

Media Kit: Overview

Nature's Little Secrets

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS – Known as “the land that time forgot,” the British Virgin Islands remains an undeveloped haven for natural treasures; unlike the glitz and glam of its Caribbean neighbours, what the destination lacks is its greatest asset – no high-rise hotels, no casinos and no crowds. The pure and indefinable beauty of the unspoiled land is the main attraction – verdant hillsides covered in ancient mahogany trees and cacti, pristine beaches kissed by Technicolor tides, a colourful aquarium of the world's most diverse sea life, extensive coral reefs responsible for claiming renowned wrecks as well as vast outbacks and wildlife sanctuaries sheltering endangered species. More than 60 islands form a distinct pattern around the Sir Frances Drake Channel – including the main island of Tortola, creating the backbone of the Channel and Virgin Gorda stretching to form the eastern border. Wild Jost Van Dyke lingers in the west with Anegada dangling remotely north and a series of smaller islands speckled in the south – the BVI reveals nature's little secrets in every cove.

Steeped in a history laden with Western discovery and swashbuckling pirates, including the infamous Blackbeard, the BVI merges a fabled past with blank pages to create future stories. Childhood fantasies of Robinson Crusoe and Swiss Family Robinson come to life, as ‘island roving’ becomes a way of life, discovering islands that appear to have remained untouched for centuries. With islands visible from nearly every vantage point, some appearing close enough to swim to, the BVI provides mystical, ever-changing scenery.

A mix of sun, clouds and the sheer height of peaks transform both colours of the sea and the hillsides from light to dark (and every shade in between) in a matter of seconds. Undoubtedly, the most breathtaking attraction is the more than 24 hectares of unmistakable waters of the BVI that leave witnesses speechless, only able to utter the word “wow” as the gradient shades of blue move from crystal clear to turquoise, teal, azure and cobalt.

Authentic in its Caribbean identity, the BVI is purely island with brightly-hued houses no taller than a palm tree, shops decorated with clapboard shutters, unpaved roads leading to secret hideaways, scents of orange blossom lingering in the morning air and wild roosters providing the morning wake up call. Only scarce touches of technology interrupt the calm. A new addition to Tortola, roads were just completed in the last two decades; prior to this, donkey-back was the preferred method of transportation. Likewise, Jost Van Dyke welcomed electricity for the first time in 1991.

Genuine in her hospitality, the BVI is a welcoming nation where permanent residents – called BVI Islanders – and visitors alike greet each other with a warm smile, a hearty handshake and a simple beep of the horn to say hello to passers by.

Here, whether a long-time friend or first-time guest, drinks are offered to the thirsty, johnny cakes (a small fried biscuit made from scratch) are offered to the hungry and rides are offered to those on foot.

Entrenched in this aquatic playground, the BVI is known for some of the best sailing, diving, snorkelling and fishing in the Caribbean. Acclaimed the “Sailing Capital of the World” with fair weather and constant winds, most islands are reached by line of sight navigation and contained within an 80 nautical kilometre radius. With both crewed and bareboat charters available (Tortola houses the largest bareboat fleet in the Caribbean totalling more than 700) these “floating rooms” bring to life the saying ‘discover your own island’ as hundreds of island ports are available for docking, each with a distinct personality, decisive

charm and hidden secrets. Norman Island offers a welcoming first stop for sailors at The Bight.

From Norman Island, boats drift slightly northwest to visit The Indians and drop anchor for some of the BVI's best snorkelling. Just east of Norman Island, Peter Island beckons boats with the most romantic beach in the BVI (despite its name) -- Dead Man's Bay. Continuing on a northeastern course, Virgin Gorda elegantly appears, her southwestern tip home to The Baths.

The many coves, bays, reefs and islets for mooring and anchorage also offer sightings of a new existence for divers and snorkellers. Just off the Coast of Salt Island lies the most famous dive site in the Caribbean – the Wreck of the Rhone – where the mighty iron-hulled steam-sailing vessel sank after encountering the Great Hurricane of 1867. In the south, Norman Island – Robert Louis Stevenson's inspiration for "Treasure Island" – lays claim to the legendary Caves and nearby Indians – a cluster of four rocks rising 15 meters above the shimmering surface of the sea.

Breaking world records – including the record for Atlantic Blue Marlin weighing 590 kilograms – the BVI offers the most diverse fishing as well as the most constant source of marine life in the Caribbean. From "secret" fishing holes tucked into shallow crevices to renowned deep water spots, the BVI provides fishermen fruitful waters to catch more than 160 varieties including Wahoo, dolphin, tuna, king fish, marlin, tarpon and bonefish. The "drowned" island of Anegada is particularly well known for the abundance of silvery bonefish wading off shore.

