



Cat's Pause

Aboard the right charter, you can find peaceful pockets in the tourist-drenched Virgin Islands. We found a secluded beach on Virgin Gorda (above), a quiet harbor on Jost Van Dyke (right) and a shaded view from the shore of Anegada during a weeklong stay on *Angel Glow*. Her spinnaker was designed by the owner's wife, whose abstract paintings grace the yacht's interior.



Finding Solitude
in the Virgins
Aboard The
Cruising Multihull
Angel Glow

By Kim Kavin

Photography By
Peter Frederiksen



Tracking the 200 or so endangered rock iguanas that survive beneath Anegada's loblolly tree roots takes the kind of patience that comes only with solitude. You can follow the trail of a 4-foot lizard across the 3-mile-wide island the entire day without catching a glimpse. A thorough effort to find one of the reptiles requires foraging for nutmeg and cactus berries to tempt them out of hiding, stepping gently atop the wobbly limestone chunks at the base of the trees and keeping a peripheral watch for wild goats, cats and sheep. Successful or not, you will find yourself alone in a place few humans have laid a toe, with warm sun embracing your shoulders and a constant ocean breeze tickling the back of your neck.

The Virgin Islands are among the most heavily visited in the Caribbean. With direct flights available from several U.S. cities to St. Thomas, and cruise ship connections to the rest of the Caribbean, tourists flock there. The beaches are crowded, the towns packed with white-skinned visitors bent on shopping and consuming rum punch. It's not Miami or Ft. Lauderdale—yet—but finding peace in the Virgins has become a chal-

Few boats can provide such access to the region's nooks and crannies with the same comfort as this 65-foot cat



lenge, even on charter.

With some effort, it's possible to find quiet havens. Even greater pleasures await those who charter multihulls. Less-trampled pockets, such as Anegada, are off-limits to deeper draft yachts but within easy reach of vessels like 65-foot *Angel Glow*. Her captain, Greg Urlwin, and his spirited crew of three introduced my group to a version of the Virgins the cruise ship throngs will never see, using the 5-foot draft luxury cat to turn the islands into one private Eden after another.

Anegada is 11 miles long and hosts about 150 inhabitants. It is accessible only by Tortola-based flights three times weekly or by boats with no more than 7 feet of draft. We found the shallow harbor half-full of smaller sailboats, mostly monohulls that likely had a much slower and rougher ride through the 3-foot to 5-foot swells than we did sailing from Virgin Gorda. During our 11-knot passage, I napped half the way. We powered through the channel like a gentle force and anchored closer to shore than any

other yacht, sheltered for the night from the strong wind that had carried us there so swiftly.

One benefit of the comfortable ride a catamaran provides is being well-rested and eager to sample exotic treats, which are many on Anegada. The island's rugged terrain is rich in hidden beauty. Two species of wild orchids, lavender and white, flash like blinking eyes in the tarnished olive underbrush. Much of the foliage is regal perhaps just because it's there, fighting to live and grow in the sand and limestone earth.

The loblolly trees are the grand oaks of the island. The will it must take their roots to dig for water is rivaled only by the restraint of the century plants, which bloom just once a year. Each looks like a giant aloe cabbage with an asparagus stalk growing from its heart; if you catch them in season, their yellow flowers blaze against the clear blue sky some 30 feet overhead. It's a serene backdrop to the salt marshes in the island's middle, where the 15 flamingos brought there to repopulate seven years ago have grown into a fiery pink flock of 51. They'll let you get just close enough to note their long-legged elegance before they fly away.

Every such secluded en-count-



er is a snapshot for the soul, bound for an album of new memories from an old, familiar place. We found the rest of the Virgin Islands busting to tell us their secrets as well, from rarely spotted underwater wildlife to pristine white beaches.

Few boats we encountered could provide such access to the region's nooks and crannies, let alone with the soothing stability of this 65-foot sailing yacht and all the toys she carries. On the subject of multihulls, Urlwin is a true believer. In his mind, there is a revolution afoot with more and more charter guests choosing cats over monohulls. Today's yachtsmen, he says, want to bop from island to island in comfort with kayaks and dive gear on board, not heeled over in a cramped cockpit with one dinghy in tow.

He likens the beamy, awkward-looking cats to jet air-



Angel Glow's dual swim platforms (left) are big enough to accommodate two divers getting into or out of gear, even in feet made awkward by fins. After a day at depth swimming among stoplight parrotfish and sea turtles, there's no more enticing night life than Foxy's, at the end of the pier (above) on Jost Van Dyke.

planes in a new age of transportation.

"Planes used to have propellers," Urlwin explained, his dark eyes squinting from years of steering into the sun. "I'll bet when the first jets came out, pilots looked at them, didn't know what to make of them and said, 'That'll never fly.' Well, I see a correlation between those prop planes and most of today's sailing yachts, which were designed, space wise, to carry cargo."

By contrast, *Angel Glow* carries 10 guests and four crew in spacious accommodations, both above and belowdecks. Each of four guest staterooms has a queen-size berth and an en suite head and shower, and the master has a king-size berth. The staterooms were inviting after a day of diving near Sandy Spit with Tortola on the horizon. I felt as protected and calm as the reef there as I sank into my mattress, my mind still absorbing the day's visions of camouflaged sand divers, blunt-spined brittle sea stars and staghorn coral piled along the ocean floor like jumbled king crab legs.

Angel Glow's air-conditioned saloon has four seating areas, including a couch big enough for three or four adults to sprawl while watching television. But most of our time was spent on deck, where the space is about twice that of a monohull her length. There are five lounging places in addition to the bimini-covered dining area, twin swim platforms and hammock, meaning guests can have a half-dozen conversations and not hear any except their own. I spent one night swaying silently in the hammock, watching the stars glisten like diamonds, hearing only the warm breeze whistle as a

cocktail party raged abaft.

