



Views don't come much better than this at BEYC.

What do you do for your summer holiday if you love sailing but your partner is less enthusiastic? Do you charter a boat one year and stay on dry land the next? Or do you do as Clive Loughlin and his wife Lesley did and find the perfect compromise in the BVIs?

Recognising the dilemma that confronts many skippers with reluctant wives, Nautilus Yachting has teamed up with Horizon Yacht Charters and the Bitter End Yacht Club to provide packages that combine a bareboat charter from Horizon's base at Nanny Cay on Tortola, followed by a land-based stay at the super-luxurious Bitter End Yacht Club on the next-door island of Virgin Gorda.

We landed at Beef Island airport on Tortola in late evening and left the air-conditioned chill of the aircraft behind as we emerged into a warm breeze.

Within minutes of landing, Horizon's Mikey had loaded our bags and was driving us to Nanny Cay where our boat *Sunshine*, a brand new Beneteau 323,

was waiting for us.

Since we'd been travelling all day, we just crashed out for the night and awoke to bright blue skies and a fresh breeze that made the heat a pleasure rather than a chore.

After breakfasting at The Genaker cafe in the marina we went to Horizon HQ, where we autographed a few

could use whenever we liked.

Georgina then took us to the chart room and gave us a very extensive briefing on the cruising area, plus tips for towing the dinghy and things to do with it while manoeuvring. This was our first visit to the Caribbean and our basic plan was to sail around Tortola anti-clockwise and visit as many of the 'must sees' that Georgina had mentioned as possible.

By midday we were ready to set off. *Sunshine* was all ours and Lesley squeaked as we set out into brisk conditions and headed due south for Peter Island just 4M away. The trade winds are almost invariably from

the east and are normally in the range 10-20kn, but today they were up a notch at 25kn. Our first tack took us across to



formalities and Georgina gave us a mobile phone, so they could contact us with strong wind warnings, and that we



PAINKILLER RECIPE

2 oz Pusser's® dark rum
1 oz cream of coconut
4 oz pineapple juice
1 oz orange juice

Shake or stir ingredients and pour over ice in a tall glass. Sprinkle freshly grated nutmeg on top and serve.

Twice as nice in the BVI'S

Great Harbour on Peter Island, before we headed back to Tortola and brought up east of Road Town, the commercial capital of the island and the harbour used by visiting cruise ships. Forget any illusions of skyscrapers and cosmopolitan chic. Road Town is small and the residents anxiously await the arrival of the island's first traffic light.

MOTORING IN

Our target for the first evening was Spanish Town on Virgin Gorda. This is some 12M due east of Nanny Cay and, because time was moving on, and in view of the distance still remaining to Spanish Town and the requirement to be in harbour by 1730, we switched on the engine and motorsailed the remaining distance. In this part of the world it gets dark quickly and changes from dusk to dark in

the space of just half an hour after 1900.

After showering on board



Sunset over Gorda Sound.

we ventured out with torch in hand, turned left out of the marina gates and followed the road to the Chez Bamboo restaurant that Georgina had recommended to us as good for traditional food. It was excellent; we shared a seafood platter and my lobster curry and Lesley's red snapper *en papillote* cost us US\$60 including wine.

We were keen to make an

early start, so we went to the harbour office at 0800 to settle up for the berth and for topping up our water tanks. We also bought brioche and other fresh food and then headed out for the short (1M) hop south to 'The Baths' – a weird collection of oversized rounded boulders that are one of the area's star attractions.

The Baths are so popular that you're not allowed to land your dinghy on the beach, but you can tie it to a floating line stretched between two buoys that are a short (40m) swim from the shore.

The Baths are well worth the small effort of visiting and we spent half an hour exploring the 'caves' formed by the piles of massive boulders, before buying a few beers and chilling out with our feet in the surf.

