

Women Who Sail



Giving Back

to the BVIs

By Julie Thorndycraft

The British Virgin Islands are a special place, both for those who live there and for those who visit. It is where my husband and I got our first taste of tropical sailing. The BVI ultimately got us hooked into a sailing lifestyle. When Category-5 Hurricane Irma smacked the islands September 6, 2017 with winds exceeding 215 miles per hour, we worried about the devastation and its impact on the people and the island. Then Hurricane Maria trounced the Caribbean two weeks later. The two hurricanes, referred to as Irmageddon, devastated the islands, including their tourism industry.

This natural disaster was unfolding just as the location decisions were being made for the fourth-annual Women Who Sail (WWS) Rendezvous. Over the last couple of years, the group has taken a philanthropic focus by giving back to the areas in which we sail. After Irmageddon, the destination choice was simple—we needed to, had to, return to the British Virgin Islands, which had been the location of the first WWS Rendezvous in 2015. They needed tourists (us) to help their economy and help their recovery.

Mahalo Sailing, the primary organizer of the trip, got a firm commitment from Dream Yacht Charters that they would have boats back in service by the time the event was scheduled for May 2018. With boats secured, the trip was a go.

We sought to expand our impact—just spending money as tourists wasn't enough. We wanted to help where it was needed, but everything was needed whether it be food, housing, fresh water—literally everything! Through connections on Facebook such as BVI Abroad-Hurricane Irma we connected with One Love BVI, a charitable non-profit that was raising funds for a wide variety of needs. We narrowed our focus to Adopt-A-Roof BVI (AAR) and started to actively solicit donations from WWS members, friends, and family members. AAR's primary objective is to raise funds to put roofs back on houses where the hurricanes had either ripped them off or damaged them. The need was great: 80% of the homes had roof damage of some scale. One hundred percent of the funds were targeted for re-building projects. The homes selected were



those most in need and inhabited by “belongers”—not some vacation home or vacation rental.

The Rendezvous officially kicked off May 11 with an initial get-together dinner for 40 women at Island Roots Café in Road Town. To accommodate our large group, they closed just for us and prepared a wonderful buffet dinner. Xtian (pronounced “Christian”), the mixologist extraordinaire, served up the most unusual rum punches which, combined with his enthusiastic chatter, got everyone into the party mode.

Opening night would not be complete without a few presentations. Chris Marshall from Adopt-A-Roof joined us for the event and shared information regarding the positive impact that our donations were having in the BVI. Captain Holly Scott of Mahalo Sailing shared the relevant logistical details for the upcoming week, and we ended the night with a few raffles from our sponsors who donate items from magazine subscriptions to plush Turkish towels.

I’d be lying if I said the night ended at that point. It may have for some, but for a number of us, we stuck around long enough for Xtian to get even crazier with the adult beverage concoctions!

We boarded the boats the next afternoon; three 50+ foot monohulls and two very large catamarans. Captain Sarah Cavanaugh and First Mate Anne Arey were in charge

of the largest catamaran, a brand new 47-foot Fountain Pajot Saona. Like any new boat, it had a few quirks but it made up for it with a great layout that allowed everyone to comfortably hang out on the upper deck next to the helm.

We set off for Leverick Bay for the first night and then headed to Anegada the next day. We rented a couple of trucks, loaded a dozen sailors onto benches in the back of each truck, and headed off to Loblolly Bay. It was a great treat to spend time snorkeling and exploring. In our exuberance, we managed to leave one person behind and had to send a truck back to rescue our inadvertent castaway.

From Anegada we headed to Marina Cay—the devastation was most sobering. And yet, the bougainvillea was blooming and sharing its splashy color with everyone. The bright red British phone booth, so familiar to locals and visitors alike, was missing but had been located in the harbor and was marked with a Clorox bottle to ensure its future rescue from the salty depths.

A trip to the BVI is not complete without a stop at Foxy’s on Jost Van Dyke. Our rowdy group of 40+ women invaded the bar and restaurant for some great food and a crazy night of dancing. There were rumors that a bra was stapled to the rafters but we heard later that it disappeared. We suspect that a local needed it far more than the rafters! Win-win!





The biggest treat on this trip were the winds—we had big winds! Every boat, monohulls and catamarans alike, got plenty of time to put sails up and enjoy some amazing sailing days. I personally manned the helm of a 50-foot monohull from Anegada to the Baths and can say that I washed the boat—and its crew—thoroughly!

After Jost, we headed to Norman Island for some snorkeling at the Caves and the Indians. With the wind and waves, the snorkeling at the Indians was a bit of a challenge, but we still had an amazing time. From there our cat took a side trip into a small bay that was completely protected from the winds. We spent a wonderful afternoon paddling around on the SUP and kayak. A perfect wind-down for a fabulous week.

We returned to the marina base the next day and reluctantly turned our boats back in. But we were not done. That night we had a big dinner at The Tamarind Club to celebrate the Royal Wedding occurring across the pond in the original British Isles. The Tamarind created a special menu for us and we had a great final evening at the restaurant that had been a focal point of the very first WWS Rendezvous.

The Tamarind Club had been demolished by Irmageddon and while they were able to re-open the



restaurant, the hotel side of their business along with their pool had yet to recover. It was nice to be able to give them some business and it was exceptionally nice of them to cater our Royal Wedding Dinner!

In regards to our overall fund-raising efforts, we raised over \$7000 for Adopt-A-Roof as well as donated a large number of items to local charities. Fund raising required a bit of creativity. We had a silent auction that included some great items from our sponsors. And in one situation a fork that was left behind from another boat was ransomed and raised \$31— for a fork!

As always, the trip was declared a success and the “best ever”! We’re already planning Rendezvous #5, heading back to the Pacific side of Mexico and the Sea of Cortez in April 2019! 🇺🇸

