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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016



BEHIND THE LENS
PHOTOGRAPHER MATTHEW ROLSTON
ON HIS DESIGN DOMINATION

BAR HEMINGWAY IS BACK
THE LEGENDARY RITZ PARIS
RECAPTURES ITS OPULENT SPIRIT

CRUISE CONTROL
AN EXCLUSIVE JOURNEY THROUGH
THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Treasured Islands

A luxury catamaran charter in the British Virgin Islands doesn't just promise an off-the-grid week of exploring secret beaches, diving wild coral reefs and hunting for treasure. It also offers a chance to discover your inner sailor.

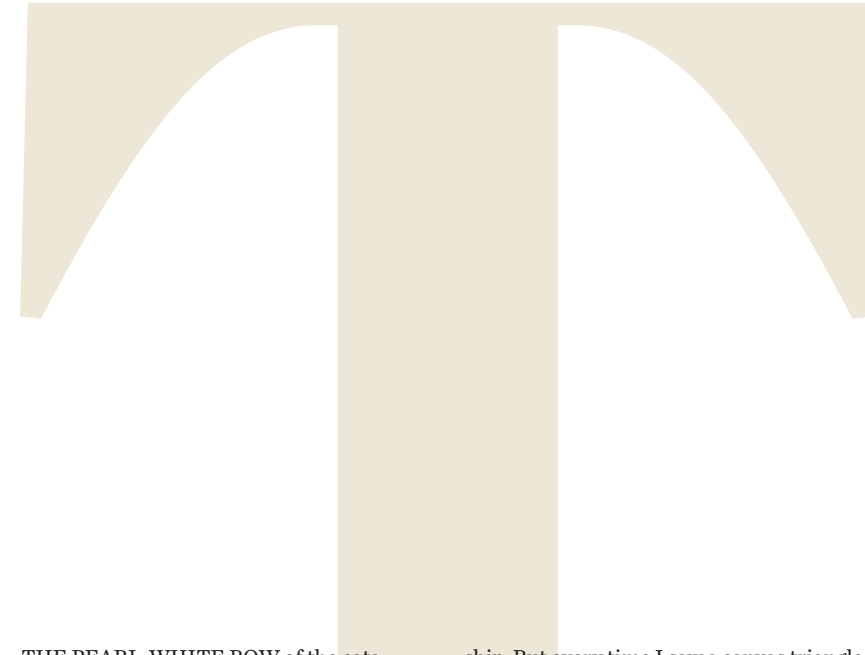
STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAD DAVENPORT

The British Virgin Islands, with their tumbledown-boulder beaches and innumerable islands, are a cruiser's paradise.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Day sailors launch off one of the BVI's many beaches. Every evening sailboats converge on marinas or moor offshore. A personal chef cooks up fresh-caught tuna on the *Alegria*. The Bitter End Yacht Club off Virgin Gorda attracts many visitors.



THE PEARL-WHITE BOW of the catamaran *Alegria* swings gently toward the islands on the horizon like a compass needle settling on a bearing. Magnus Lewin, a 40-something Swede with a deep sailor's tan and a mane of tangled blond hair, glances up at the mainsail ballooning over us. We're in the heart of the British Virgin Islands, an archipelago of reef-lined, emerald-green islands. It's early afternoon; the sun is high and the wind is up. The 59-foot *Alegria* cuts through rolling seas at almost nine knots.

Magnus lets the wheel spin lightly through his grip and ticks off a roll call of romantic maritime names like Soldier Bay, Treasure Point and Privateer Bay. "That one is Norman Island," he says, pointing to a low, green ridge. Magnus' familiarity with the location and the boat goes beyond training: He is the co-founder and owner of TradeWinds, the charter yacht company that operates the *Alegria* and other luxury catamarans around the world.

"They say there's millions in pirate gold stashed away in the sea caves," Magnus says, turning the attention back toward Norman Island. "We'll get you snorkeling out there later this week and maybe you can find some."

