great Harbour on Peter Island and step ashore to take scenic walks to private beaches. Half the island is devoted to the yacht club, whilst the other half is deserted. Indulge in a Cast Away Facial at the Peter Island

Resort (+ 284 495 200), take a dip in Dead Man's Bay, or take the tender across to Dead Chest Island. Reputedly the origin of the sea shanty 'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—yo ho ho, and a bottle of rum,' Dead Chest Island is said to have earned its name after the infamous pirate Blackbeard left several of his crew there with nothing except a bottle of rum as punishment. A few tried to unsuccessfully swim to Peter Island across the bay that became known as Dead Man's Bay.

Day 3: Peter Island to Norman Island (3 nautical miles)

Neighboring Norman Island is said to be the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure*

Sea Force One

Length | 176'6/53.8m

Guests | 12

Rate | From €280,000 per week

Contact | Charter Broker Adelheid Chirco
at Ocean Independence, +49 211 355 5444,
adelheid@ocyachts.com,
www.oceanindependence.com.





Island. Reputed to be the site of buried treasure from the Spanish galleon *Nuestra Senora*, the island's waters are the perfect spot for an afternoon of watersports. Lying just off Norman Island, The Indians are a dramatic reef and rocky outcrop, resembling an Indian headdress and providing superb snorkeling.

Later on in the early evening, your crew can organize a treasure hunt ashore for the children, whilst the adults step aboard the notorious *Willy T* schooner, which is anchored just off the island, for dinner and dancing.

Contact: Manager Ewan Anderson, VHF Channels 16 or 74, +284 496 8603, willyt09@surfbvi.com; www.williamthornton.com.

Day 4: Norman Island to Salt Island to Ginger Island (8 nautical miles)

From Norman Island, cruise to Salt Island and discover one of the most famous dive sites in the Caribbean: *HMS Rhone*. Lying just off Salt Island, this Royal Mail steamer went down in 1867. Further on, the brilliant coral wall known as Alice in Wonderland at nearby Ginger Island slopes from 12 meters (40') to a sandy bottom at 30 meters (98'). The diving here is often referred to as a fantasy due to its vibrant colors and huge coral formations.

Day 5: Ginger Island to The Baths, Virgin Gorda (3 nautical miles)

After your fill of diving, cruise through the Sir Francis

Drake Channel to Virgin Gorda. Reclining to the east of the British Virgin Island chain, the island is the third largest in the group. One thing you must do is dive into The Baths on the southwest coast. These are a series of seawater pools shaded by giant granite boulders. With their colorful fish and coral, they are a delight to discover by snorkeling or sea kayak.

Close to The Baths is Spring Bay with a white sandy beach and some of the island's clearest waters. A lawn sweeping down to the beach is great for picnics, and its small coves are ideal for afternoon snorkeling expeditions. Also nearby is Devil's Bay Beach, accessed only by water or by walking The Baths' trails. Think deep blue waters, pure white sand and clear skies.

Calliope

Length | 138'8/42.28m

Guests | 10

Rate | From US\$160,000 per week

Contact | Charter Broker Agnes Howard at Camper & Nicholsons International, +1 954 524 4250, ah@ftl.cnyachts.com, www.camperandnicholsons.com.



Credit: Nicolas Claris



Little Dix Bay makes the perfect place for snorkeling

Cruise around and anchor off the reef and snorkel in Little Dix Bay on the west coast. Late afternoons in the Caribbean are all about relaxing so head to the spa at Little Dix Bay for a massage. The spa is set on the hillside with panoramic views over Virgin Gorda. The treatments draw on the island's indigenous plants and the ancient therapeutic practices of the Carib Indians. Try the Goat Milk and Honey Wrap. *Contact: Rosewood Little Dix Bay's Spa Manager, Christine Parillon, +284 495 5555, christine.parillon@rosewoodhotels.com.*

Those wishing to explore the island on land can head to discover fascinating Spanish fortress ruins

at Little Fort National Park. There are also National Parks at Gorda Peak, Devil's Bay, Spring Bay and North Sound.

Recommended restaurants

The aptly named Top of the Baths restaurant has an American-inspired menu, great views and the islands' famous Painkiller cocktails. If you are on Virgin Gorda on a Sunday, don't miss the weekly barbecue and live steel bands for a rousing dose of Caribbean cheer. *Contact: Restaurant Manager Norman Henderson, +284 495 5497, www.topofbaths.com.*

Day 6: Days 6 & 7 Little Dix Bay and North Sounds, Virgin Gorda (5 nautical miles)

Around the headland of Blowing Point is a beautiful arc of secluded sand and the perfect spot for the crew to prepare you a picnic on the beach. However, there are also plenty of other beautiful beaches. Savannah Bay Beach on the west coast is one particularly beautiful stretch of secluded sand, and just north of this is also Mahoe Bay Beach with its picturesque reefs, vivid blue waters and tropical landscape.