BOOKING UP

Nautilus Yachting acts as the UK agent for both Horizon and the BEYC and can handle the whole package including all flights. The company provided excellent information before the trip, including a detailed breakdown of all the booked flights etc. Everything worked like clockwork. We had a taster week with three days' charter followed by three days at the BEYC. This was an excellent holiday and did work well for us, but as with all good things it would have been better if we had longer both on the boat and at the BEYC. In June 2009 the Beneteau 323 from Nanny Cay Marina will cost £1,247 per week. The Bitter End Yacht Club costs £205 per person per night and BA flights to Antigua with connecting flights to Tortola cost £718/person, including tax. **Contact Nautilus Yachting on Tel: 01732 867445 Email: charter@nautilus-yachting.com.**

JOST VAN DYKE



CHARTS & PILOTS

Imray (www.imray.com) publishes a number of guides and charts. The pilot we used was *Grenada to the Virgin Islands*, Jacques Patuelli (2nd Ed), £30 – on which Imray offers a 10 per cent discount to readers of *Sailing Today* who quote this article. The whole area is covered by Imray chart A233, £17.50. The UKHO also has *Leisure Folio SC 5640 The Virgin Islands*, which covers both the British and US Virgin Islands in more detail (also available from Imray).

NAVIGATION

The lateral buoyage system in the BVIs follows the IALA Zone B standard whereas the UK and most of the rest of the world follows IALA Zone A.

In Zone B the memory jogging phrase most people use is 'Red Right Returning'. If you are red/green colour blind you probably wouldn't notice any difference, because the green 'starboards' are cans and the red 'ports' are cones, so you merely leave the cones to starboard as you are returning to a harbour, just as we do in the UK.

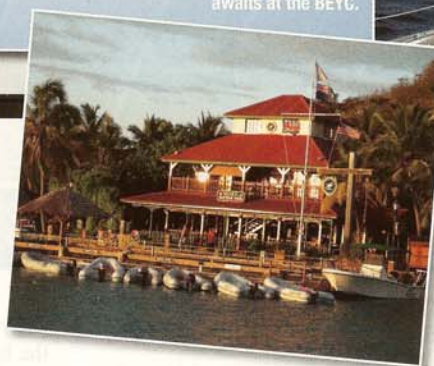
We could now reap our reward for yesterday's slog to windward. We slipped our mooring and unrolled the genoa for a downwind run due west and along the north coast

of Tortola. Beef Island lies just off the east end of Tortola and is connected to the main island by road. We decided to call in at Trellis Bay for lunch at 'The Last Resort' on Bellamy Cay, a small islet in the middle of the bay.

We pressed on west towards our next night time destination of the island Jost Van Dyke and took Georgina's recommended detour between Little and Great Camanoe to avoid a shallow patch in the main channel.

The north coast of Tortola is not blessed with any harbours to divert our attention and so we headed on further west towards Long Bay on Jost Van Dyke. Our plan was to dine at Foxy's Taboo, but unfortunately all 10 mooring buoys were taken and, because it was a bit exposed anyway, we continued round the coast for another mile and picked up a white mooring buoy in Little Harbour just as it was starting to get dark.

Right: Lesley hangs on as we head for Soper's Hole. Below: A warm welcome awaits at the BEYC.



We went ashore in the dinghy, the only one I have yet chartered that came with an 'all round white light' on a pole, and paid US\$25 to the staff at the deserted Harris' Place and continued our stroll to the crowded Sidney's 'Peace and Love'. We hadn't booked and when we arrived rather late all their fresh lobster was gone, but they were still able to serve us with delicious barbecued chicken.

The wind in the harbour is diverted by the hillsides and when we arrived the wind was blowing in from the south, but in the course of the night it strengthened and came at us from the opposite direction. I was glad to be on a mooring.