Hunting for lost treasure wasn't on my wish list when I boarded the *Alegria* a few days ago from the island of Tortola. Although I grew up in the Colorado Rockies, about as far from the ocean as you can get, the sea is in my blood. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* inspired me to hop freighters around the South Pacific and later explore the Caribbean by cruise

ship. But every time I saw a canvas triangle cutting the horizon, I yearned to belong to that mystical tribe of sailors.

Our first afternoon onboard I learn that much of the joy of a charter boat is found in the freedom it provides. While first mate and chef Penny uncorks a chilled bottle of Bollinger Champagne, her partner, Captain Nathan, gathers his passengers — a pair of Canadian businesswomen, a New York photographer and me — around a nautical chart of the islands.

"The BVIs are famous for sailing," Nathan explains. "There are more than 50 islands with some of the most beautiful beaches and protected anchorages in the world. We're fortunate on the *Alegria* that we can chart our own course. I have some suggestions of where we might want to explore, but it's really up to all of you, and the wind, where we want to go."

Nathan hoists the sails a few minutes later and we are underway. I head to the bow and sit in the netting suspended between the two hulls. The green sea rushes beneath me, and the white mainsail soars overhead.

"I grew up sailing with my uncles in Sweden, but it was scuba diving that really turned me into a sailor," Magnus says of his overlapping personal and professional lives as he joins me on the bow. "I just love the freedom of being able to move around the world and explore by sailboat." As I am an avid diver myself, we wind up discussing the best dive sites off Tortola.

Later that evening, we drop anchor off an uninhabited island. Nathan grills book-thick steaks off the stern and Penny pours

South African wine. We gather around the table enjoying sundowners and swapping travel tales. Magnus tells us about building his first boat and sailing from Africa to Brazil. “We did something right,” he laughs. “She’s still in the fleet.”

When Penny delivers plates of warm chocolate torte and vanilla ice cream, one of the Canadians marvels at how big the boat feels, even though it’s barely 60 feet long and has six cabins. “I wasn’t expecting that,” she says. “It seems like you can always find a private place to hide away and read or just spend time with your partner.”

With the per-cabin charter, I wonder if there’s ever friction between guests. Magnus shakes his head. “The kind of people who are drawn to this way of travel — sailing between islands — are social and

very interesting and really enjoy meeting new people. And sailors cross all economic and social lines. I can count on one hand the number of times guests haven’t clicked on the boat. It just doesn’t happen.”

I stay up on deck until the moonrise fades out the stars. Down in my cabin, I leave the curtains on the picture-window portal open. The moonlight reflects off the water and I fall asleep to a tropical version of the Northern Lights dancing on my white ceiling.

Over the next few days, I begin to appreciate the all-inclusiveness of a charter. It goes beyond the leather and wood-trim cabin, the gin-and-tonics, the steak and lobster. We pull into quiet bays for snorkeling and paddleboarding. We explore small harbors by kayak. And every afternoon, Penny opens the “noodle bar” by tossing a few floats off the stern and passing out nutmeg-sprinkled Painkiller cocktails. Within minutes, most of the passengers have dived into the ultimate swim-up bar.

