The Journey of a Lifetime

How to charter your own sailboat around the British Virgin Islands and beyond…

John Summers, President, SailNashville, Inc.

Life is short. Live your dream

It's the rare sailor...

It's the rare sailor who doesn't find him or herself dreaming about sailing across the multi-hued, aquamarine waters of a tropical destination or stopping on the white sandy beach of a temperate shore. I know I dreamed about sailing in the British Virgin Islands probably before I even knew how to sail.

Maybe you have that same dream...seeing the coastline disappear and experiencing that sudden feeling of being alone even though you may be with a friend or significant other. For a moment, it's just you, your compass and your navigation skills to guide you. Nothing to break the silence but the waves and the water crashing against the hull of the boat. The hull of the boat flexes as it fights against the strong waves of the ocean. Then there is total calm. You are sailing with nothing but the wind pushing you forward on your journey of a lifetime.

Can you relate?

Maybe you have memories of your younger days sailing with your Dad. But you haven't been on the water in many years. Maybe even decades. Remember that feeling? Just you and your Dad out on the open water.

If you have ever been sailing, you know it's a unique experience that is sometimes difficult to describe to your friends who have never sailed before. It's an experience you have dreamed about or resurrected memories of that you want to experience again.

But you're not sure where to start. You make excuses and have a long list of reasons you can't pursue your dream of sailing. I can't relive the past...it's too expensive...I don't have time. Sound familiar?

But that longing of sailing keeps coming up. You are constantly dreaming of sailing the open seas, but it feels like a pipedream...

You can make that dream a reality. You can start today to learn what you need to know to experience the British Virgin Islands in a way few people can even imagine. ***And that is what this report is all about.***

My Journey To Sailing The BVIs

My sailing adventure has been a lifelong pursuit since the age of twenty-three when a friend invited me to join the University of Tennessee Sailing Club on their Spring Break trip to the Abaco Islands in the Bahamas. Having grown up in Chattanooga where one's primary opportunity to enjoy the water was being pulled behind a ski boat, the Bahamas trip opened up a whole new world to me. And I was hooked on sailing!

It would be four years before I had the opportunity to sail again...this time on a Hobie Cat catamaran off the beach in Destin, Florida.

It was a multi-colored 14-foot sailboat sitting on the sands just out of the surf. I instantly had an overwhelming urge to sail her the minute I saw her. Ever confident of my skills after spending a week in the Bahamas, I spent the next hour or so going back and forth on a beam reach along the condos and high-rise hotels lining the beach. I realized rather quickly that I had remembered little from my Bahamian sailing experience. But I had fun and wanted to sail again.

After moving to Nashville later that year, I spotted a brightly colored Hobie Cat sitting on a trailer with the sails unfurled. It was the 16-foot model, with two sails in bright alternating colors of blue, purple, red, and orange. I immediately turned

into what was then Jimmy Holt's Sports Center, asked the price ($3,000.00 with trailer), and bought the Hobie Cat on the spot. The next day I had a trailer hitch mounted on my Volvo coupe, then went to pick up my Hobie to take it home.

Like any new boat owner, I immediately wanted to take my new toy out for a sail. That's when reality hit me—you really don't know how to sail this sailboat you just bought.

So I went to a local bookstore, ordered a few sailing books and devoured them over the next couple of days.

I also went searching for a place to store my new Hobie and stumbled upon Hamilton Creek Marina, Metro's only sailboat marina. Fortunately, they had a spot on the beach available. Little did I know at the time that I would have some connection to this marina for the next almost forty years. Over the next few years I would purchase an O'Day 222 keelboat and then a larger O'Day 272 as my family grew.

My work as Director of a non-profit association took me to a number of coastal cities over the years. Every chance I got, I would reach out to find a local charterer and spend a day sailing on San Francisco Bay, San Diego Bay, Puget Sound off Seattle, Tampa Bay, off Maui, Key West, the Chesapeake off Annapolis, Newport, anywhere I could.

