



# PIRATES AND LEOPARDS IN THE CARIBBEAN?



Getting your pirate on in the British Virgin Islands (BVI).

| story **JOHN DEVERS**

There are plenty of scary bedtime stories about the real pirates of the Caribbean. Blackbeard put lit fuses into his hair and beard, which gave off smoke and made him look like a demon in battle. He terrorised Atlantic shipping from 1717-1718 before he was killed by pirate hunters. 'Black Bart' Roberts was the most successful pirate of his generation, capturing and looting hundreds of ships in a three-year career to 1722. 'Calico Jack' Rackham was known for the bright clothes he wore and the two female pirates serving on board his ship. In those days, the battles were lethal, and brutality knew no bounds. There are even stories about big cats smuggled aboard pirate ships to strike fear into the enemy when engaged at close quarters in battles on the high seas.

St Martin – Leopard 48.



Fast forward three centuries and any big cat sightings in the Caribbean are more likely to be from the Leopard family and the stories about life at sea in that part of the world are thoroughly modern. They are about lifestyle, adventure and new possibilities as we prepare to usher in the third decade of the 21st Century.

Over the past seven years, I've reviewed many models across the Leopard range and talked to many proud owners about the features and benefits they love, as well as their plans for cruising in Australian waters. While big numbers of these proven cruising vessels have been delivered into the Mediterranean and Caribbean charter markets since the early 2,000's, Australia's love affair with the Leopard brand has gained its growing momentum mostly in the last 10 years. Leopards across both the sail and power cat range have become immensely popular because of their design and performance credentials in our warm climate

settings, especially with private owners. Hence past reviews and cruising experiences have been framed within the Australian context.

But hey, on this magnificent round planet of ours, some smart thinking outside the square box can so easily set up new sailing adventures that are exotic, exciting, safe and even financially sensible. What if cruising possibilities ticked boxes you didn't think were within reach? Well, clip on your safety harness, settle in with a black rum pineapple cocktail while I whet your cruising appetite and bust a few myths in the process.

If private ownership is your thing, what if you were to take delivery of your new Leopard in the British Virgin Islands in the heart of the Caribbean with the benefit of a lower purchase price without the 5% duty and 10% GST? Then spend a year or two ... or more, soaking up the culture and history of this extraordinary part of the world. Set off for unlimited trade wind sailing

on the beam up and down the countless windward and leeward islands. Tap into the excellent marine infrastructure, including all the trades and services on hand. Discover how easy everything is with mostly day sails from the British Virgin Islands all the way to the Grenadines.

If it's charter ownership that interests you, how does this sound? Moorings/Sunsail offer guaranteed returns of 9% per annum on the purchase price and up to 12 weeks access across their vast network of charter bases. There are a host of owner privileges available including upgrades, family and guest benefits and the ability to redeem points across brands, vessel types, flotillas and sailing schools.

Whatever form of ownership you decide on, to make your way between sun-kissed atolls and put your toes into an impossibly blue sea, the first rule is to relax. For those looking for a true slice of adventure, or for those with a yearning to explore unique cultures, or simply those on a quest for the world's finest rum cocktails, the Caribbean is a sailing mecca, and there's no better way to truly see it than by boat!

Lose yourself in the laid-back local vibe as you cruise from island to island. Choose between easy sailing over short distances or longer open-water passages for more of a challenge. Stop off for lunch and a swim, dive, paddleboard or kayak. Dip your toes off the stern into soothing cobalt water as you make your way along the archipelago. After sailing, moor up and toast to a superb day in paradise with a cool, well-earned beer or cocktail. Sheer bliss.

What about the hurricane? Just over 18 months after Hurricane Irma hit the British Virgin Islands, this 'jewel in the Caribbean' has well and truly bounced back to its former glory. It has not only bounced back better, stronger and greener, but many of the most-loved local establishments have reopened to delight seasoned sailors with their mouth-watering cuisine and famous Caribbean hospitality. Its pristine white sands, turquoise waters and snorkelling spots are as spectacular as ever.

Isn't it expensive? The cost of living shouldn't be a challenge if you're smart about it. Take the British Virgin Islands for example; unless you plan to visit an all-inclusive yacht club or resort, you can rub shoulders with the locals at the rustic dinner shacks and bars you'll find nestled among many of the bays.

