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Chartering in the U.S. Virgin Islands

by Lynn Seldon, Boating Writer

With the approach of winter, many boaters have to put thoughts of boating in neutral and wait for the spring thaw. That's not the case for smart boaters who head to the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) for a little mid-winter time on and off the water.

Heading to the USVI has many advantages: frequent flights to St. Thomas; easy entry requirements for U.S. citizens; use of the U.S. dollar; excellent boating conditions; and experienced charter companies. Quite simply, these islands make for an ideal boating destination.

The USVI consist of three islands: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. St. Thomas is the busiest and most-developed of the three, with a bustling cruise ship port, world famous duty-free shopping, and many elegant resorts. Nearby St. John is small and serene, offering a wide variety of activities to outdoors enthusiasts. Thirty-five miles to the south, the largest island St. Croix, provides the ideal mix of her two sister islands, with two distinct towns to visit and a wide range of accommodations.

Most who charter a boat stick to the waters around St. Thomas and St. John (rather than heading to St. Croix), as well as the neighboring British Virgin Islands (BVI). Entry requirements are a bit more strict for the BVI (even for those on a boat), but any small hassles are well worth it (check www.bvitourism.com for more info)!

The Charter Experience

The beauty of chartering a boat in the USVI (besides warm mid-winter air and water) is that it's ideal for boaters with all experience levels. "A chartered yacht vacation still remains the best way to experience the true Caribbean," says Erik Ackerson, the new executive director of The Virgin Islands Charter yacht League.

Whether choosing a fully staffed charter where you leave everything to captain and crew or going completely bareboat (for those qualified), chartering a boat in the USVI gives complete flexibility (including the type and size of boat chartered). The captain and crew bring experience specific to Virgin Islands waters (including the best anchorages and restaurants), while charter company staff can help with complete plans for those going out on their own.

The variety of boats available for charter will suit any budget and number of people. Of course, though sometimes expensive, provisioning on St. Thomas is quite easy (some charters even do this for clients in advance, with specific requests filled when possible). Marina Market (www.marinamarketusvi.com) at Red Hook is highly recommended!

On the watersports front, the crystal-clear Caribbean beckons visitors with a wide variety of things to do above and below the surface. Hotels and outfitters can help with snorkeling, scuba diving, boating, fishing, windsurfing, parasailing, sea kayaking, and much more.

For information, contact the United States Virgin Islands Division of Tourism at 800-372-USVI or visit www.usvitourism.vi. For more information about chartering, visit www.vicl.org (The Virgin Islands Charter yacht League) or www.caribbeancharter.com (Flagship).

This is an abridged version of this article. To read the full version, including specific information about each of the USVI, please visit the Cruising Destinations section of www.americanboating.org.



*Tranquil beaches await you in the USVI.
Photo courtesy of U.S. Virgin Islands Dept. of Tourism*



Show Your Passion for Boating with ABA Personal Boat Checks

ABA members can order exclusive ABA personal checks and address labels from Identity Check Printers. These products offer a wonderful way to show your passion and support for ABA and America's proud boating history.

Featured designs include full color photographs or beautiful illustrations of lighthouses, powerboats, sailboats, the American flag, or a photo of your own boat. Each design is accompanied by the ABA logo. So, no matter what type of boater you are, there's a design that will appeal to you.

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View all of the designs and products online at www.americanboating.org/checks.asp and order yours today!



BOATER QUIZ - SAFETY RULES

Boating is fun recreation for the entire family. But a little carelessness or misguided action can take away that pleasure, which makes safety a top priority.

1. If a boat is overturned, what is your best safety action?
 - a. Immediately move away to keep from being pulled under if it sinks
 - b. Don life jackets and gather together away from the overturned boat
 - c. If it is not sinking, use the boat as support
2. Borrowed (as opposed to owned) watercraft account for what percentage of accidents?
 - a. Less than 10 percent
 - b. Less than 25 percent
 - c. More than 50 percent
3. Approximately how many drowning deaths are there in the U.S. each year?
 - a. 6,000
 - b. 8,500
 - c. 2,800
4. All federal waterways and many states require life jackets to be worn by persons under what age?
 - a. 5 years
 - b. 13 years
 - c. 16 years
5. How many boating-related drowning accidents involve alcohol?
 - a. Less than 10 percent
 - b. More than 50 percent
 - c. 28 percent
6. Vessels more than a certain length must carry a USCG-approved throwable PFD. What is that length?
 - a. 20 feet
 - b. 26 feet
 - c. 16 feet
7. When visibility is low and you hear two prolonged blasts every two minutes with a one second interval between, you are hearing a message from what?
 - a. A power-driven boat NOT underway
 - b. A power-driven boat underway
 - c. A sailing vessel
8. Choosing a marina is an important safety issue. What percentage of on-board fires do experts say is the result of electrical failures in shore wiring and overloaded circuits?
 - a. About 8 percent
 - b. About 34 percent
 - c. About 60 percent
9. Carbon monoxide poisoning mimics sea sickness and intoxication, in what way?
 - a. It's colorless, odorless, tasteless
 - b. It's light blue in color and has an odor like bananas
 - c. It's colorless, tasteless, but smells like rotten fish.

*Key to answers
1c, 2c, 3a, 4b, 5b, 6c, 7a, 8c, 9a*

Do You Have All the Auto Coverage You Think You Have?

Millions of auto owners are involved in accidents every year—and if that weren't bad enough, some people are often stunned to find out that their auto coverage actually may not cover everything they anticipate. For instance, many auto policies will take a deduction for depreciation—even if the car is brand new and is involved in an accident while driving off the dealer's lot!

Below are some questions you should ask before purchasing auto insurance:

- If your new car is damaged beyond repair, will your auto insurer replace the vehicle with a new one, or take a deduction for depreciation? Many insurance policies specify that they will only reimburse you for the blue book value of your vehicle, not for the vehicle's sticker value, no matter how recently the vehicle was purchased.
- If your older auto is involved in an accident, will your auto insurer replace items like tires, batteries, steering and electrical wiring components in full, without taking a deduction for depreciation?
- If you have an accident while driving a rental car and it needs repair work, will your auto insurance pay the rental agency's expenses for daily loss of rental income while the auto is out of service? Will it pay for the towing, storage and administrative costs the rental company may incur?

As an ABA member, you now have the opportunity to apply to purchase quality auto insurance at special rates that are designed to save you money, with hassle free payment options, and personalized service.

For more information, free insurance reviews, and no obligation premium quotes, call **800-888-2308**. Be sure to mention your group code: **BGX** or visit www.americanboating.org/metlife.asp. ■

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Are you missing out on valuable ABA member benefits? Following is just a snapshot of member benefits available to you. For a full listing, please visit www.americanboating.org.

- Safe & Clean Boating Information
- 5% Discount at BoatersWorld.com
- Boating Life Magazine
- Boat Maintenance & Repair Program
- ABA Marina Discounts
- ABA Boat Insurance: 800-477-7140
- ABA Boat & RV Financing: Boat - 877-222-0244 RV - 866-789-4511
- Boat Value Calculator
- Marine Manufacturers Information
- Boat Towing and Education Laws
- ABA Group Auto Insurance
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