In 1989, my desire to go bareboating in the Caribbean led me to an American Sailing Association school in Destin, Florida. The week-long hands-on course got me a sail to Pensacola and back, plus my ASA 104 Bareboat certification.

That certification gave me the knowledge and confidence to charter a 42-foot Beneteau from The Moorings in the British Virgin Islands. It was the

experience of a lifetime. My first bareboat experience as captain of the sailboat.

A few years later, when I proposed to my wife, my one condition for the honeymoon was that we spend it on a sailboat. That resulted in my first trip to the Lesser Antilles Islands of St. Martin/Sint Maarteen and St. Barts on a 38 foot Beneteau from The Moorings.

A few years later we took my two oldest daughters to the BVIs for one of our best family vacations ever. Just this year, for our youngest's daughter's high school graduation gift, we returned to the BVIs. It was another wonderful family vacation. These islands are still the best sailing grounds in the world. I just wish we had returned sooner and more often.

As you can see, my passion and participation in sailing spans decades. After retiring from my "day job", I was contemplating what to do with all my free time.

One day as I was waiting on my 15-year-old daughter to finish her day at Sail Camp, looking out over the water at Percy Priest Lake, I remembered my ASA sailing class and how it had opened the door to so many of my best sailing memories. That's when the idea of creating a sailing school hit me. This was the genesis of SailNashville with one goal in mind…to share the joy of sailing with as many people as possible and have fun doing it.

I reached back out to the American Sailing Association (ASA) to see what steps I would need to take to open a sailing school. (They actually had my original certification from the aforementioned ASA 104 class in their database.)

That led me to earn my ASA instructor certifications.

Next, I bought a new Catalina 22 Sport and established our ASA sailing school – ***SailNashville*** – at Hamilton Creek Marina. Our first class was offered in the spring of 2019.

Now we get to share our love of sailing with others.

Life is short. Live your dream.

Are You Ready To Sail The BVIs?

That depends on your experience, how long it has been since you sailed and what you want to accomplish.

If you have been sailing regularly within in the past few years, then you probably have many of the basic sailing skills needed to successfully skipper a bareboat cruise through the BVIs. That experience will enable you to better absorb the sailing knowledge you will gain from an ASA course.

The ASA courses provide you with the knowledge to successfully navigate a charter sailboat yourself and the practical knowledge of the systems and the routines to live on a sailboat. Completing the ASA courses and earning your certifications also makes it easier to book your trip. They are your licenses to charter.

If you are new to sailing, your ASA courses will be even more valuable. You will discover what you need to know in a logical, easy to understand sequence using both classroom and hands-on instruction on the water where you spend time practicing and perfecting the skills you learn in your ASA classes. This will accelerate the process of becoming certified and living your dream of sailing the British Virgin Islands.

Our goal is to provide you the instruction you need to be a safe, competent sailor capable of sailing across Percy Priest Lake or taking your own bareboat charter in the BVIs. Taking a proven, systematic approach to learning how to sail or to enhance your current skills will dramatically increase you chances of becoming an accomplished sailor.

Interested in learning how to become a better sailor?

Call us today at 615-610-7551

You can also visit our website at sailnashville.com

Never assume you know everything…

Never assume you know everything you need to know to sail at the level required to charter a boat and sail the British Virgin Islands. This can be a dangerous assumption. I always had a great experience when sailing the BVIs because I sail regularly and keep my sailing skills honed through regular sailing and teaching others. But I have learned lessons along the way that have taught me not to take my skills for granted.

I know firsthand how quickly things can turn bad. Remember the Hobie Cat I mentioned earlier…

Like many, if not most sailors, my visions of sailing were basically of a tranquil glide across the silvery expanses of Percy Priest Lake on a gentle breeze. I had taken the Hobie out a few times just in the slough around Hamilton Creek Marina. Through trial and error, I had managed to get the boat safely back to the marina each time with no harm, no damage.

