

# Dead Reckoning Around Paradise

## A Moorings power catamaran charter makes the exotic accessible

**Paradise** is that place in my mind that means something beautiful and pleasing and evokes memories of the best moments of my life. The British Virgin Islands fit all those definitions for my wife, Ruby, and me. So when friends invited us as their guests on a Moorings 47-foot power cat charter, it wasn't a hard decision to make regardless of my upcoming back surgery.

Ruby and I began our love affair with the Virgin Islands in 1983, when with a group of young and upwardly mobile

corporate friends we picked the Virgin Islands for an extreme vacation destination. We went the monohull and canvas route back then, as we were all from Annapolis, the sailing capital of America and home of the Naval Academy.

This trip would be our fourth to the Virgin Islands, and our first cruising under power. After two monohull experiences we had already decided that for cruising and anchoring out,

By CHARLIE CUSTIN • PHOTOS BY RUBY CUSTIN



***This quiet anchorage at Norman Island is where my buddy began to believe that you really can get around the B.V.I. by dead reckoning.***

a catamaran offers the best of all possible worlds with its roominess, shallow draft and stability. Our extreme vacations have given way to comfort and ease of use.

We arrived at The Moorings nicely renovated Tortola base and settled in aboard the boat. That night my buddy, a meticulous planner, spent two hours charting our first leg to Norman Island. I kept suggesting, "Leave it to dead reckoning." We will come back to that later. The next morning we completed our briefing, which combined cruising options with an onboard briefing about

the operation and safety equipment of our cat.

No visit to the B.V.I.'s would be complete without Norman Island. All the stories of pirating in the Caribbean have some origin here. The Caves are a great snorkeling adventure. As you enter the dark, mysterious caves you immediately imagine pirates rowing ashore with chests of treasure. It doesn't matter if they actually hid them here or not, you will still look down through your mask in hope of finding an ancient coin.

After a couple of hours of exploring, we brought the boat



*Clockwise from left: "X" marks the spot at Pirates Bight; Pirates Bight Bar and restaurant is a popular stop on Norman Island; visiting shops at the Bitter End; nightfall at anchorage off Norman island; sometimes at Virgin Gorda, the souvenirs comes to you.*

around to The Bight and picked up one of the 110 buoys available for \$25 per night. At that price, a mooring is well worth the peace of mind it provides. Just like that it was cocktail time—I don't remember what the actual time of day was, but that is the thing about being in Paradise; cocktail hour comes when you feel like it. Off we went to the Pirates Bight Bar and Restaurant, famous for inventing the Bushwhacker, a libation that tastes like a chocolate milk shake but packs a powerful punch. I can't confirm that they invented the Bushwhacker, as their friendly manager Rupert Starkey claims, but it's a good story, as are the numerous tales of hidden treasure. As a planning note, "Pirates" is closed during August and September.

From Norman Island we headed northeast and entered Sir Francis Drake Channel, just about in the exact center of the B.V.I. In less than an hour we were pulling up to the Cooper

Island Beach Club, a full service stop with a good restaurant, a diving center and a beach that is about 30 feet from the bar. Morgana's Gift Shop is a good choice for island-made gifts and we enjoyed the grill's conch fritters and chicken roti.

My ever-cautious navigator was still plotting and planning for Bitter End, our next destination, but I could see he was weakening. Maybe my continuous whispering, "dead reckoning," in his ears was working, or maybe he began to realize that almost every island is both recognizable and visible from the last.

It was now past noon, and we wanted to make it to Bitter End by four. I highly recommend that you get to your overnight anchorages by 4 p.m. to get the best mooring buoys. We had all been to The Baths at Virgin Gorda before, so instead of stopping at this famous formation of boulders, we slowed and took in the sight from a quarter-mile offshore. If you only plan one trip to the



*Clockwise from above: A portion of The Baths at Virgin Gorda; Our power cat offered excellent water access with twin stairways astern; there really is a dive shop behind all those signs at Jost Van Dyke; the pool at Peter Island Resort.*

B.V.I., you must not miss The Baths. These gigantic boulders have formed caves and pools that you can swim or walk through. Something about the place makes you feel like a kid.

From The Baths it took us about 30 minutes to reach Mosquito Point and enter Virgin Gorda Sound. We made it in time to get a spot facing the Bitter End Yacht Club, which was easily the most well-rounded destination of our trip. This resort offers activities and services for every age group. There's sailing, a full-service spa, three beautiful beaches, a Vita course, archery, and movies on the beach every night. The biggest surprise at Bitter End may be the buffet, a totally gourmet experience (served Tuesdays and Thursdays) producing the best meal we had on our trip. The fresh tuna, swordfish and filet mignon on the grill was fabulous. With candlelit tables 10 feet from the water and the serenade of steel drums, it was Paradise all over again.




The Navigation Wars had taken a turn in my favor and my buddy had put away his charts in favor of GPS and binoculars. Every destination in the B.V.I. is navigable by sight except Anegada, the only flat island on our itinerary. There are two reasons to time your arrival to Anegada so that the sun is directly overhead. One is to help see the reefs that flank the entrance channel and the other is to take advantage of the world-class snorkeling. For great navigational advice, check out [nwmangum.com/NavToAnegada.html](http://nwmangum.com/NavToAnegada.html).

We came to Anegada for lobster and snorkeling and were not disappointed. Within minutes of mooring we hopped a tourist bus to the North Coast. The 30-minute ride dropped us at Loblolly Beach with its miles of beautiful beaches and huge coral heads, sea fans and marine life all within shouting distance of the beach.

Returning to our anchorage we faced the challenge of

choosing a place to eat. It wasn't hard. At one of the docks we found a local trimming down huge spiny lobsters at the end of his restaurant's pier. Not only had Wilfred Creque caught the lobster that day, but he was also the cook and owner of the "Lobster Trap." Our dockside, moonlit dinner was out of this world. The Lobster

had begun. Having heard so much of Peter Island's accommodations, we hoped to have a memorable last night there. Unfortunately, unless you get a room along with your dock space, one of the restaurants, the beach and pool are off-limits. The next morning, after turning in our vessel at The Moorings Tortola base, we boarded the ferry to St. Thomas. With a few hours to spare before our flight, we hired Allies Taxi to take us to Cuzzin's, a Caribbean restaurant famous for Creole cuisine, healthy portions and friendly service. The mango cheesecake was our final slice of Paradise, which, for Ruby and me at least, exists less than three hours from the U.S. 



*The flybridge of our Moorings power cat offered a great vantage point for dead reckoning through paradise.*

Trap has just one sitting. Make reservations early on VHF 16 or 284-495-9466.

We sighted Jost Van Dyke about an hour after leaving Anegada and headed for the eastern side of the island and Sandy Cay. Dropping anchor, we dinghied ashore to what looks like the original "Gilligan's Island." With its coconut palms and crystal clear reefs, it made a perfect picnic location. From there, it was a short hop to Great Harbour. The harbor is calm and well protected and home to the famous Foxy's bar. The town and its people are charming and unique.

Heading south from Jost Van Dyke we approached The Narrows, sighted St. Thomas and headed back into the Sir Francis Drake channel where our trip

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