

Travel Talk Online Forums

Customer Trip Report: British Virgin Island Charter with Footloose

Written by: Cliff Norris - June 15, 2012

Greetings Everyone,

Today must be the day for posting trip reports. I have prepared this report from our recently completed journey of June 2-10. A little background first, we chartered Vindaloo, a Beneteau Cyclades 43, from **Footloose** for the week and really enjoyed our time on the boat. We had five people on board, two couples and myself all from Atlanta, so the three-cabin, 3 head layout worked well. The couples had never been on a sailing trip before, but this was my second time chartering from **Footloose** and fourth time overall. It was fun to recall the lessons from my ASA sailing instructors as I "showed them the ropes" during the trip. We provisioned through **Footloose**, and everything was sent according to order, even our special request for turkey bacon. For some reason, we wound up with about two dozen extra zucchini, which we tried to cook in every way possible. But I drew the line at zucchini and cereal for breakfast!

Saturday, June 2 – We departed Atlanta at 6:30 AM on American, changed planes in Miami, had an hour delay due to a mechanical problem, and arrived in Saint Thomas around 2. After a much needed lunch and rum punch at The Petite Pump Room, we took the 4 PM Smith's ferry to Road Town. (Tip: Cash transactions work a whole lot faster at The Petite Pump Room.) It took about a half hour for the 20 people on the ferry who arrived in Road Town to get through Customs and Immigration. The **Footloose** taxi was right there, and took us to our new home for the week. The boat was in excellent condition and cleanliness when we arrived. Our provisions arrived just after 6 PM. We chose the sleep aboard option for the first night, but there was no wind in the harbor, so it was very steamy. I think if we have such an early departure again, it would be worth staying in the hotel the first night so everyone can catch up on sleep and have a fresher start to the trip. Of course, if Delta, our "hometown airline" wouldn't charge \$300 more for the direct flight ...

Sunday, June 3 – Cast Off! Our first adventure started really early, right at sunrise. A very nicely dressed young woman came up to the boat and said that she had been left by her friends on shore all night and asked if we could take her to her boat anchored in the harbor. So, I unhitched the dinghy to pick her up at the dinghy dock. She was there along with ***the guy*** with whom she had shared her time on shore. So much for rescuing a damsel in distress. Anyway, I took them over to their boat, which was quite nice. Luckily her friends on board were still asleep. Is there an equivalent for the "walk of shame" when you are in a dinghy? The "dinghy of shame", perhaps?

We had our boat briefing at 8:30 with the guy from **Footloose**. I had already gone all over the boat the night before using the TTOL checklists that BillH sent me. Thanks greatly for the list, it really helped as I went through everything. To echo a previous thread, the briefer said that we should use the holding tanks when we were in an anchorage or at a national park, but let it flush out when we were over deep water. There would be an extra charge if they had to pump out the tanks or if they had to unclog the piping from the heads. Normally, I am a patient person, but in my excitement to leave, I left without picking up the National Park permit and the tool bag.

We had a nice reach down to the Indians for lunch and our first snorkel stop. I missed this on my last trip, and we had a good time swimming around the rocks. We decided to settle in to the moorings just outside of the Bight on Normal Island for the evening. I took my friends over to the Caves since the sun was low in the West, and the light

was very nice. However, it seemed to me that the coral was not as vibrant as when I was there last in 2007. As has been mentioned in earlier threads, Sunday nights are very rollicking in the Bight with a lot of speedboats coming in and out. I was glad to have a little distance. I rigged a hammock above the foredeck, which was nice for sunset. The air had been very hazy from Saharan dust, plus we were near the full moon, so the stargazing wasn't the best.

Monday, June 4 - Full Moon – We slept in a little bit to recover some more from Saturday's trip. We did a little snorkeling around the cove, too. We dropped the mooring and headed over to Trellis Bay so we could get a spot for the Full Moon Party that night. We arrived around 1 PM, and there were still a few spaces left. After lunch, we snorkeled around and found a remora that was trying to attach to the boat. The others took the dinghy around to snorkel the coral near Sprat Point. The report was that the reef there was quite nice. We went ashore in the afternoon to pick up some more ice and to tour the shops. Despite the Diamond Jubilee holiday, almost all were open. We went ashore again in the evening for dinner and the party. The barbecue had quite a lot of food for the price, although I would only give it a "fair" on the deliciousness scale. The party had one area with island music and the Jumbies near the fireballs, and another area a little farther along with a dance floor and 80's/90's disco music. I had a good time, but I think the others were expecting something more raucous. Perhaps I should take them to the Bomba Shack next time!