With a total population of just under 26,000, only a few islands in the BVI are actually inhabited. With hundreds of bays, the curvy Tortola offers simple pleasures on every side, from surfing Atlantic swells in the northern Apple and Josiah's Bay and embarking on sailing adventures in the South from Nanny Cay and Road Town Harbour to congregating among fellow yachtsmen in the West at the chic Soper's Hole and energetic Cane Garden Bay. The most populous island in the BVI, Tortola is the city centre and home to 80 percent of BVI Islanders.

Just 19 kilometres across the Channel lies Virgin Gorda, best known for her natural masterpieces, including the nearly vacant beaches of Savannah Bay, Long Bay, Mountain Trunk, Pond Bay and the most spectacular, The Baths. Mysterious in origin but thought to be the result of eons of evolution, large granite boulders are stacked and strewn across white sand beaches forming caverns and grottoes filled with shallow wading pools of the crystal sea. The tiny island of Jost Van Dyke exudes a 'lost in time' feel with undeveloped beaches and shack bars, punctuated by a lack of manmade amenities. Here, the beach is the main road and one of the most popular day excursions in the BVI.

The island of Anegada, remotely located in the Atlantic Ocean, beckons visitors to the isolated north with captivating sunsets, succulent lobster feasts, challenging sailing outside of the protective Sir Frances Drake Channel and a welcoming desolation in the form of 37 kilometres of untouched, uninterrupted beaches. As the third largest coral barrier reef in the World, Horse Shoe Reef has claimed more than 200 ships in its history making it a wreck divers underwater paradise.

Whether floating rooms or land-based abodes, the BVI offers a wide range of accommodations from modest inns and high-end hotels to private resorts encompassing entire islands, all unpretentious and complementing the natural island beauty. The Jewels of the BVI – a charming collection of intimate inns nestled in her hills and along her shores -- allow guests to fully appreciate Mother Nature in intimate rooms that don't distract.

Virgin Gorda hosts a handful of high-end resorts dedicated to the natural preserve of the island, including the first luxury resort and spa in the BVI, built in the 1960's by Laurence Rockefeller. Sitting on the

thinnest appendage of the Virgin and only accessible by boat is a resort that has come to be known as a haven for boaters embarking on an island-hopping holiday.

On Anegada, accommodations are quaint, operated by native islanders, whose family ties go back generations, including the only major hotel on the island with 20 rooms. This inn is small in size but big in hospitality as owners Lawrence and Lorraine Wheatley personally attend guests with gracious manners.

Jost Van Dyke offers a retreat for those who want absolutely nothing to do but sit and gaze at the panoramic views of White Bay. For the BVI guest who prefers accommodations that are a bit more primitive, this Jost Van Dyke campground features simplicity itself in equipped tents and cabins made of plywood.

For the ultimate in natural luxury, islands such as Peter, Guana and Necker whose resorts are the only development, epitomize privacy and quiet elegance with supple spa treatments, well-appointed accommodations and a sense of exclusivity as some house a maximum of only 32 guests at a time.

Infused with Caribbean flair and West Indian influences, authentic dining is a trademark of the BVI from the curried flavours of roti to the polenta-styled fungi made of cornmeal and okra. On Anegada, the main meat is the succulent Anegada Lobster, prepared in old oil drums converted to grills and is served for lunch underneath the thatch-roof of Big Bamboo and dinner at Anegada Reef Hotel where secret sauce flows freely, but the native island recipe does not. On Jost Van Dyke, the multi-generational owned Abe's by the Sea is known for satisfying sailors with exotic breeds of fish including wahoo and kingfish. The culinary hub of the BVI, Tortola is home to an accredited branch of the New England Culinary Institute, training some of the most innovative chefs in the world, including Alton Brown, creator and host of "Good Eats" on the Food Network. Here, students learn from the finest chefs in the Caribbean, working side by side at such renowned establishments as Butler's at The Inn at Essex and La Brioche.

The islands of the BVI are home to a rich wealth of coral atolls, verdant hillsides, endangered wildlife and a biodiversity of marine life rivalled only by the Amazon. Forming a colour palette of rosy reds, emerald greens and brilliant teals the greatest attraction for visitors to the islands are the islands themselves. Currently there are 20 national parks throughout the BVI totalling more than 736 hectares on both land and sea.

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