By the morning the wind had turned again and we headed out into 20kn winds with 25kn gusts. With one reef

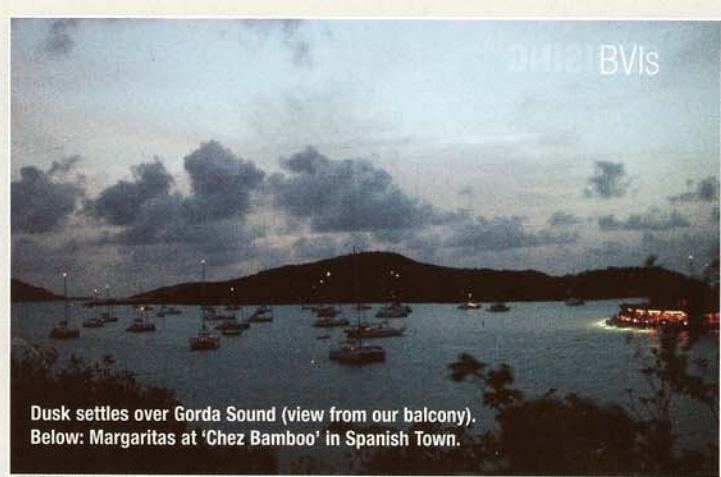
in the main and two thirds of the genoa, we made short work of crossing the 4M channel before ducking in to Soper's Hole, which is widely regarded as a good hurricane safe haven.

We really liked Soper's Hole. It is bright and colourful with good facilities for servicing yachts and their hard working crews. We took one of the mooring buoys in the bay and then dinghied to the dockside. The marina office waived our offer of payment, because we were only planning to stay for a few hours, and we headed straight for Pusser's Landing (of Pusser's rum fame) for burger, fries and Painkillers, plus a bit of retail therapy in the store. (Eat before you shop to get useful discount vouchers.)

Pusser's Rum claims the Painkiller is 'The drink of the BVI'. We completely agree and dedicated research has brought us to the conclusion that it also happens to be the best drink on the planet. The freshly grated nutmeg is key, so don't even think about



Sunshine on one of the National Park's mooring buoys at 'The Baths'.



Dusk settles over Gorda Sound (view from our balcony).
Below: Margaritas at 'Chez Bamboo' in Spanish Town.



leaving it out.

Refreshed by this dose of cosmopolitan chic we pressed on, turning left at Frenchman's Cay and motor sailing towards our final night's destination of Norman Island.

En route we came to Pelican Island and the impressive 'Indians'. We picked up one of the red buoys that were sited perilously close to the jagged rocks, but my fears regarding swinging circles were allayed after I'd donned snorkel and goggles and headed out for an inspection. Then we motored the 1M into The Bight on Norman Island and picked up one of the 40-odd mooring buoys provided by the Pirates Bight restaurant on the beach at the head of the bay. We chose to eat on board and paid our US\$25 to the lady in the launch that buzzed around the bay carrying provisions for sale. The bay is also home to the two-masted schooner *William Thornton II*, which also serves meals – but you have to book.

Norman Island is just 2M east of the island of St John,

which is part of the US Virgin Islands. On a longer holiday it would be easy to visit St John and St Thomas beyond, but as these are US territories you would have to go through US Customs. We had to get the boat back before midday, so we set off early and sailed the 5M back to Nanny Cay.

After clearing ourselves off *Sunshine*, Mikey drove us to the ferry dock in Trellis Bay – home to the Aragorn Craft Studios and an internet café with terrific sandwiches – I had delicious smoked wahoo.

ON THE FERRY

The Bitter End can only be reached by sea and the distance from Trellis Bay on Tortola to the Bitter End on Virgin Gorda is about 12M. The ferry motored slowly out of the bay before the captain switched to 20kn of turbo drive, leaving rainbows of spray in our wake as we made the transition from charter yacht to shore-based pampering.

We had said "Wow" on first landing at the dock and we said triple "Wow" when we took

in our cabin, its verandah with hammock and quite simply the most fantastic view I've ever had from a hotel bedroom.