Tuesday, June 5 - Virgin Gorda – We sailed over to The Baths in the morning, but the moorings were completely full and there were a half dozen boats circling. I opted to anchor at the next beach up with a few other boats. As we were preparing to depart, a Moorings PowerCat was also trying to anchor, but the skipper seemed to keep looking for spaces a little too close to us. There was plenty of nice, open space, but they kept trying for a half hour to be right next to us. Eventually, they gave up and went back to the mooring field. Oh well, crisis averted.

One feature of traveling with a group of rock climbing friends is that they have to stop and climb every boulder. So, The Baths were an amazing stop for them. In fact, it took well over an hour just to walk down the beach to the start of the trail through the rocks. The snorkeling was nice around the rocks, too. After finally getting the starving crew back to the boat, we made lunch, then headed up to the North Sound and around to Leverick Bay for the evening. We showered, refilled the water tanks, picked up a few items in the store, and got ready for the evening. The restaurant had closed, but the food at Jumbies was pretty good, especially the conch fritters. They were about three times the size of the ones you get in Key West, and so delicious. They had a DJ playing music, but a passing rain shower sent everyone back to their boats, so he finished early. This was the second time I have fallen asleep in the cockpit at Leverick Bay. In a neat coincidence, the boat in the slip next to us was the Mary Jewell from Bowling Green, KY, my hometown, and happened to be filled with a group of fellow Kentuckians.

Wednesday, June 6 - Anegada – Starting on Monday, the weather report mentioned a tropical wave that might approach. With the wireless at Leverick, I saw that it was passing through the southern Caribbean, closer to South America. In the BVI's, it gave us a bit stronger winds over the next couple of days, around 20 kts., and swells from the East. Since it didn't look like rain or storms would follow, I asked the crew about going to Anegada, which I missed on my last trip. I knew the swells might make for a rolly trip, but the increased wind would speed our passage. They were agreeable to the trip, so we headed out. We sailed with the first reef in the main and the jib, and made a nice, although active passage, and no one became seasick. I enjoyed the adventure of setting out for a point beyond the horizon. With the continued haze, even the mountainous islands faded out of view, so it was like being on the open ocean. Steering through the swells took a bit of work, but we stayed pretty close to our course the whole way, straying but just a little to the West.

I have heard that there are two kinds of sailors, those who have run aground and those who are lying. I will just say that as you approach the Anegada mooring field between the red and green channel markers, stay closer to the red side. There is a sandbar in the channel on the green side, so don't turn to port too soon to go behind other boats in the field to get to a ball. Fortunately, a wave and a little extra engine power was all we needed. A couple of other boats became stuck in the same place and had to extend their booms and sails to heel over a bit.

Once moored, Barry from Whistling Pines came over to greet us and chatted with us about his home on the island. He must be the most care-free man in the whole world. After lunch, we took the Whistling Pines' taxi over to Cow Wreck beach. We had the whole beach to ourselves for an hour before anyone else arrived, and it was absolutely marvelous!!! It was like reaching the last beach on the last island at the edge of the world. And it has a bar! So quiet. So tranquil. Such heavenly lobster fritters!

The haze had cleared enough, and the moon's rise was late enough, that evening to make for some very nice star-gazing from the deck. Although we weren't having an official shower, quite a number of meteors streaked across the sky. One of the crew had never seen a shooting star before, so I can hardly think of a better place than Anegada for one's first time ... for meteors. The people from the catamaran in front of us had a powerful green light in the water. It was interesting to see the fish that swam by. We also saw some greens dots floating by in the water that we thought were fish reflecting that boat's light. We shined our own light, but did not see fish. We thought they might be squid, but more on that later.