On this particular day, I decided it was time to take the Hobie out into the center of the lake. Everything started off fine. I got the boat rigged, got it off the beach, had jumped on the trampoline successfully, trimmed the sails in, and pointed the bow east down the slough towards the main body of the lake. In a few minutes, I was out in the middle of the lake tacking back and forth trying to keep control of the sailboat.

For those not familiar with a Hobie Cat, they are basically two fiberglass pontoons connected by an aluminum frame over which a nylon trampoline is stretched, with a mast, two sails, and two rudders. There is no ballast like there is on a keelboat. So the skipper and crew are the ballast with their placement and movement critical, especially as the wind increases. Translated…they are easy to turn over and you may get wet…a lot.

Here is the ***Big Lesson*** learned that day…
Check The Weather Forecast Before You Go Sailing!

After about an hour of pleasant sailing under clear blue skies, the clouds began to roll in and the winds began to steadily increase. As the winds picked up, it became more and more difficult to control the sailboat. The winds became relentless. Before long, my experience (or lack of) on the sailboat showed itself in my first capsize. I quickly righted the boat, got back on the tramp, and pulled the sails in to get the boat moving. But the sailboat capsized again…then again…then again.

I can't remember today exactly how many times the sailboat capsized or how long I was in the water, but it was a lot. Slowly fear crept in. I was exhausted. Every muscle in my body ached. I knew time was running out. And I started to realize I may not make it back to shore.

Keep in mind this was a time before cell phones. I didn't have a handheld VHF radio, since few monitored them regularly on Percy Priest Lake at the time, and there were no boats in hailing distance.

Fortunately for me, a young woman sailing a small dingy sloop noticed my predicament and sailed over to help. After assessing the situation, she threw me a line and towed my Hobie Cat back into Hamilton Creek Marina. If she hadn't, I'm not sure what I would have done or if I would have even been able to make it back to shore, much less the marina by myself.

Fortunately, I lived to tell the story and put the valuable lessons I learned the hard way into practice.

Here are the three main lessons I learned that day:

1. **Never go boating without checking the weather.** If there is any question of incremental weather, stay home.
2. **Know your limitations.** More importantly, don't let your desires or your ego let you exceed your limitations.
3. **Learn how to be a better sailor.** When you stop learning and assume you know everything...you will be a danger to yourself, your loved ones, your crew, and other sailors. Keep sailing and keep learning.

Interested in learning how to become a better sailor?

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Why The British Virgin Islands?

The BVIs are the near perfect chartering location. That's particularly true for the first-time charterer. The BVIs are just a few miles to the east of the U.S. Virgin Islands and are far less developed. They are composed of three main islands, Tortola, Virgin Gorda, and Anegada with dozens of smaller islands surrounding them. Azure waters, steady trade winds, and numerous sheltered anchorages have drawn sailors to the BVIs for centuries.

One appeal to the beginning sailor is that you can sail within the protected waters of the Sir Francis Drake Channel for days, all within the sight of land. Except for Anegada, which is coral formed, all of the BVIs are volcanic, meaning there is safe water up to near shore in most places.

The BVIs are where bareboat yacht chartering began 50 years ago, and they remain today the largest destination and most frequently sailed waters in the world. Unlike other Caribbean islands, there are very few large resorts to mar the natural beauty of the islands.

What began as The Moorings with six Pearson yachts in 1959 now encompasses hundreds of sailboats and dozens of charter companies. It is the main industry in the British Virgin Islands. The government and the local residents do everything to make your visit the best it can be.

The BVIs suffered extensive damage in 2017 from hurricanes Irma and Maria. While there are still many signs of damage remaining from the storm and numerous businesses still not yet re-opened, the islands are back in business for sailing charters. New sailboats have replaced the damaged. Bars are back serving their exotic drinks. Restaurants are again preparing their special Caribbean fare. Lobsters are being grilled. The islands are green again. And the water remains azure blue.

Things To Consider...

Your family and/or work schedule will dictate when you can travel. Of course, school breaks, family events, or traditional holidays are all factors.

