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By Land or by Sea

Unwrap the flavor of the British Virgin Islands, bite by bite. BY KRISTY ALPERT

Island Fare:
(Left to right)
Norman Island
caves, the Moorings,
a couple at Soggy
Dollar, shoppes at
Road Town, and
Rosewood Little
Dir Bay Sugar Mill

Raw Bar
PHOTOS: © BRITISH
VIRGIN ISLANDS
TOURIST BOARD & FILM
COMMISSION

It isn't the stars or even the winds that direct boats toward their destinations as the months ease into autumn in the British Virgin Islands; instead, captains, crew and passengers all sail with noses high in the air, ready to drop anchor when hunger strikes.

Sailing by scent is far superior to any map or GPS while in the British Virgin Islands during November, as the annual Food Fête ignites the islands with the enticing aromas of culinary celebrations and gastronomic gatherings. Visitors arrive barefoot on Norman Island to dine and dance in the warm sands during the Barefoot Gourmet Soirée before embarking on a

crustacean-centric excursion toward Anegada for the annual Anegada Lobster Festival. The entire month is dedicated to the foods and personalities that bring flavor to the British Virgin Islands — when tourists and locals dine together beneath the sun or sip icy cocktails around beachside bonfires to savor the best of the BVI. However, the islands act as a proverbial feast throughout the entire year for professionals looking to serve up business with a side of pleasure with their accompanying friends and family.

More than 60 islands make up the BVI, where traveling by boat proves the best way to experience the islands, islets, rocks and cays that comprise this

INFO TO GO

With no direct flights from the United States to the BVI, many visitors arrive via Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, Antigua or St. Maarten. There are three airports throughout the islands, with the major airport on Tortola (EIS) welcoming 10 airlines to its gates. From there, visitors can book water taxis, charter boats or board ferries to the other islands. Flights to Virgin Gorda (VIJ) and Anegada (NGD) also arrive daily. Most resorts offer ferry service or chartered flights from Tortola for arrivals earlier than 4 p.m. Keep in mind many resorts and businesses close during the rainy season (typically Aug. 15–Oct. 1), and visibility for snorkeling and scuba diving doesn't clear up until the early winter months.



British Overseas Territory. English is the predominant language and the U.S. dollar is the official currency — despite the required passports for U.S. travelers — and although driving is done on the left side of the road, renting a car is a breeze for travelers staying on the islands less than 30 days. Taxis, water taxis, shuttles and ferries make it easy for guests to navigate the islands and roads without ever getting behind the wheel, and charter boats are readily available for groups to sail with or without a skipper and crew during their time on the islands.

Island hopping is a rite of passage in the BVI. Companies like The Moorings BVI and MarineMax Vacations set the standard for chartered trips through the islands, often stopping on Peter Island to sample Jean Kelley's famous recipe for coconut French toast or dropping anchor at Norman Island to explore the caves where the infamous pirate Blackbeard

once stored his treasure. There's always an island in view from *any* point on *any* of the islands. It's simply a matter of steering and sailing to arrive and discover something new, such as the uninhabited beaches of Deadman's Chest Island, the celebrated swim-in Soggy Dollar Bar on Jost Van Dyke (home of the original Painkiller rum cocktail) or the vibrant flamingos who make their home on Necker Island.

Even some of the BVI's most celebrated hotels encourage guests to get out on the water with inviting packages, such as the Stay & Sail experience at Rosewood Little Dix Bay, where guests can soak in the best of the islands by land and by sea. This Virgin Gorda resort was founded by conservationist Laurance Rockefeller more than half a century ago, and it only recently reopened after an extensive four-year renovation and redesign. The resort remains one of the leading examples of eco-

LODGING

Oil Nut Bay

Arriving by boat or helicopter is just the start to the adventures at this exclusive resort. Villas can sleep up to 12 guests, while the expansive suites offer sweeping views over the bay.

Virgin Gorda
\$\$\$\$

Rosewood Little Dix Bay

Despite having set the standard for eco-friendly luxury, this celebrated resort raised the bar once again when it reopened after a four-year redesign. The rooms are exquisite and the experience is unparalleled.

Lee Road, Spanish Town, Virgin Gorda
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Scrub Island Resort, Spa & Marina

Part of Marriott's Autograph Collection, this character-rich private-island resort dedicates itself to telling the story of the land. Only accessible by boat or helicopter, the resort features 52 accommodation options ranging from villas to suites.

Scrub Island
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DINING

CocoMaya

Don't let the thatched roof or swing-up bar fool you; CocoMaya is an effortlessly chic dining spot along the Sir Francis Drake Channel. This unassuming yet upscale beachside restaurant serves Latin-Asian fusion cuisine alongside a wine list with more than 140 offerings.

