

Bare-Boating in the British Virgin Islands – a New Kind of Working Vacation

Well, it's now official. The first SSYC BVI Regatta is over, though not forgotten, at least not until the last Caribbean tan dissolves in our chilly Northwest rain. After six months of planning and hours of briefings from veteran BVI explorer Bob McClure, our band of intrepid skippers and 40 Seattle sailors embarked for ten days in the unspoiled British Virgin Islands, ready to crew seven yachts on the Caribbean seas.

Some travelers arrived early to enjoy St. Thomas, San Juan and Tortola for a few days. Others skidded into Hodge Creek barely in time to claim their berth. Still others dallied at the Tamarind Club before descending on the marina and overrunning Sunsail's four yachts and three catamarans they would call home for the next week.

That first day at port was a flurry of provisioning, fueling, partying and boat hopping. Who will forget the thirsty fuel tank that ordered water? Or the winsome virgin sacrifice who christened the trip with a tumble into the drink? The scent of bilge and barbecue sauce blended into a questionable perfume that scented the air, while Pussers Painkiller rum filled nearly every cup, ensuring a numbness that bordered on delirium.

With night fall, revelry ceased until the only sounds in the sleepy harbor were the soft slap of waves against fiberglass and the eerie creak of rigging from 180 masts. And overhead millions of stars silently wheeled across the indigo sky.

It's days like these that keep us on the seas

Come morning the exodus began, each skipper charting their own itinerary. The boats were barely out of port when the adventures began. Judy on the Solitaire reported engine failure, so Joe on the Fearless gallantly rendered assistance until the marina engineer arrived.

Meanwhile, Mood Indigo under William's command went pirating. The intrepid crew snorkeled ashore to Sandy Cay off the coast of Jost vanDyk, where local natives insist they claim a veritable treasure trove of Sam Adams, courtesy of the Boston Beer Company's Annual Bash. The weighty cooler nearly sank the tender, but it was worth the risk. The crew counted their loot with one and one-half renditions of "100 Bottles of Beer on the Wall" and didn't have to buy another bottle for the entire trip!

There are too many stories to fit in this small article – tales of generosity and comradeship, romance and ridiculousness, heroism and hedonism. But without question, the trip's most romantic moment was when Alan popped the question to Wendy on a beautiful white sand beach in front of Foxy's, then took her dancing to a thrumming reggae band.

After a week of sailing and sunning under the dazzling Caribbean blue sky, the boats docked back in Hodge Creek. Some sailors went on to sail other islands, others bid adieu to the islands and straggled back to overcast Seattle to pick up their other life. But don't be surprised if you see your mates occasionally drift off, a wistful smile on their lips, humming a Jimmy Buffet tune.

Will we do it again? According to William Shadbolt, who conceived and planned the excursion, it was an even bigger success than he expected. "I thought maybe we'd have 20 people and maybe three or four boats. The actual response was phenomenal."

Trips are already being planned to bare boat in the Greek Islands, French Polynesia and the Spanish Coast, because it's days like these that keep us on the seas.