

CLASC Trip Report
British Virgin Islands
May 6–13, 2017

Trip Leader: Rick Heiman

The sailing charter to the British Virgin Islands (BVI) was a destination which the Clear Lake Area Ski Club has never visited. This trip was almost three years in development beginning with a single charter boat. A second boat was added soon after the initial offering, and we were able to get a third boat about a year out from the trip. In all we had twenty-nine trip participants. The BVIs offer so much variety especially when you can island hop from your very own luxury live-aboard.

The BVIs have never seen the likes of pirates like us. Alas, there was nothing to plunder except for a variety of refreshing adult beverages. Each member of this trip had a special relationship with the ocean: for some it was snorkeling, for others it was SCUBA, and still others used the kayaks, the paddleboards, and the floats or some a combination of all mentioned. There were onshore excursions including a mid-week excursion to the famous Baths, an amazing large boulder arrangement at the water's edge. A hiking trail through these boulders challenged many of us, but everyone made it through with nary a scratch.

The three boats were 58 foot sailing catamarans with AC, private cabins and heads, complete with sink, shower and toilet. All of the real work was provided by our crew consisting of knowledgeable captains, gourmet cooks, and stewardesses who catered to our every whim. The crew was eager to please, including special diet requests.

The food was outstanding!! We enjoyed a variety of menus all served family style on the aft deck of the boats. Wines were available for every meal (unless you were a diver and had to postpone until after diving). On non-diving days some even enjoyed an adult beverage with breakfast.

Specialty mixed drinks were also offered including "Dark and Stormy" and Mojitos. The coolers were fully stocked with several types of beer and carbonated beverages available anytime and with an abundance of ice.

Twenty-six of the twenty-nine flew from Houston to the BVIs through San Juan. The other three arranged their own transportation via St. Thomas connecting to a high-speed ferry. The participants spent the first night ashore at the Moorings base hotel, the Mariner Hotel.

The hotel was more than adequate with several dining options and a pool. The rooms were fresh and comfortable. This was especially nice after a long day's journey. We met the captains and crew the next day about noon who welcomed us aboard and gave us a boat tour followed by a fantastic lunch.

We were unfortunately detained for a few hours as we waited on some delayed luggage, a rather common occurrence for the small airline, Seaborne Airlines that provided the second leg of our journey to the BVIs.

After the delayed luggage arrived we were promptly out of the harbor and under sail to our first destination anchorage, the Bight at Norman Island. Once on our mooring balls, some opted to snorkel the caves, while others joined the festivities at the local floating bar, Willy T's. The captains provided water taxi service for each group. Some enjoyed a swim or floated with a special beverage at hand. The water temperature was in the comfortable low 80s. Some that snorkeled saw an eagle ray cruise by, a rare experience!

The first dinner aboard was amazing! We had such a wonderful evening. Each boat had its own special experience with the crew and guests getting to know one another.

After dinner some gathered on the bridge deck to enjoy music and after-dinner drinks. Some turned in early to be sure they were ready for the next day's activities such as diving while others partied the night away.

We soon learned how to live like pirates with hardly a care in the world. Most were in the pirate mode within hours of boarding, but for some of us it took a day or two to believe this would be a care-free vacation with the whole week still ahead of us.

There were many options for getting ashore and the crews were eager to assist whether by dinghy, paddle board, kayak, or snorkel. Many took advantage of this and visited unique bars and shops along the way.

The boats were large enough to mingle or find your own space for contemplation and reflection on the beauty and harmony of nature of this region of the Caribbean. One morning a lady was spotted doing yoga on her paddle board. (Or was she one of our group?) No doubt that some of our boats had paddle board experts.

Some with boating experience like me enjoyed watching the captains exercise their skills in sailing and handling the boat both underway and while on a mooring. The crews were expert in picking up a mooring ball which occurred once or more almost every day.

On Monday, the dive boat arrived with all of the gear and tanks and picked divers up from each of our luxury catamarans. Our first dive would be the famous Indians, a small group of rock peaks reaching about thirty or forty feet out the water. The dive boat picked up a mooring ball and as we looked over the side, the water was so clear that we could see the bottom. The dive company, Sail Caribbean Divers, had the dive gear ready for each diver including names on each BCD (Buoyancy Compensation Device).

Soon after, the large catamarans arrived to allow those who wanted to snorkel and enjoy the site also.

Our second dive for the day took us north to Pelican Point just off Norman Island. It was another beautiful dive. Just another day in paradise.

A gourmet lunch soon followed, and this lifestyle would be repeated for several more days.

Midweek after the Baths, the captains and I agreed to spend one evening at a dock so crews and guests could have a dock party and mingle. We moved from boat to boat for hors d'oeuvres and cocktails. Afterwards each boat resumed their nightly gourmet dining. That night we had a tremendous storm and many were glad (including me) that we were at the dock. There were high winds, and much lightning and thunder along with it. As the dawn broke and the winds calmed, there was evidence of the storm including at least two smaller boats swamped in the harbor area. Nature is so awesome. The lightning show was extraordinary.

For the week we moored, anchored, or docked at these islands: Tortola, Norman Island, The Indians, Peter Island, Salt Island, Cooper Island, Virgin Gorda, The Dogs, Marina Cay, Jost VanDyke and Sandy Cay.

Divers were able to experience 3 days of two-tank diving including the famous Wreck of the Rhone that went down 150 years ago during a hurricane. Those folks who snorkeled at Marina Cay rated it the best along with the Wreck of the Rhone.

The last day aboard found most of us moored near an idyllic sandy beach, White Bay on Jost VanDyke. It was a sunny day and the water was calm and clear with that Caribbean blue from the lighter shades over the sand to the darker blue in the deep. The water toys were deployed, some sipped beverages while floating about, others headed ashore to explore, and some exercised kayaks and paddle boards. Under a shady tree ashore, I sat reverently admiring the view and giving thanks for another week in such a heavenly location.

Later that day we motored almost full into the wind back to Road Town, the Moorings base, where we had our last dinner aboard. Following our gourmet dinner, there were many farewells to the captains and crew as we began to pack and prepare for the morning departure. We had a bit of a layover in San Juan, Puerto Rico, but all were back on home turf by late Saturday evening.

We found that most of us were well-suited to pirate life, but life's commitments kept us from becoming stow-aways.

After these photos, see the photo supplement.



At the dock before departing to our first destination.



Underway to our first mooring in the Bight, Norman Island



We are underway and so is the party!



Anchored and ready for playtime.



What a view!



Another beautiful anchorage (Great photo!)



Cooling off at the Baths, Virgin Gorda, BVIs



Mom and daughter Tanya and Nicole at the Baths, Virgin Gorda, BVIs.



Ken captures some memories at the Baths, Virgin Gorda, BVIs.



A picture perfect beach in the BVIs



Dining aboard Happy Hours II. The gourmet dinner arrives shortly.



Gourmet Dining Preparations. Thank you, Chef!!