



A Dream Oasis

Two veteran cruisers lose track of time in a secret anchorage in the BVI.

BY TIM MILLER AND JULIE BROWN

We had just dropped off our guests at Crown Bay Marina in St. Thomas, and Julie and I had three weeks to go cruising on our boat, *McGregor II*, a 58-foot Hatteras Yachtfish that we charter out of the Virgin Islands. Showing our friends, family and guests around these beautiful islands never gets old, but spending time alone on our boat is a special event. After stopping at the local market for some fresh fruit and vegetables, we were off.

The south side of St. Thomas can be a little rough at times, but today we had a gentle 13-knot breeze and calm seas. We were headed to our favorite cove, "Secret Anchorage 415789er." Located on the north side of Norman Island, it is a special place of crystal blue water, pristine reefs and, most importantly, only a few boats.

As we passed the north side of St. John, the beautiful beaches of Maho and Cinnamon tempted us, but we were on a mission to get to our secret anchorage. Before heading into the British Virgin Islands, we had to stop and clear customs. We did this at Soper's Hole on the west end of Tortola, a deep-water bay with a rich history of pirate lore. The shore is dotted with



SPECIAL TIME.
The Hatteras on
the hook (above).
Miller and Brown
on vacation (right).

vivid colored buildings of raspberry, purple and uncountable shades of greens and blues. After we checked into customs, we proceeded immediately to the local wharf-side pub for a "welcome to the BVI" cocktail. This particular beverage is called a "Painkiller" — a special mixture of rum (of course), orange juice, pineapple juice, cream of coconut and a pinch of fresh-ground nutmeg.

As we were making our way to a table, our favorite waitress called out, "How many, Tim?" "Two number threes, please," I replied. The drinks are numbered according to the amount of rum they serve; four is the most potent, and

TIM MILLER AND JULIE BROWN (4)

three just seems to be the right mix. After all, we were on vacation. As we sipped our drinks, the steel band played on with that tireless island beat. Smiling at each other, Julie and I affirmed that this could be one of the best places to sit and watch the day go by. We were, however, bound and determined to get to our secret anchorage, so we finished our drinks and moved on.

As we approached our anchorage, there were only three sailboats bobbing gently in the breeze. We dropped the hook and grabbed our masks and fins. This is one of our favorite snorkel spots. A shallow reef extends around the entire horseshoe bay. You never know what you might encounter here: Turtles, eels, a multitude of colorful reef fish and even a curious reef shark may make an appearance. The water is clear and blue and it seems like the cleanest ocean you have ever swum in.

After snorkeling, we turned to cocktail hour, which is always a magical time in the Caribbean. Sitting on the aft deck with drinks in hand, we watched the sun disappear behind Norman Island. It was then that the sky came alive with shooting waves of pink and blue. The blues soon turned darker into a wave of twilight. Right about then the local fishermen came by, throwing their nets for the many sprats that populate the area. "You need any fish, mon?" one asked. "Yes," I told him as he came alongside. It just so happened he had a



ON THE WATER. A 58-foot Hatteras makes cruising easy throughout the Virgin Islands.



UNDER THE WATER. Snorkeling is special in the reefs and anchorages that dot the BVI.

red snapper, my favorite. He filleted it in about two seconds flat and was off again casting his nets. Grilled snapper and a fresh salad — it doesn't get much better than that.

Another tradition we always try to uphold on our boat is stargazing from the foredeck. With black night heavy upon us, the constellations made their appearance. Orion, Taurus and Sagittarius were all glowing, and a number of shooting stars entertained us until we were too weary to keep our eyes open.

We awoke the next morning eager to try out our latest purchase. I had just surprised Julie with a new kite for pulling one of our kayaks. But would it actually be able to pull a kayak through the water? I was, of course, the guinea pig, and after several failed attempts, I got

the kite up and took off quickly.

"How will you get back?" Julie screamed. "Come get me at the Indians," I shouted back. Blue ocean water passed by me as the kite took me farther from *McGregor*. The stiff breeze propelled me along, and an extremely peaceful feeling came over me. Way too soon Julie was beside me saying, "Where do you think you are going?" "Jules," I replied, "This is so cool!"

So we spent our days at our secret anchorage, getting up early, working on boat projects until 1 or 2 in the afternoon and then jumping in the ocean for a snorkel or a reef dive or a bit of kite kayaking. As the days passed, no one joined us at our secret bay. This was every cruiser's dream: a private oasis. Over breakfast a week or so later, Julie asked, "What day is it?" We had no phone service, no e-mail, no FM radio. I smiled and said, "I'm not really sure. Wednesday maybe?" The next day a boat pulled into our secret bay and we yelled across, "What day is it?" "Saturday," he called back. We were only two days off.

The following morning, we pulled up our anchor and headed reluctantly back to St. Thomas. It was time to get back to work. We were a bit saddened to leave our private paradise, but refreshed and rejuvenated by our time at Secret Anchorage 415789er. ♣