On the first night we went on Captain Kinto's Champagne Cruise, which pottered around the mile wide bay accompanied by Caribbean rap. David Vendler and his multinational family, composed of his wife Xianchun and children Killian and Céline, were on their second visit and remarked that Bitter End was the only holiday location they had ever returned to.

The Bitter End Yacht Club has over 100 boats of varying descriptions that guests can take out; these are mainly dinghies. I learned to sail in a Laser, but it was many years since I had last been dinghy sailing. I had never sailed a cat and the chance to have a go in warm waters in a Hobie Wave was too good to miss.

I'd forgotten how much fun you can have in a dinghy and the »

WEATHER

The weather in the BVI is driven by the trade winds, which blow 24 hours per day and give constant cooling breezes of 10-20kn (except during July and August when it can get rather sticky).

In the winter the air temperature is a delightful 22-28°C, dropping a few degrees at night. The summer months are a bit hotter at 26-31°C. The sea temperature is also pretty steady, generally within a degree or two of 28°C.

Brief intense rain showers can come at any time but are usually followed by brilliant sunshine.

The hurricane season officially runs through summer to the end of November with peak activity in September.

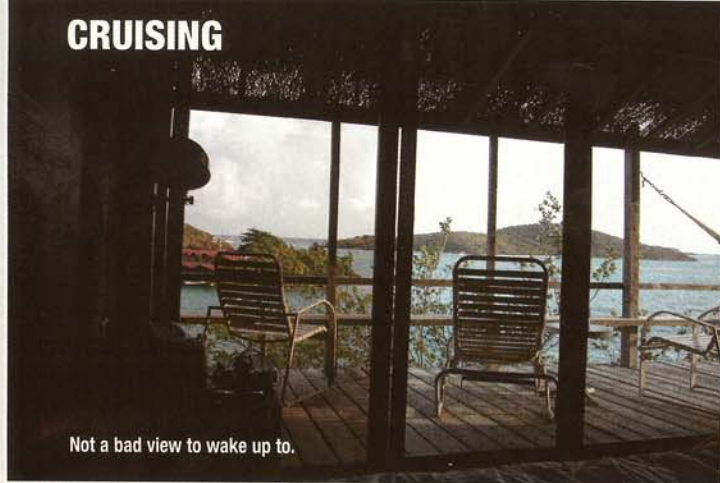
CURRENCY

The US dollar is the preferred currency. We did get some Eastern Caribbean dollars for Antigua but I think we would have been OK with just US dollars.

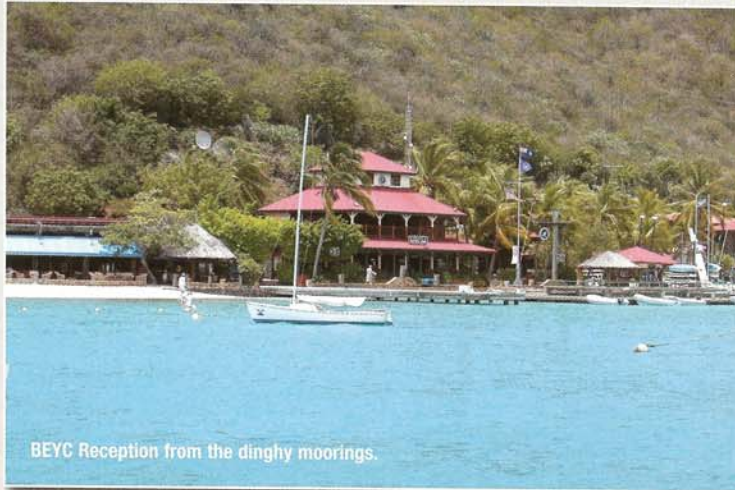
As a general rule we found that everything cost about the same as you would expect to pay in the UK.



