

Island fling

Isolated anchorages, tropical bays and superb service aboard the sailing yacht *Tenacious* make for the perfect BVI charter
Frances Howorth





We're CREAMING along, our POWERFUL wake carving a white trail across the DEEP BLUE water

There's an ineluctable magic to waking up aboard a fine sailing yacht in a memorable location. Life just doesn't get any better than lying in bed listening to the Caribbean sea lap against the hull of *Tenacious*, a beautiful 35-metre sloop built to the designs of Ted Hood and Andrew Winch. We are at anchor off Jost Van Dyke, one link in the chain of the British Virgin Islands. With a low morning sun outside and the soothing sound of the sea, it is tempting to linger in the supremely comfortable master stateroom but, with private access to the aft deck we are soon outside enjoying the energising sea air. It's still early but the air is already warm; the day is shaping up nicely. Soon, Captain Duncan Hipkin and his young and enthusiastic crew are buzzing about attentively. There's a spring in their step and they bubble with enthusiasm as they go about their tasks.

We sailed here the previous evening from Soper's Hole at the western end of Tortola, where we boarded *Tenacious*. Lisa, our wonderful chef, cooked us a barbecue steak dinner, served impeccably in the yacht's capacious cockpit. With shaded seating for eight at two tables this is the perfect place for a meal.

A breakfast of fresh fruit and fabulous pastries sets us up for the morning's activity, a hike across the island to the 'bubbly pools' on the north coast. We begin our trek at Foxy's Taboo, a bar right down on the shoreline in Diamond Cay. Duncan leads the way on an easy walk along the beach, past the mangrove trees. Going over the hill, through a copse of machineel, we come to a U-shaped pool. Here, when the conditions are right, the Atlantic swell crashes through the small gaps in the rock, bubbling and frothing into a creamy lather of frenzied sea water.

After a lazy afternoon, we up anchor and with all sails set we are soon creaming along at a steady nine knots, our powerful wake carving a broad white trail across the deep blue water. We are bound for Norman Island and an anchorage called the Bight. Often referred to as Treasure Island, Norman Island was mentioned in a letter written in 1750 as being the location of buried treasure that had been taken from the Spanish galleon *Nuestra Señora*.

"Fancy a drink ashore before dinner?" asks Duncan. He recommends we try either the *Willy T* – a 28-metre replica of a topsail schooner and now a floating bar and restaurant at anchor in the bay – or Pirates Bight at the top of the sandy bay where we can sup a real Caribbean rum punch. We choose the latter, but only after we have been for an energetic walk across the island. There are no cars on the island and, save for the bar on the beach, no buildings either.

We dine on *Tenacious's* foredeck on casual, cushioned seating under a generous awning. This daytime sun-trap is transformed into an alfresco dining area for eight guests with a portable table. It is early to bed and early to rise in the Caribbean – the mornings out here are too good to waste sleeping.

One of the greatest joys of sailing in the BVIs is the ability to jump over the side in most anchorages, sink below the surface, and then with nothing more than a snorkel, mask and a pair of fins, watch in awe as a whole new world unfolds. And one of the most enjoyable delights of sailing aboard a yacht like *Tenacious* is being spoiled rotten by her ever-attentive crew, who watch over us while we swim and stand by with white fluffy towels for the moment we step out of the water.

The crystal-clear and warm waters round our yacht at Norman Island are perfect for an early-morning dip.

Previous pages: Green Cay off Jost Van Dyke
Below: *Tenacious* sailing upwind in the Sir Francis Drake Channel.
Below: Duncan, the captain, and his partner chief stewardess Lisa.
Bottom: Tortola.



We take *Tenacious's* tender for a short trip across to the Indians. This small outcrop of rocks is an excellent beginners' dive site and a wonderful spot for snorkelling. Equally fun are the caves on Norman Island, where it's easy to swim inside and admire the myriad fish. We sample both locations before returning to the yacht for a wonderful breakfast.