Spend the night anchored in the sheltered waters in the North Sound. Activities abound here, from

Dream

Length | 170/51.82m

Guests | 12

Rate | Please enquire for rate

Contact | Charter Broker Jan Henry at Fraser Yachts Worldwide, +1 954 522 3344, jan.henry@fraseryachts.com, www.fraseryachts.com.





Discover private beaches on Peter Island

snorkeling the reefs off St Eustacia to water skiing to testing your skills in small boat sailing at the Bitter End Yacht Club. *Contact: Sailing School Director, Jerome Rand, +284 494 2746, watersports@beyc.com.*

Recommended restaurants

Only accessible by boat, the Bitter End Yacht Club has a seafaring tradition combined with glamour. The resort has two restaurants and bars, an English-style pub, boutiques and a spa. Rendezvous with fellow seafarers at the clubhouse for lobster and fresh fish, or try some of the local West Indian dishes. *Contact: Restaurant Manager Marielle Arneaud, +284 494 2746, marneaud@beyc.com, www.beyc.com.*

Known for its elegant, international cuisine, Biras Creek is an open-air restaurant on the northern tip of the island overlooking North Sound, or for a truly memorable evening, book a table at Saba Rock. Its over-water lounge is a romantic setting, and live music and dancing all go to make it one of the island's finest dining experiences.

Also recommended is the little courtyard restaurant of The Bath & Turtle in Spanish Town, which serves up fantastic fish and chips (+284 495 5239). For those looking for more traditional dishes, Chez Bamboo in Spanish Town is a gem for Cajun and Creole cuisine. Put in your order for the likes of bouillabaisse and chocolate bourbon mint cake, (+284 495 5752).

Day 7: Virgin Gorda to Guana Island (9 nautical miles)

After three days exploring Virgin Gorda, depart and cruise to nearby Guana Island. An interesting spot to visit, the island has a wildlife sanctuary with some of the richest collections of plants and animal species to be found in the Caribbean. Anchor off White Bay Beach and take the tender ashore to this stretch of white powder sand for a picnic lunch. From here, you can walk to six further secluded beaches, or hike the island's scenic nature trails.

Day 8: Guana Island to Jost Van Dyke (6 nautical miles)

The neighboring sandy island of Jost Van Dyke is the last stop on your itinerary. The British Virgin Islands are

Mondango

Length | 169'7/51.7m

Guests | 10

Rate | From €185,000 per week

Contact | Charter Broker Christopher Craven at Edmiston and Company, +377 93 30 54 44, cec@edmistoncompany.com, www.edmistoncompany.com.





famed for their beaches, the best of which is said to be White Bay on Jost Van Dyke. An immaculate crescent of ivory sand, the beach has a reef lying just offshore running nearly the full length of the beach. Blessed with calm waters, perfect for children to swim in, the reef has a convenient break providing access to the shore by tender.

Jost Van Dyke is one of the liveliest islands in the British Virgin Islands, and as such there are several quintessential Caribbean classic restaurants and bars in Great Harbour and White Bay.

Swim to the Soggy Dollar Bar on White Bay. The essence of the Caribbean, the bar was aptly named

when it opened as access was by water only, and it is where the Painkiller cocktail, the British Virgin Islands' signature drink, was first created. The trademark cocktail is made of rum, orange juice, pineapple and cream of coconut. *Contact: General Manager Tina Chinnery +284 495 9888, relax@soggydollar.com, www.soggydollar.com.*

In early evening, the place to be for a drink is Ivan's Stress Free Bar where you can sway along to reggae tunes and tuck into a delicious feast of lobster, (+340 513 1095), then celebrate your final evening with a Painkiller cocktail at the infamous Foxy's—making the perfect toast to an excellent cruise (+284 495 9258).

Day 10: Jost Van Dyke to Tortola (4 nautical miles)

For those disembarking in the British Virgin Islands, your itinerary finishes in Tortola. For those traveling from the US, you can join your charter yacht from St Thomas Airport in the US Virgin Islands and cruise the short distance to the British Virgin Islands, taking in St John along the way. Those traveling from Europe can fly to Antigua and take a flight connection to Tortola and embark in the port at Road Town, the island's capital. ■

The yachts featured are just a selection of what is available in the Virgin Islands this winter season.

Necker Belle

Length | 104'1/32m

Guests | 10

Rate | From US\$100,000 per week

Contact | Charter Broker Tom Collins at Burgess,
+1 305 672 0150, tcollins@burgessyachts.com,
www.burgessyachts.com.

