

Media Kit: Snorkeling & Diving

Nature's Little Secrets, Below

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS -- A necklace of lush islands rising from the Technicolor tides of the Caribbean Sea, the British Virgin Islands offers some of the most remarkable snorkelling and diving in the world, from mysterious caves in the south to breathtaking grottoes in the east. With more than 60 islands in the archipelago, including the main islands of Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke and Anegada, the BVI boasts a biodiversity of marine life rivalled only by the deep of the Amazon Rainforest.

Just off the Coast of Salt Island lies the most famous dive site in the Caribbean -- the Wreck of the Rhone. The RMS Rhone -- a mighty iron-hulled steam-sailing vessel, once over 92 meters long -- sank after encountering the Great Hurricane of 1867 and now lies broken in half along the sandy ocean bottom. Divers are eager to travel deep depths to pay respects to the perished crew and catch a glimpse of her new residents inside the bow -- colourful snapper, soldier fish and parrotfish.

Wreck diving is prominent in the BVI with both natural and man-made disasters promoting the vitality of the underwater life cycle. Near Cooper Island, divers encounter "wreck alley" -- a field of modern ships sunk by local dive shops and the BVI government to encourage the flourishing of sea creatures. Remote Anegada, is home to more than 500 vessels, victims of the extensive network of coral reefs surrounding the area, rumoured to lay at rest with treasures buried within.

In the south, Norman Island, Robert Louis Stevenson's inspiration for "Treasure Island," lays claim to the legendary Caves. Four vacuous tunnels, one extending to depths of 73 meters, provide the sensation of a night dive even in the shining sun. Nearby Angelfish Reef boasts waters so clear a diver maintains perfect visibility at depths of 28 meters.

The heart of snorkelling in the BVI is found amongst the tiny islands that form the southern boundary of the Sir Frances Drake Channel, boasting 11 of the most notable sites -- The Caves at Norman Island, Diamond Reef, Lee Bay and Towing Point at Great Camanoe, Dip n' Scrub and Shark Point at Scrub Island, Monkey Point and Grand Central Station on Guana Island, Brewers Bay East and West on Tortola and, finally, Great Dog Island.

Exotic marine life resides at The Indians -- a cluster of four rocks rising 15 meters above the surface of the sea, situated just off the northern shores of Norman Island. While the view looking up at the towering formations is overwhelming with barren appearance and cliff-like slopes, the true treasure of this area is found looking down.

Drifting 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 reciprocates curiosity, such as the violet Creole wrasse that seemingly appear from nowhere to envelope snorkellers and then quickly dash off again.

At Cooper Island in Manchioneel Bay, beds of sea grass hide little green turtles, while graceful sting and eagle rays graze above the blades. Nearby, a large Queen Conch bed is home to the nearly foot-long snails, buried deeply during the day, but awake at night to feed on the sea grass. At Cistern Pointe, photogenic ledges attract spectators with bright corals in rod and fan form.

The purest snorkelling site in the BVI is found at The Baths on Virgin Gorda, forming the eastern edge of the island necklace. Large granite boulders stacked and strewn across white sand beaches form caverns

and grottoes filled with shallow wading pools of the crystal sea.

The rock labyrinth, with some individual stones as large as three-story houses, welcomes snorkellers to discover coral, sponges and marine life encrusted on the underside of boulders.

Virgin Gorda offers several bays ideal for beginners, including Little Dix Bay. Both calm and sheltered, Little Dix Bay still affords amazing views and discoveries around the reef.

On Jost Van Dyke, novice snorkelers appreciate the remarkably calm waters of White Bay where moving shoals of fish try to elude hungry pelicans and streak through the water in the form of indigo blue stripes.

The BVI, consistently recognized as one of the most breathtaking destinations in the world and the undisputed Sailing Capital of the World, presents 60 islands for exploring its secrets. The BVI is rich with the storied islands of Norman, 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 BVI Tourist Board toll free: 800.835.8530 or visit www.bvitourism.com.