But the weather can also make a major difference in your schedule. Whenever you charter in the Caribbean you must be aware of the hurricanes.

The official ***hurricane season*** for the Atlantic Basin, which includes the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico generally runs from the first of June to the end of November. The peak season runs from the middle of August to the end of October. But a deadly hurricane can happen anytime. And climate change has made weather patterns less predictable.

Charter companies price their trips according to the season. You will see a noticeable difference in cost between "high season" in the winter months and the "low season" in the summer months.

While the off-season rates can be very attractive, remember, they come with a greater degree of risk. As a first-time charterer, I would encourage you to err on the side of caution until you further develop your sailing skills.

The charter companies are going to monitor the weather and will direct you back to the base harbor if bad weather develops. But getting back home before the storm hits can be difficult or impossible in a fast-developing storm.

Because you will normally schedule your charter months in advance, I would recommend trip insurance. While it adds to the overall cost of the trip, it protects your investment if you do have that “perfect storm” come up the same week you have scheduled your “vacation of a lifetime”.

Traditional Sloop or Catamaran?

Pretty much the entire charter fleet in the BVIs is new as a result of Irma. So you can expect the latest in styling, comfort, and systems on your charter boat.

Whereas sailboat charters were once all sloops, today catamarans make up approximately 50% of the charter fleet. These catamarans come in both sail and power versions, although we can't consider the latter as sailing.

Which you choose is a matter of preference, with each having their own pluses and minuses. But here are some of the factors you need to consider in making your selection:

• Monohulled or catamaran

While there are similarities, there are significant differences between a monohulled sloop and a catamaran.

Sloops are the traditional sailing vessel with a mainsail and a jib. Interior accommodations will be smaller with less separation than a comparable catamaran. The sloop will be narrower and will generally have better sailing response. It will heel with the wind, which some non-sailors find uncomfortable. It will also fit better in anchorages and marinas.

Catamarans on the other hand have room and comfortable accommodations. There are berths in both of the hulls with most shared living areas in between. While catamarans can be fast sailing straight, they are not as responsive in tacking. They sail flat which some like, some dislike. They are also much wider than a sloop, so they are harder to maneuver when anchoring or in a marina.

• Size

Charter boats generally range in size from 30 feet to over 50 feet. Clearly the larger the size, the more people you can accommodate on a trip. The larger size also means greater power on the sails and the boat from the wind. A larger boat simply takes more skills and strength to handle than a smaller boat.

• Accommodations

Accommodations are usually in direct relation to the size of the sailboat. The more people you want to have on your trip, the larger the family, the more the accommodations become a factor in your decision.

With a larger sailboat, you will have more double cabins with separate heads, which provide more comfort and privacy. You will also get larger open space for eating and socializing.

Today more and more charter boats are fully outfitted with the comforts of home or a luxury hotel. You have a wide range of options and prices to choose from depending on how important the sailing is to you versus the comfort.

• Features: above and below deck

Today's charter companies offer a lot of features including electronics, biminis, dodgers, powered winches, microwave ovens, video, air conditioning, bow thrusters, in-mast furling, and much, much more. These can add ease of sailing, but they add complexity and cost to your charter. Choose carefully. Get what you need, get what you want, but not more than either.

• Age and condition

Hurricane Irma did a lot to update the charter fleet in the BVIs by destroying many sailboats. But there are companies that specialize in older boats that have been moved out of the "first tier" of charter boats. Shop carefully and you can save on the cost of your trip with the expectation of smaller and less modern accommodations and systems.

If your dream is to charter your own sailboat, then SailNashville is here to help you.

Call us today at 615-610-7551

You can also visit our website at sailnashville.com

Choosing Your Charter Company

You have a wide selection of charter options. You can choose:

1. One of the large international companies, such as The Moorings or Sunsail, with bases all across the world; or
2. One of the moderate sized charter companies, usually with one or more bases in one particular area, such as the Caribbean; or
3. A single location charter company, with one location, such as the Florida Gulf coast, the Chesapeake Bay, or Maine coast; or
4. You can work through a brokerage company that matches individual charterers up with individual boat owners.

