



The Pitons dominate the island of St. Lucia.

St. Vincent & The Grenadines

A Down Island Yacht Charter

By Tom Wuckovich

I am inexplicably drawn to the Caribbean each year in ways that I'm unable to resist. Sailing these tranquil waters on a chartered yacht has become a ritual, a rite of passage that I eagerly embrace, knowing that it invigorates my body and calms my soul like no other solitary event. For more than 20 years, Caribbean islands have been my refuge, a place to restore my energy, and it's never more evident than when I sail St. Vincent & the Grenadines in the southern Windwards.

Yachts still can glide silently through these aquamarine waters to places only touched by the sun, where voices in the night are few, carried upward on soft breezes into a star-studded canopy to join with the ghosts of others echoing the beauty and grandeur so brilliantly displayed here.

Sailing on a private yacht gives you the opportunity to explore hidden bays, coves and small villages at a leisurely pace seldom accorded to those who arrive here on large vessels with a schedule set in stone. Yacht charter guests can stay and play as long as they want, unaffected by the rules and regulations of a strict itinerary. In essence, you are the master of the sailboat, even though you may opt for a crewed yacht, which includes a captain and a first-rate chef.

The Moorings has been a mainstay in the Caribbean for over 30 years, and offers seven-day crewed charters to St. Vincent & The Grenadines that begin in St. Lucia at Marigot Bay, a secluded harbor so enchanting that filmmakers have featured it in several movies, including the original *Dr. Doolittle* starring Rex Harrison. From Marigot

Sea Fever

*I must go down to the seas
again, to the lonely sea
and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship
and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel's kick
and the wind's song
and the white sail's shaking,
And a gray mist
on the sea's face, and
a gray dawn breaking...*

—John Masefield

Bay, it is an idyllic sail southward to St. Vincent, the portal to The Grenadines.

With captain and cook aboard, along with four other friends on a 47-foot gleaming white Moorings catamaran—the yacht of choice for pleasure sailing, although single-hull crafts are still popular—we set sail on a glorious afternoon that would take us first to Soufrierre at the southern end of St. Lucia, with an overnight stay below one of the most memorable sights in all the Caribbean—The Pitons.

Towering some 2,000 feet above the bay, these twin peaks are singularly spectacular, and ones you won't soon forget. The bay also is home to one of the most prolific reefs in the area, and a snorkeling expedition before dinner will reveal parrotfish, spadefish, starfish, rays, eels, barracuda and an abundance of colorful coral. After a refreshing late afternoon swim, there's appetizers and cocktails to enjoy before an incredible dinner under the stars in a spacious cockpit that signals an end to our first day's journey.

The next morning, at first light, we were captivated by the sun's rays reflecting on the water like tiny diamonds on a black velvet cloth. After a hearty breakfast, we were ready for the sojourn into St. Vincent & The Grenadines, anxious to discover islands with extraordinary names such as Bequia, Mustique, Mayreau, Canouan and the Tobago Cays. We also were aware that these islands were the favorite haunt of 17th-century pirates, and talk of buried treasure, pirate lore and buccaneer exploits stimulated our imagination. We knew we weren't the first to indulge in fantasies about these waters.

The "Imagineers" at Disney chose St. Vincent and these hideaways for their first film in *The Pirates of the Caribbean* series: *The Curse of the Black Pearl*. At Wallilabou Bay on St. Vincent's north coast, Disney built the set that represented "Port Royal," where Captain Jack Sparrow, played by Johnny Depp, stepped ashore on the rickety dock as his dilapidated scow sank. We glided into this bay after a few hours' sail, anchored, and went ashore to explore the remains of the Pirates set left by the filmmakers.

Just beyond the black sand beach, a small road leads to a natural waterfall that cascades into an inviting lagoon where you can wash off the sea spray from the day's sail. The 20-minute hike winds through a lush valley surrounded by emerald green hills dressed in a wide variety of native plant life. Afterwards, Wallilabou's sheltered bay is an ideal place to have lunch before continuing on to Young Island Cut and Kingstown, the main town on St. Vincent.