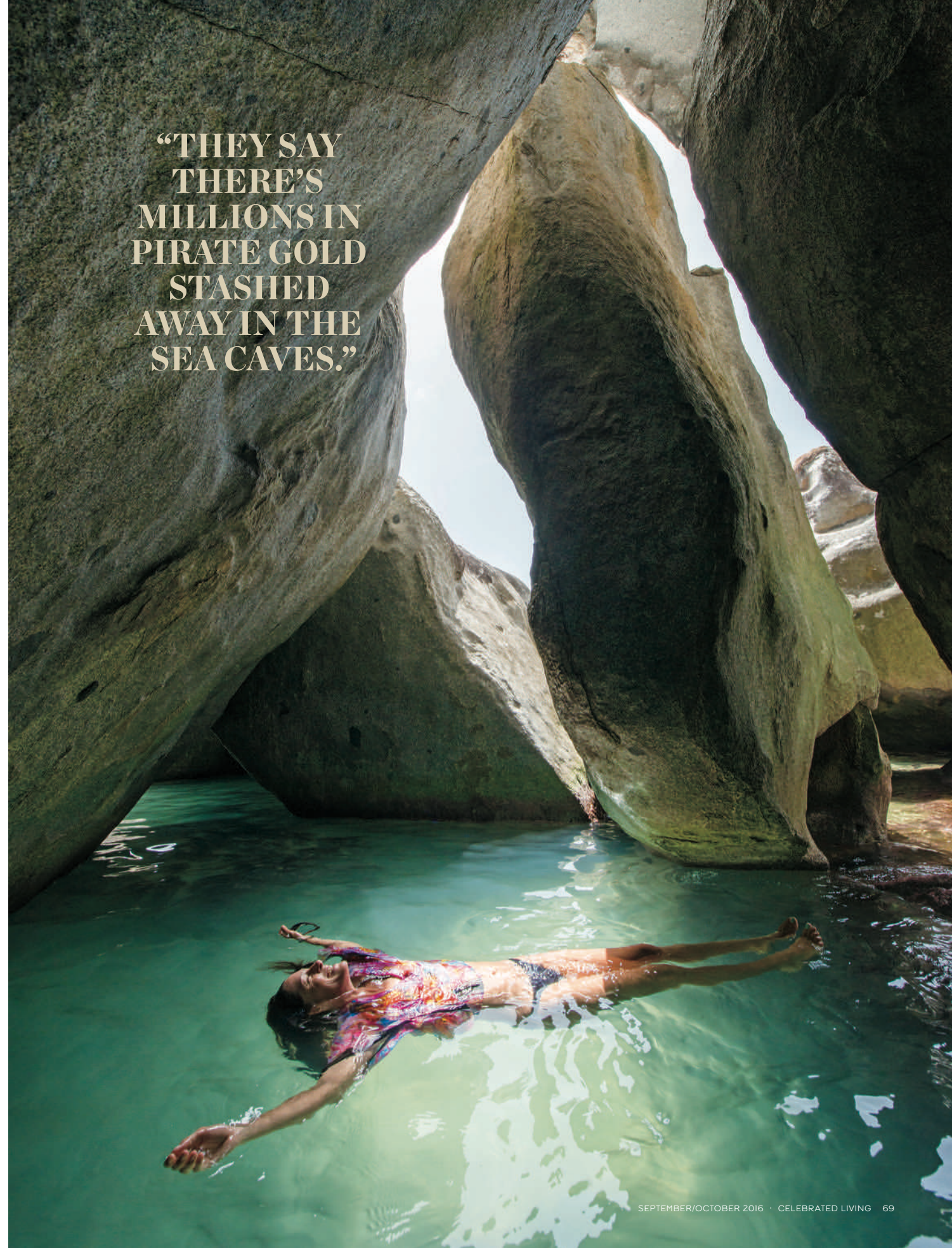
As we cruise among the islands, I realize it’s not just that Nathan and Penny know where to go, they also know when. Their nautical timing is spot-on, as we are always onshore long before any tour boats reach our destination. Today, we’re the sole sailboat mooring off Trunk Bay, a pristine, loamy beach against a backdrop of coconut trees and a couple of monolithic boulders. One of the businesswomen laughs as Nathan readies the kayak for her. “It’s so prehistoric-looking I’m half expecting a dinosaur to emerge from the jungle and wander down the beach,” she says.

Not surprisingly, given Magnus’ passion for the underwater world, TradeWinds’ charters also include scuba diving. When Magnus learned I’d been certified for the last 15 years and had racked up more than 1,000 dives, he spoke to Nathan about adding an afternoon stop.