Any of these options will work. And all will handle your charter professionally.

It really depends on your needs, where you want to charter, and the level of individual attention you want.

If you do not have sufficient sailing experience yourself, then the charter company will require you to have a captain on board who knows the sailboat and the area.

Some people prefer to hire a captain. That way they can sit back, relax, and let the captain do all of the work while they enjoy their favorite beverage. Many captains are wonderful guides and offer great companionship.

You may also consider a flotilla where you join with a group of sailboats which are usually led by an experienced captain familiar with the area.

Preparing For Your Dream Trip…

There are three core ASA courses you will need to complete to become certified to charter your own sailboat:

- ***ASA 101 – Basic Keelboat Sailing Course***
- ***ASA 103 – Basic Coastal Cruising Course***
- ***ASA 104 – Bareboat Cruising Course***

SailNashville will take you from being a non-sailor to having the knowledge and skills and the "CERTIFICATION" to charter a sailboat up to 45 feet on your own.

The next few pages will give you a description of each course along with the boats we are currently sailing.

ASA 101 – Basic Keelboat Sailing Course

You will learn how to skipper a sloop-rigged keelboat of approximately 20 to 27 feet in length by day in light to moderate winds (up to 15 knots) and sea conditions. Knowledge of basic sailing terminology, parts and functions, helm commands, basic sail trim, points of sail, buoyage, seamanship and safety including basic navigation rules to avoid collisions and hazards. Auxiliary power operation.

For the ASA 101 course, we sail the Catalina 22 Sport, which is America's most popular sailboat. Almost 16,000 have been built in the 50 years

Catalina Yachts has been in business.

It is a comfortable, steady, easy-to-sail daysailer with a cabin. The large, uncluttered cockpit has ample room for a class of four students to maneuver.

Tiller steering, self-furling jib, reefable main, and outboard engine are perfect for ASA introductory keelboat course.

ASA 103 – Basic Coastal Cruising Course

You will discover how to skipper a sloop-rigged auxiliary powered (inboard engine) keelboat of approximately 25 to 35 feet length by day in moderate winds (up to 20 knots) and sea conditions.

For the ASA 103 course, we sail the Catalina 275 which is Catalina's most stylish design. While it looks like it is built for racing, with its retractable bow sprit and open transom, the 275 is a tremendous teaching platform and cruiser.

ASA 103 is about advanced systems on coastal sailboats and the 275 has them. We start with the engine – a

14.6 hp inboard diesel sail drive with two blade propeller. It has a full galley with ice box, and it has an enclosed marine head.

The Catalina 275 is perfect for ASA 103 and Percy Priest Lake.

ASA 104 – Bareboat Cruising Course

You will learn to skipper a sloop-rigged, auxiliary powered keelboat of approximately 30 to 45 feet in length during a multi-day cruise upon inland or coastal waters in moderate to heavy winds (up to 30 knots) and sea conditions.

Knowledge of provisioning, galley operations, boat systems, auxiliary engine operation, routine maintenance procedures, advanced sail trim, coastal navigation including basic chart plotting and GPS operation, multiple-anchor mooring, docking, health & safety, emergency operations, weather interpretation, and dinghy/tender operation.

For the ASA 104 course, we sail the Catalina 385. It's a perfect liveaboard sailboat with two large cabins, a large saloon, and a functional, comfortable cockpit. The 802 sq. ft. sail plan and the 40 hp Yanmar diesel provide plenty of power whether sailing or motoring. You also have a full head and a full galley.

The Catalina 385 is the perfect sailboat for sailing and living along the Gulf Coast.

If you want something simple, easy to handle, but fun…

ASA 110 – Basic Small Boat Sailing Course is a great place to begin regardless of age. Learning to sail a small dingy is exciting since its size and light weight provide the new sailor with immediate feedback to adjustments of sail trim, weight position and steering.