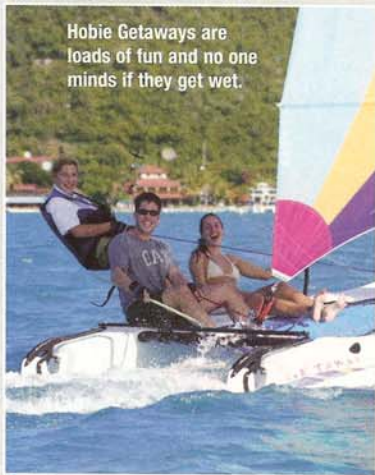
CRUISING



Not a bad view to wake up to.



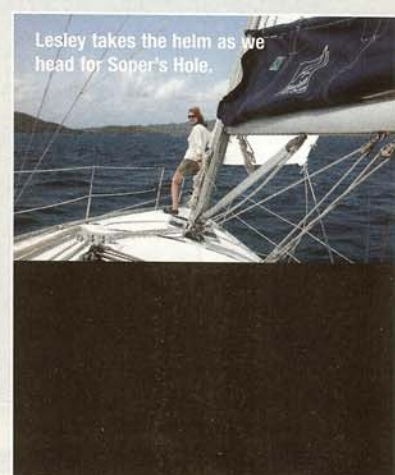
BEYC Reception from the dinghy moorings.



Hobie Getaways are loads of fun and no one minds if they get wet.



Comfortable seclusion while we soak up the view.



Lesley takes the helm as we head for Soper's Hole.

Hobie was so fast and mainly easy to control. I was soon flying around the bay with spray shooting up through the trampoline deck. Any feelings of self-congratulation were premature, because it was not long before my feet got tangled up in the mainsheet during a gybe and I capsized, but I was quite pleased to be able to get her upright again without any assistance.

That afternoon I bumped into David and he suggested we take out a Rhodes 19. Like me, David had sailed Lasers a while back, but wanted to be shown how to rig and handle a boat with a jib.

David, Xianchun, Céline and I were taken out in a launch and we soon had the boat rigged and ready for action. Once we'd all settled down, Céline took the helm and I handled the mainsheet, so I could be ready to de-power the sail in the gusts. Céline took to helming like a pro and quickly got the hang of it and started to enjoy the tilting over.

While I'd been out on the water having fun with the Vendlers, Lesley was relishing just chilling out, swimming in the 'safe swim area', walking around the estate looking at humming birds and the colourful tropical vegetation and soaking up the rays on the beach loungers.

For her it was great to be able to relax, knowing that her time was her own without the element of stress that she still sometimes feels when we're out sailing together.

Afternoon segued effortlessly into evening and an excellent candlelit dinner just yards from the surf before we returned to our verandah to watch the stars and anchor lights of the cruising yachts moored or anchored in the sound. The wonderful thing about the Bitter End Yacht

Club is the variety of activities in which you can take part, including PADI dive training and US Sailing Association tuition (similar to our RYA). Or you can simply take out any of their boats, kayaks or windsurfers, for as long as

you like and at no extra charge. They even have YachtShots zipping around taking flattering action photos of your endeavours. But you don't need to do the activities to enjoy the BEYC. It's a

wonderful place to chill out and enjoy the warm sun, with cooling breezes guaranteed, and crystal clear multi-chromatic seas and the gentle ruffle of waves capsizing on the fine sandy beaches.

In the evenings we would walk past the big game fishing boats with their underwater lights attracting an aquarium

of fish life and sometimes stop at The Pub where reggae music filled the air.

The whole idea of spending some days on a yacht charter followed by days on shore really worked for us and meant that Lesley had the shore bit to look forward to while we were on board the boat. For me it was a win-win situation. I loved the sailing and exploring new areas, but the days spent at the BEYC allowed me to turn back the clock and have loads of fun in all sorts of different dinghies.

We loved every moment at the BEYC, but the most abiding memory is of waking up each day and looking out towards the surrounding islands with our hammock gently rocking in the breeze.

I am normally ready to go home by the end of a holiday, but this time it was different. As the ferry pulled away from the jetty at Bitter End, both Lesley and I found ourselves looking back and wishing we could stay.



Captain Kinto in the groove.