Spanish Town, Virgin Gorda
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Foxy's Tamarind Bar

The strong drinks and chill vibe at this beach bar have attracted many celebrities and dignitaries over the years. Come on Friday and Saturday nights when Foxy himself often gets behind the grill for the weekly barbecue dinners.

Great Harbour, Jost Van Dyke
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Nova Restaurant

Only accessible by helicopter or boat, Oil Nut Bay's exclusive restaurant offers over-the-water dining with chic lounge options and over-water hammocks for after-dinner relaxing. Begin with confit duck nachos before feasting on whole grilled lobster or tender risotto.

Oil Nut Bay, Virgin Gorda
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OIL NUT BAY RESORT IS
ACCESSIBLE BY BOAT OR
HELICOPTER, WHICH
BREATHES AN AIR OF
EXCLUSIVITY THROUGHOUT
THE 400-ACRE PROPERTY
AND CREATES AMPLE
OPPORTUNITIES FOR
EXPLORING BOTH ABOVE AND
BELOW THE SHORELINE.

Piece of Paradise:
Oil Nut Bay resort on
Virgin Gorda

PHOTO: © OIL NUT BAY



In the Swim:
Snorkeling and diving at the caves at Norman Island

luxury. Its 81 accommodation options, tucked among 500 acres of private beaches and native flora and fauna, provide the perfect place to reunite with friends and family after a day at the office or on the water. Private butlers, multiple fitness programs and an award-winning spa and children's center ensure visitors are well taken care of during their time at the resort, while a variety of meeting spaces offer the option of doing business on site to minimize time away from each other. Locally inspired cuisine is always on the menu at the resort's renowned Sugar Mill restaurant, set within an open-air stone mill overlooking the bay. Another option, beachfront dining, delivers a twist on farm-to-table as fresh catches of the day and handcrafted cocktails appear on the menus. The resort's latest addition, the 57-foot catamaran *Vision*, is available for half-day sailings, sunset cruises or even multiday immersive experiences.

Just on the other side of Virgin Gorda, guests of the Oil Nut Bay resort feast on a menu of watersports, where jet ski rentals, fishing charters and kiteboarding lessons only begin the list of ways to spend time on the water. The resort is accessible by boat or helicopter, which breathes an air of exclusivity throughout the 400-acre property and creates ample opportunities for exploring both above and below the shoreline. The shipwrecks just beyond the resort's edge teem with treasures to be discovered, and it's not uncommon to spend the day snorkeling with eagle rays and sea turtles in the protected waters just off the hotel's beach. Further inland,

the resort's 117 home sites can accommodate multigenerational families and couples with options ranging from six-bedroom private villas to one-bedroom cliff-side suites overlooking the ocean. Private chefs can prepare meals-to-order en suite, but the ambience of the resort's chic lounge and restaurant, Nova, plays a vital role in the dining experience. Diners can lounge on the overwater hammocks or daybeds after indulging in multicourse meals paired with delectable wines, or sway to the sounds of live jazz as the sun dips below the Eustatia Sound barrier reef.

A full moon is a special occasion in the BVI, and the many lively moonlight parties throughout the islands provide the perfect backdrop to celebrate this monthly alignment. The first full-moon party was held in 1989 at the legendary Bombas Shack; but after the beloved surf shack was shattered by hurricanes Irma and Maria, other restaurants and bars throughout the islands began adopting the tradition. Today there are countless options for celebrating beneath the glow of the full moon. The family-friendly celebration at Trellis Bay on Beef

Island, one of the most popular, features costumed *moko jumbies* — local stilt dancers — performing alongside fire dancers to calypso music among a night market featuring local artisans and Caribbean fare. Foxy's Tamarind Bar on Jost Van Dyke proves a favorite of sailors as well as celebrities (Kenny Chesney is a fan), and its full-moon parties always include Foxy's famous barbecue to kick things off. The expats come to Paradise Club in Cane Garden Bay for this monthly fete, where the party doesn't even begin until 10 p.m. for an adults-oriented night of dancing barefoot beneath the moon, glowsticks included.

The scene is a bit more subdued during the day at all the full-moon venues, especially at Trellis Bay, where the vibrant artist colony becomes a shopper's paradise for securing one-of-a-kind artwork or handcrafted items. A stroll along Waterfront Road or Main Street in Road Town on Tortola offers another chance for shopping local while in the BVI's capital city, where boutique jewelry stores stand next to gluten-free bakeries and a mini-village of crafters and artisans. The johnnycakes at Midtown Restaurant are rated among the best in the islands by locals, but you won't likely find two islanders who would agree on any one restaurant serving the best fish and fungi, the national dish of the BVI.

Seasoned with 60 unique islands and peppered with a vibrant culture, the British Virgin Islands serve up a flavor all their own, and like all of the world's greatest dishes, these islands are best enjoyed with friends and family.