For the ASA 110 course, we sail the Catalina 16.5. There are dinghies, then there is the Catalina 16.5. The nearly 10-foot cockpit provides plenty of room for our students and instructor.

And unlike most dinghies, it has molded seats for a more comfortable sail. It also has a waterproof storage area to keep essentials dry.

The Catalina 16.5 is a great teaching platform and a great daysailer for one or a family.

Know Your Limits...

One of the lessons my 17-year old daughter learned on our recent trip to the BVIs is that a larger sailboat requires more physical strength to handle the sails or steer your course.

Sailing on Percy Priest or Old Hickory Lake, we consider a 10-15 mph wind to be strong wind. While in the BVIs, 12-18 mph were the lightest breeze we had on our first day of sailing. As the week progressed, so did the wind, finishing our charter week with 22-26 mph winds. It was quite a ride.

Where 27 to 35-foot sailboats are generally the larger boats on Percy Priest Lake, in the BVIs, 35 to 37-foot boats are the smallest. Larger boats mean larger sails, larger lines, and larger winches. Your sails and the wind are your power. The larger sailboats require more strength to handle your sails and steer your boat.

I'm 67 years old and in average physical condition. I loved every minute of it. My daughter did a great job handling the sails and keeping on course. But it took more energy than she expected and after 30 minutes or so at the wheel, she was happy to turn it back over to Dad.

Know your limits and select the size of your sailboat accordingly. If you think you may need assistance sailing a larger boat, then consider bringing another couple to help or consider hiring a captain.

As a side note...one reason catamarans have become so popular is that the two pontoons allow for privacy when you have another family or friends on board. At the same time, catamarans are larger and carry more sail. That can make the sailboat more difficult to handle.

It's important to know your limits and select your charter sailboat

accordingly. You not only want your adventure of a lifetime to be fun, you want it to be safe.

Packing For Your Trip

On our recent trip to the BVIs I learned an important lesson (for those of us who wear contacts). I had a partially full bottle of cleaning solution in my travel kit. Rather than replacing it with a full bottle, I took a chance on having enough. Not a good decision. I realized once we got on our sailboat that I only had a couple of days of solution left.

The grocery store at our marina didn't carry it. I asked about a pharmacy and was told I would have to take a taxi into Road Town, Tortola. When I got to the pharmacy in Road Town, I was told they didn't carry contact solution. I would have to get it next door from the optometrist. Well, it was Saturday around 3:30pm, and the office closed at 2:00pm. It would be three days until I located it on a shelf in a grocery store in Spanish Town on Virgin Gorda.

The moral of the story — ***prepare carefully*** and take what you need in essential items such prescription drugs and health care needs. Don't assume you can find things on the islands. It's a different economy there. It's the islands. Also, at the same time, pack light. You really will spend most of your time in shorts, t-shirts, bathing suits, and the like. Dressing up for dinner is basically a clean shirt.

Your charter company can give you a good packing list. There is also a good list in the ASA 104 – Bareboat Cruising Made Easy textbook. A couple of things often overlooked are charger cables for all of your gadgets; a really bright flashlight or headlamp; extra batteries; and Chapstick.

You will also want to pick up a copy of The Cruising Guide To The Virgin Islands. This will be an invaluable resource for learning more about the British Virgin Islands, navigating the harbors, finding the marinas, and it also has information on places to visit.

I hope you have gained more insight into sailing the British Virgin Islands. You will not regret taking this trip of a lifetime. There is nothing that matches the exhilaration and sense of accomplishment that you will feel after sailing the BVIs. It's something you have to experience to truly understand.

I would love the opportunity to help you get started on your own journey.

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SailNashville

Visit our website at sailnashville.com

Contact me via email at john@sailnashville.com
Call me at 615-610-7551 if you have any questions.

Share this document with anyone you know who could benefit from this information.

Looking forward to talking with you soon.