Kingstown's crayon-colored mix of buildings is spread over just 12 small blocks—perfect for browsing the quaint shops and stores. The open-air markets and the stands of fresh fruit and vegetables that line the streets and the waterfront are a magnet for sailors. We opted for some bananas, mangos and coconut to take back to the "cat" for snacks. For a genuine hike, Fort Duvernette behind Young Island Resort is a true challenge.

The remains of the fort on top of this rock outcropping, which rises some 200 feet above sea level, includes two batteries, one about 40 feet from the top of the rock, and a second on the summit. Both contain 20 four-pound guns and an eight-inch mortar. It's an arduous climb, but we were rewarded with a magnificent view of the surrounding islands, in addition to the armament.

If you're a fan of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films, the cast was



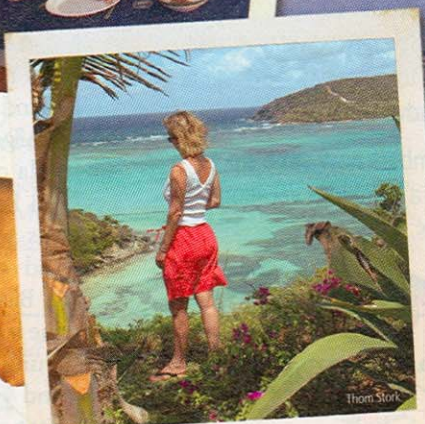
Ahoy, ye kids!

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You can share dinner onboard with friends, but there is time for quiet moments ashore.



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housed at Young Island Resort, and the Ocean Allegro restaurant on the Kingstown waterfront was a favorite watering hole for Depp and the other actors. The restaurant still features a “Black Pearl Martini” on its menu.

Despite these enticements, we were content to move on to the other islands on our itinerary. Next was Bequia (pronounced Beck-We), just nine miles south of St. Vincent and the largest in The Grenadines chain. In Bequia, they worship boats. The age-old tradition of building boats by hand is still practiced, and if by chance you happen to sail into Admiralty Bay and see this activity on the beach, check it out. The boats are rolled down to the water on huge logs amid cheers and applause—and the rum flows freely.

Yachtsmen from around the world consider this bay a great spot to anchor and to spend a day or so. The waterfront is lined with local bars, restaurants and craft shops, and there is usually a festival of some sort going on, complete with West Indian food and the occasional steel band. My first taste of spicy pumpkin soup was in Bequia, but sailors and visitors try to grab a pizza at Mac’s, an island legend, where the toppings are as diverse as the clientele.

And speaking of legends, Mustique has its share. This British-influenced island is home to such royalty as Princess Margaret and Prince Andrew, whose villa complex can be seen from Britannia Bay. Rock legend Mick Jagger also has a house on this luxurious getaway, and sometimes can be seen hanging out at Basil’s Bar on the beach just beyond the main dock. Wednesdays is “Jump Up” night at Basil’s and your best chance to spot a celebrity. Live music from a local band continues well into the early



Take a quick swim off the back of the yacht, and later share a glass a wine with your companions.

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hours. Basil’s specialty is homemade ice cream. Buy a cone before you head into the smaller Grenadines, where there are fewer conveniences.

In the Tobago Cays, there are no shops or stores—only sailboats anchored inside the horseshoe-shaped reef that surrounds the four main deserted isles. Dive or snorkel the luminescent waters or beachcomb the coral sands. Along some of the shoreline, conch shells by the thousands are littered on the beach, a testament to the bounty in these generous waters. Toward evening, music from yacht stereos fill the air along with the smell of fresh food being barbecued on grills attached to the stern of the yachts. It’s an atmosphere of tranquility rarely enjoyed anywhere in the world.

Leaving Tobago Cays is usually tinged with regret—it’s one of the most unspoiled places on earth, and it means that there are only a couple days left on the charter, and many more islands to stir the imagination. Which one to choose: Mayreau with its peaceful bay, Canuoa, Palm, Petit St. Vincent? Or perhaps, as I have done on many other occasions—save them for another time! **GP**