The yacht's decor, designed by the owner's artist wife, is as adventurous as each day spent aboard. The saloon features leopard-pattern cushions with African-style beaded hangings, accentuated by the artist's own abstract paintings mounted on the beech finish. Red, blue and yellow curtains in the master stateroom flood the interior with stained glass-like rays each morning.

"The decor matches the attitude on the boat," Urlwin said. "Everybody should be having as much fun using it as she had decorating it."

Angel Glow's crew makes having fun easy. Urlwin sets the tone, letting problems roll off his back with the same ease as offers roll off his tongue to satisfy your every wish. This is a crew that will join the fray after they launch you and the water toys safely off the nonslip sole. *Angel Glow* carries two sailboards, two single kayaks and two doubles, a 15-foot hard-bottom inflatable with water skis and a doughnut, snorkels for 12 and dive gear for five—with two dive compressors on board. The crew has whatever you request in the water practically before the windlass stops churning.

The catamaran's dual swim platforms mean nobody has to wait in line to frolic in the aquamarine sea, and we were quick to hop in and share our time with nature instead of the dozens of tourists in other parts of the islands. The platforms were especially helpful during diving; both are wide enough to accommodate feet made awkward by fins, and each is roomy

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enough for two divers to remove their gear at the same time.

Some of our guests were content to snorkel, as our shallow draft let us anchor a mere 100 or so yards from various reefs. At Mountain Point on Virgin Gorda, there were dozens of spotfin butterflyfish about a two-minute swim from the boat, showing off the black spots on their tails nature designed to distract attackers from their eyes. The secluded cove

also housed some lesser-known marine life, such as longhorn blenny, which look like 2-inch owls with coral antlers.

Where the snorkeling was good, the diving was better. Urlwin is a licensed dive master, and *Angel Glow* let us access sites unknown to most. During one 45-minute dive near Mountain Point, we saw a stingray, a camouflaged green sea turtle, a blue-spotted cornetfish and a good-size trunkfish.

That's more than you'll see at most popular, overdived sites during an entire week, and you'll rarely find such an unblemished palette of red and yellow coral.

Of course, all the activity left us eager for every delicacy chef Louise Jeitz brought from the galley. Some favorites were her salmon quesadillas with crabmeat guacamole, grouper stuffed with lobster, and potato/leek/butternut squash soup. Her Manhattan-style clam chowder has chunks big enough to be intimidating, but tender enough to lull your jaw into submission. She adjusted meals and portions to our tastes, serving big lunches to re-energize our aching arms after a morning of kayaking or light fruit and crumpets the day after a big dinner. Nobody should disembark without trying her raspberry-sauce cheesecake—so light it's like biting into a cloud.

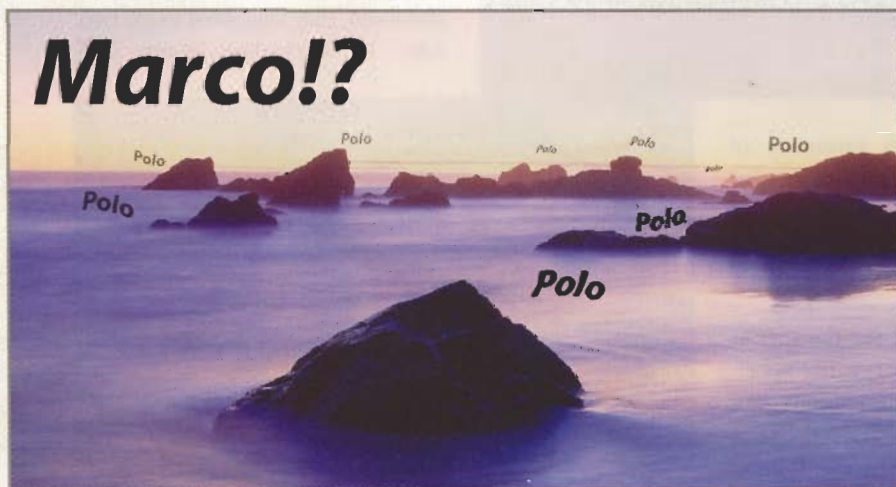
By the time we returned to civilization, clearing customs in St. John, we'd evolved into the well-tanned, muscled-toned guests a yacht like *Angel Glow* is built for. Our appearance wasn't lost on the bartender at Mongoose Junction, who sized us up amid the primped and showered honeymooners.

"Here's a bunch of old sea dogs," he said with a smile. "Which one's the captain?"

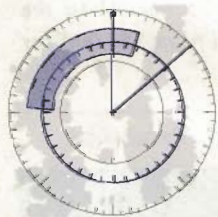
That's not something you hear said too often about tourists in the Virgins, especially ones who've been pampered all week by a crew so eager to please they leave gifts on your pillow each night. We should have known this would be unlike any other trip after embarking our first afternoon, when Urlwin popped the cork on some Dom Perignon. A smile crept into his sun-drenched cheeks as he welcomed us aboard, his words hinting at a lifetime's memories to come.

"Well," he said, "we just don't know any other way." □

Contact: Missy Johnston, Northrop and Johnson Worldwide Yacht Charters, (800) 868-5913; fax (401) 848-0120; NJRIcharters@edgenet.net; www.NANDJ.com; or any charter broker. *Angel Glow* charters at \$25,000 per week for six guests, \$27,500 for eight and \$29,500 for 10.



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