An hour later, Nathan, a dive master, kits up Magnus and me. We’ve moored just off the Indians, a cluster of craggy seamounts said to resemble the feathers in a Cheyenne headdress. We step off the stern platform and, when the bubbles clear, free-fall like aquatic skydivers toward a field of purple sea fans. A hawksbill turtle the size of a coffee table glides past us, and a school of hunting trevally whirl like a disco ball.

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THIS PAGE: the *Alegria* and her sea kayak at an evening mooring
OPPOSITE PAGE: floating in the quiet calm of a grotto in Devil’s Day National Park





“IT SEEMS LIKE YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND A PRIVATE PLACE TO HIDE AWAY AND READ OR JUST SPEND TIME WITH YOUR PARTNER.”



THIS PAGE FROM TOP: guests paddling the *Alegria*'s sea kayak along the wild shore of Trunk Bay; the islands' hidden beaches

OPPOSITE PAGE FROM TOP: TradeWinds Co-Founder and CEO Magnus Lewin at the helm of one of his luxury catamarans; an overwater palapa at the Bitter End Yacht Club; beautiful soft corals

From 40 feet down, I look up at the sheer sea cliffs where the surf is thundering. The bubbles and seafoam look like storm clouds over some dark peak. The water is so clear I can see the twin hulls of the *Alegria* floating on the underwater sky.

I sleep in the next morning and only wake when Nathan blows the conch for breakfast. I'm halfway through my eggs Benedict when it hits me: Today's the day. We're sailing to the island locals claim was the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

The sea caves of Norman Island are tall, yawning crevices. "Watch the sea surge as you swim into the caves so you don't bang around," Nathan says as I slip on my fins and mask. He hands me a waterproof flashlight and jumps into the water beside me. We're instantly swarmed by a friendly school of yellow, black-striped sergeant major fish. "They're used to being fed," he chuckles as he puts his snorkel in his mouth and starts to swim.

It's a short snorkel over the reef before we spot the caves. The sandy bottom shallows out and we swim through clouds of silverside minnows that sparkle in the flashlight beams. The cave walls are red and orange and pulsing with delicate coral. "This is it," Nathan says when we finally reach the dark beach and haul out. The lap of the waves echoes in the chamber like a heartbeat. The air is dense with humidity. "The story is that a local fisherman sought



shelter from a storm inside a cave, maybe this one," Nathan says. "And the action of the surf had uncovered treasure."

I sweep the flashlight beam over the wet beach and rake my fingers in the sand. My only reward is some delicate shells. I linger in the cave after Nathan swims out, admiring the white silhouette of the *Alegria* caught in the cave's mouth. I wish I had a shovel.

Treasure Island's secret eludes me. But later that day, as we make one of our last crossings in the cobalt blue of the Drake Passage, I discover something just as precious sitting in the cockpit beside Magnus. "I'm always happiest when I'm out sailing," he says. "On a long passage, it takes a few days to leave the land behind you and lose those connections. But when it finally happens it's an amazing feeling. Suddenly you're just living in the now."

Learning to sail isn't part of the formal charter, but it's easy to get involved on a sailboat the size of the *Alegria*. Over the past few days, Magnus, Nathan and Penny have all taught me a glossary of nautical terms, shown me how to tie knots, hoist sails and read the instrument panels.

But there's one thing they haven't taught me to do yet.

"Take the wheel," Magnus says, sliding out of the captain's seat. He points to a distant island. "That's where we're going." ^{CL}

JAD DAVENPORT IS A WRITER AND A PHOTOGRAPHER. HE HAS TRAVELED TO MORE THAN 150 COUNTRIES ON ALL SEVEN CONTINENTS.



TradeWinds (Trade-winds.com) offers individual cabins and private charters in three classes of sailboats. The 50 and 52 foot Cruising Class and the 59 and 60 foot Luxury Class catamarans like the *Alegria* accommodate up to 10 guests. TradeWinds' Flagship Class, featuring the TradeWinds 70, have six cabins.