The yacht's accommodation is laid out perfectly for charter. Designed by David Easton, the interior is simple, yet stylish and comfortable. The light wood finishes ensure it never feels dark below and, given it's size, there are a surprising number of private nooks and crannies where you can hide away for a moment's reflection on your own. The den to starboard is a particular favourite of ours; a quiet area where we can relax on the soft leather sofa and read, watch TV, play games or work on our laptops. Doors lead off from here to the winding stairway and concealed day head, as well as to the dining room. Soft lighting, a leather bench along the wall and cushioned chairs provide a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere that avoids the stiff formality of some yachts' dining areas.

The exterior is spacious and well set up for fun in the sun or shade. There are two outdoor eating areas, along with multiple spots in which to read, top up that golden tan or just take a nap. Forward of the cockpit in the raised pilothouse is the spacious full-width saloon with cocktail tables, casual upholstered chairs, a full entertainment system, and a concealed helm station. The area is filled with natural light from the large windows, while offering a spectacular 180° view of the surrounding seascape.

The next day, after breakfast, we leave *Tenacious* tucked inside the pretty Little Harbour anchorage on Peter Island and head off to the Peter Island Resort. There we are greeted by the general manager for a tour of the property and its private villas. The six-bedroom Falcons' Nest is the most magnificent of the villas, located high on the hill with stunning views over the water. The facilities, though land based of course, remind us of a superyacht, because you get your own

private chef, valet, chauffeured vehicle and housekeeper. The deck area boasts a private infinity pool, waterfall, plunge pool and open air hot-tub – all of which look out to sea.

On our return we are greeted by an old seafaring tradition kept alive by the crew of *Tenacious* and the blessing of the owner, who has a passion for all things that go bang. Each afternoon, the yacht's engineer carefully combines tinfoil, gunpowder and ingenuity with a beautiful bronze cannon mounted on the leeward side of the yacht. Then, as the sun slowly sets, Captain Duncan lights the fuse and the deckhand stands by to lower the ensign as the cannon lets out its mighty roar. This is the signal for our stewardess to serve us a cocktail. It's a naval tradition worth continuing because the mojitos aboard *Tenacious* are five-star.

Before leaving our Little Harbour anchorage next day, I am keen to visit an old friend lying underwater off the neighbouring Salt Island. The wreck of the Royal Mail Steamer *Rhone* lies in two parts, having been destroyed in a hurricane that swept through the islands in October 1887. The deeper part lies in 25 metres and is a splendid dive for the moderately experienced diver. It was used as the backdrop to the eighties movie *The Deep*.

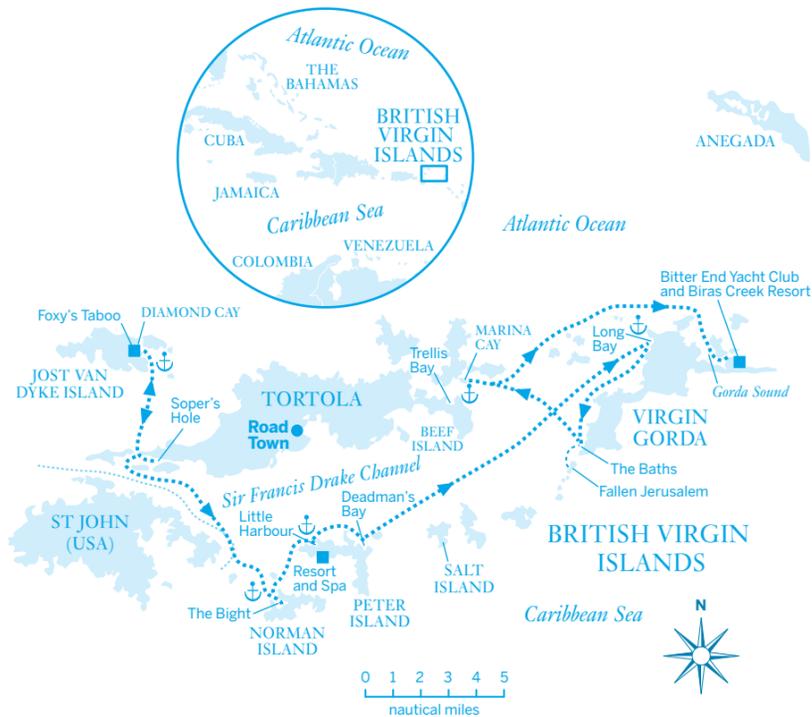
A boat belonging to Blue Water Divers collects me from *Tenacious* for a two-tank dive. I dive the deeper bow section first, and then the stern section complete with ship's boilers and massive propellers. During my dive I am lucky enough to see turtles, huge lobsters, grouper, large yellowtail snapper and many more beautiful tropical fish.