Thursday, June 7 - Monkey Point -- After a relaxing morning, we set sail back toward Tortola. The wind and swells were the same as the day before, so the trip didn't take too long. I hadn't been to the north side of Tortola, so I was looking forward to seeing some more new sights. We stopped at Monkey Point for lunch and some awesome snorkeling. The water closer to the rocks was swarming with thousands of tiny fish that reflected different colors of the sunlight as they moved. Occasionally a bigger fish would swim through, causing them all to scatter quick as a wink. There were even some big tarpon patrolling, too. I think this was the best snorkel of the whole trip. The kids from other boats loved swimming among the fish and being startled when they all changed direction. We headed over to Lee Bay on Great Camanoe for the night. We had a little trouble setting the anchor the first time because the chain went under a rock. But we were able to reset a bit closer to shore. There were only two other boats there. The moon came out unexpectedly when one of our neighbors decide to try boarding behind his dinghy and lost his pants. There was a very nice, cool wind coming between the two hills, and we enjoyed a very pleasant sunset during dinner. The stars, fixed and shooting, were bright again, and we were joined by our phosphorescent green dot friends again. There were no fish lights this time, so we know they were not reflections, but actual creatures. If a fellow TTOL'er knows what these little guys are, I would love to know.

Friday, June 8 - Jost Van Dyke – I was a little tired this morning because I set my alarm to keep waking me up during the night to check on the anchor. My GPS showed that we stayed within a 20 meter circle all night, so my worry was unfounded. We started with some snorkeling around Lee Bay. We saw two lion fish, which are so freaky compared to the other reef fish there. I can understand why no other fish tries to challenge them for territory.

After hauling anchor, we sailed around to Cane Garden Bay. The sail was a nice downwind run, and the houses on the hillsides were interesting to see. The bay was filled with green turtles swimming around, so some of the guys decided to swim with them and take some pictures. We organized a shore party to drop off trash and pick up a

few supplies and more ice (of course). Unbeknownst, the guy who stayed behind decided to do us a "favor" and scrub the cockpit and deck area in the stern using the freshwater shower hose.

We left Cane Garden Bay for the short sail over to Little Jost Van Dyke, taking a mooring in front of Foxy's Taboo. I thought about anchoring off Sandy Spit. Since the wind was coming directly from the East and not scheduled to change, that might have afforded a little bit quieter option, but we still spent a great evening where we were. We went ashore, and I led the group over to Bubbly Pool, which was a highlight. Even though the pool wasn't too active, the rock walls had quite a bit of wildlife on them, and the view from the rocks on the other side was neat to see. (The swells were too big the last time I was there to try it.) The rock climbers had a great time climbing the boulders. A school of tiny sergeant majors live in the pool and will peck at the scabs from no-see-um bites on your feet if you let them. Interestingly, those particular bites never itched again.

Of course, when we returned, sweaty and salty, people wanted to wash off a bit. After the first person, the last of the water went. Oh well. At least we still had beer! We had our last dinner aboard (with plastic plates and cups), and lay out under the stars one last time. Once again, I would say that this little corner is one of my favorite places because of its natural beauty, solitude and peacefulness. I stayed out on deck after the others retired because we just don't see that many stars in Atlanta. I chatted with my partner on the phone to catch up, and I remember shivering a little bit from the freshness of the breeze. I don't think any of us had used even the sheets the whole trip so far, but the others mentioned actually unfolding their blankets that night.

Saturday, June 9 - Return to Road Town – After breakfast, a group of us went to "explore" Sandy Spit and relax on the sand. Then, it was time to make it back to **Footloose**. We set sail toward the western edge of Tortola, then rolled up the jib and motored through the passage between Tortola and the Thatches. I wanted to take the group to snorkel over The Rhone before we turned in. We even cooked lunch while underway. The wind was directly from the East, however. I tried tacking for a while, which was nice being a sailor, but we weren't getting anywhere too fast. So, we motored the rest of the way to give folks some time to swim. I enjoyed The Rhone more this time than my previous trip because the water was much clearer. There were a lot of and more types of fish to see than I remembered. Some scuba divers arrived, and it was interesting to swim through their bubbles. Around 4 we headed back to Road Town to dock for the night. I called **Footloose** and we picked up one of their folks at the dock so he could wedge the boat into their slips, which are quite tightly spaced!

We refilled the water, cleaned the dishes, packed our suitcases and showered. We had dinner at Charlie's, down by The Moorings. The food was excellent, although the calamari appetizer worked out to be over \$2 per bite. The night was fairly calm, so it was hot on the boat. There must have been a lot of bugs, because we all awoke with a fresh round of bites. The mosquitoes made a feast of my forehead!

Sunday, June 10 - Heading Home – A fairly strong rain shower just before sunrise set the morning up for 300+% humidity. The **Footloose** office opened at 8 for our check out. We had a nice laugh about us being so excited to leave that we left our papers. We took the taxi back to the ferry, and chose the Road Town fast ferry directly back to Saint Thomas. The ride was quite nice, especially after stepping outside to the bow so the wind could dry the sweat away. After the long wait at customs at the ferry dock, we had a nice ride in the taxi back to the airport. The driver took one of the back roads by the old navy base to show us where the submarines once were and places he frequented when growing up. Then, there was another long wait at customs at the airport. I have never understood why there are two customs points since both do the exact same thing: ask if you have anything to

declare and stamp your passport. The flight to Miami was a little delayed. At Miami, we had a two hour delay because the Atlanta airport was closed for storms. We walked the length of the terminal, took the rooftop train, watched a 747 take off, and had dinner. We finally made it home at 11 PM.

Some random observations:

The **Footloose** people did not recommend drinking the boat water, so we ordered a dozen gallon jugs of water, and used it all. Powdered drink mixes like Gatorade or Crystal Light worked well and did not take up much space. In fact, mixing the peach tea and lemonade Crystal Light powders made a very passable "Arnold Palmer."

Bug bands had mixed results. For some people, that is all they needed. For me, they had a more localized effect. If I wore one on my wrist, I would be fine up to my elbows, but would still get bites on my shoulder and face. DEET spray seemed to be better for me, but nothing is 100% effective for me against the no-see-ums on the beach at Trellis Bay and Leverick Bay. (Note: I still love going to Leverick Bay. Hey, Nick!)

I would offer a better explanation to the crew about using sea water to rinse the decks and not fresh. Similarly, less is more when using dishwashing liquid. I didn't want to be a water Nazi since we were on vacation and having a good time, but I think I should have been a little more watchful.

The ZBVI station seems to have changed to an all-religious format. It's their country. However, I missed hearing about the local events and news while waiting for the 8 AM weather report. During my last trip, we heard about a West Indian food festival and added that to the agenda for a wonderful evening.

When flushing holding tanks, keep looking forward! As I kept telling the guys, "you will become really close to the other people on a boat."

The new Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS4 waterproof camera performed well during the trip. It did not have any technical problems or issues, and the pictures turned out pretty well. The panorama mode was nice because there are so many perfect places to use that feature on a trip like this. The GPS function worked well, but was a real drain on the battery. Even with an extra battery, I had a hard time keeping things charged up, so no pictures from the Rhone, alas.

Vindaloo had quite a bit of weather helm. She really wanted to round up given the slightest chance. It made it difficult to reach over for something for just a second. This boat had two wheels, each with a different set of instruments. The engine controls were on the starboard side, but the depth meter was on port. I would have preferred that they be on the same side because it was hard to check depth when trying to anchor. The boat briefer made a mistake in saying that the depth meter was calibrated to the keel. The meter showed 6 feet of water when we were briefly detained by the sand bar. We found that once the main passed the two reefing points, it took a LOT of effort to raise it to its full height. We released the clutches for the reefing lines and any others that seemed to offer resistance, but it was difficult. The only "problems" we had were the mooring light and a torn strap on one of the lazy jack lines, which we were able to work around easily.

Windscoops! The briefer took a few minutes to show us these, and they made a big difference. I didn't see any other boats using them, so I wonder if scoops are an exclusive **Footloose** "feature".

I would like to recommend Dolphus, manager at the **Footloose** dock. He is the nicest, most patient person. I remembered him from my first trip, and all the questions I had. I am happy to report that he is still the same great person to work with.

I would also like to recommend the folks at Leverick Bay. I admit that docking is not my strongsuit, but they were very helpful in securing us and reviewing my strategy for leaving without worrying the folks on the Mary Jewell during their breakfast.

My group of “newbies” had a wonderful trip to the islands and kept talking about “the next time we do this” more and more toward the end of our trip. The **Footloose** folks let us tour some of the other boats to see what we might like. They really liked the catamarans, so perhaps we will try one of those next time. Cooking dinner for 8 or 10 must be quite a logistical challenge, so I would love to hear how some of you manage that.

I had a gratifying experience sailing with “newbies” on this trip. As the skipper, I tried to always be confident, patient and positive. If someone wound a line the wrong way, for example, I would just say, “By Saturday, you will be an expert.” I think that goes a long way to making people comfortable in an unfamiliar environment. And besides, we are on a boat among beautiful islands, so having a good time is paramount. I also brought along one of my sailing books because the illustrations made it easier to show people things like how to pick up a mooring, etc. I also worked with them to plan an itinerary that had some variations and balance – sailing time versus shore excursions, swimming versus resting, sightseeing versus time in transit.