While I am diving, Michael relaxes on deck and watches our crew get ready for what turns out to be a stonking sail to windward up the Sir Francis Drake Channel. We start in Deadman's Bay off Peter Island and finish in Long Bay off Virgin Gorda. The next day we motor *Tenacious* down to the Baths, a scenic if somewhat touristy spot. The crew lead us along cave-like trails that wind their way through, under and between massive fallen boulders. To enjoy the beauty of



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Photo: Danuta Delmonet Creative / Alamy



Above: RMS *Rhone* is a perfect spot for diving. Far left: *Tenacious's* happy crew made for an exceptional charter. Left: The *Willy T*, a drinking institution in the Bight on Norman Island.



Charter facts
 Length: 35.00m
 (114ft 10in)
 Beam: 8.38m (27ft 6in)
 Guests: 8, Crew: 5
 Charter rate: \$60,000pw
 Contact: Fraser Yachts
 www.fraseryachts.com

*One of the JOYS of sailing aboard
 Tenacious is being SPOILED rotten
 by her ATTENTIVE crew*



Above: Looking towards Deadman's Bay from the resort at Peter Island.
Right: Saba Rock in North Channel.
Facing page, from the top:
 A Peter Island pelican;
 goats on Jost Van Dyke; the fuel dock on Marina Cay; the sailing cruise ship *Windstar* slips silently westwards at sunset; deckhand Will Morris admiring the shipwrecked *Lady Vagabond*.



this natural phenomenon in peace and quiet you need to arrive early and snorkel amongst the rocks offshore when it gets busy on land.

Michael's interest is piqued by the sight of *Lady Vagabond*, a wrecked freighter high up on the nearby rocks of Fallen Jerusalem. The crew of our yacht are equally intrigued and so we set off in the tender. Boys will be boys, so it is not long before they clamber on board and pose for photographs.

That evening we sail towards Trellis Bay at the eastern end of Tortola and anchor off Marina Cay, where we go diving again as darkness falls. Dinner afterwards on deck is lobster. Served with corn dribbling in a spicy ginger and coriander butter and crunchy potato wedges, it is gloriously simple food, perfectly cooked.

One of the key things that distinguishes one charter yacht from another is the standard of food served on board. It is quite possible to charter a superyacht with every amenity and water toy known to man, but if the food is not up to scratch, the charter can fall flat. It's a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of the chef, but over the past few days we've had the privilege of sampling some of the finest foods we have ever been served aboard a charter yacht.

Before leaving the tiny Marina Cay, we go snorkelling. The water is calm, the wind slight and on the surface

turtles bask in the sun. We sail north and east towards Gorda Sound on Virgin Gorda, which in anybody's language is a superyacht spotter's paradise. Dominating the skyline is the 119-metre Blohm & Voss *Yacht A*, and in close attendance are *Amnesia*, *Big Aron*, *Dream*, *Hilarius*, *Never Enough*, *My Little Violet*, *Harle*, *Parsifal III*, *Lady Georgina*, *Odessa*, *Tigre d'Or* and *Resolute*.

When the Yacht Club Costa Smeralda opens, the sound will become more attractive still. With a luxurious clubhouse and secure marina for yachts from 30 to 100 metres, and surrounded by a quaint village complete with upmarket boutiques, fine dining and private villas, the club will be a magnet for visiting yachts. Membership will also include access to the Oil Nut Bay Club and use of the Biras Creek Resort facilities.

It is here that we leave *Tenacious*, our sadness at disembarking from such a wonderful yacht and crew offset by the prospect of a few days at the Bitter End Yacht Club Resort. The manager, Mary Jo Ryan, shows us to our beachfront villa in one of the newly refurbished properties. With countless sailboards, Optimist dinghies and Hobie-cats for guests to use, it's the perfect place for families who enjoy watersports, and a fine way for us to postpone easing ourselves back into the reality of a bleak British winter. Waking up without the sound of water lapping against *Tenacious's* pristine topsides will never be the same again. **SYW**