Most Caribbean moorings tend to take the shape of well-maintained buoys, much easier than classic Med-style stern-to mooring, and they cost around \$US30 a night pretty much everywhere you go. The fee is



FROM TOP:  
British Virgin Islands (BVI) Leopard 50.  
Anegada – Cow wreck beach bar.  
British Virgin Islands (BVI) Leopard 50.

normally collected each evening by the local bar or restaurant by dinghy as the sun goes down, and they'll offer a little casual chit chat and let you know about their catch of the day, should you want to eat ashore.

### WHEN TO GO?

Despite preconceptions, the Caribbean is an amazing year-round destination, able to offer some of the world's best weather any month of the year. Yes, it's worth remembering the old rhyme about rain; 'June too soon, July stand by, August it must, September remember, October all over.' Though this is hardly scientific, it gives you an indication of when the rain is around. The rest of the year sees largely dry, warm-to-hot weather, with the odd tropical depression coming

in short and sharp, and over before you know it. Winds and sea states can get a little livelier around Christmas and New Year, which is actually the peak time for visiting, particularly in the yachting community.

### WHERE TO GO?

With more than 700 different Caribbean islands, islets, caves and reefs in the Caribbean, you're literally spoiled for choice. If you're wanting that castaway secluded experience, you're in luck as only 2% of its islands are inhabited, allowing for unique areas teeming with exotic marine and land wildlife to thrive! Here are just nine possibilities:

Norman Island, British Virgin Islands. At the southern tip of the British Islands archipelago you will find Norman

Island. Steeped in fantastic tales of pirates and buried treasure, this storied island is said to have inspired Robert Louis Stevenson's famous classic *Treasure Island*.

Take your time to enjoy panoramic views from Spy Glass Hill, a known pirate vantage point, or sail towards Dead Man's Bay to sing the infamous tune 'yo ho ho and a bottle of rum' like Blackbeard's marooned crew. Rumours of more pirate gold on the island, fantastic snorkelling spots and turquoise waters, are just a couple of reasons that make this island a must see.

Discover the island's popular diving sites such as The Caves and Indians where you'll find warm waters teeming with blue tangs, parrotfish and sergeant majors. Make sure to anchor up in The Bight, one of BVI's safest and most picturesque anchorages and home to one of the island's most loved bars, The Pirates Bight Bar and Restaurant. Spend the afternoon relaxing on the island's soft sands overlooking the restaurant and tuck into conch fritters or spiced mahi-mahi, for an unforgettable Caribbean culinary experience.

Cooper Island. This eco-conscious little gem is home to a protected anchorage, superb snorkelling spots, a solar-powered microbrewery and the largest rum bar in the British Virgin Islands. There are only five privately owned properties on the island, plus a friendly Eco-resort. Supporting sustainable tourism, Cooper Island offers more than 230 worldwide rums, water sports activities and mouth-watering dishes such as lobster bisque seafood stew.

Jost Van Dyke. Resting in the northern part of the BVI's archipelago, Jost Van Dkye was named after the Dutch privateer and rumoured pirate. Building forts on Jost Van Dyke, Tortola and Virgin Gorda, he worked on behalf of the Dutch West India Company before the Spanish invaded in 1680.

Despite its storied past, Jost remains an unspoilt oasis dotted with sugar mill ruins, natural sea-formed Jacuzzis and spectacular views for dolphin and whale watching. One of the most popular hangouts in the Caribbean is the Soggy Dollar Bar, home of the notorious painkiller cocktail. You can't head to the British Virgin Islands without dropping anchor for this coconut cream and distilled rum infusion, coated with freshly grated nutmeg.



**TOP:** Moorings Tortola base in British Virgin Islands (BVI).

**ABOVE L-R:**  
St Lucia's famous waterfalls.  
British Virgin Islands (BVI) Leopard 50.  
Leave nothing but footprints in Exumas.



**TOP:** British Virgin Islands (BVI)

**ABOVE:** British Virgin Islands (BVI) A flotilla sunset.

Anegada, British Virgin Islands. Around 11nm north of Virgin Gorda, is the unique island of Anegada formed from coral and limestone rather than volcanic rock. The famous Horseshoe Reef around Anegada is 29km long, making it the largest barrier reef in the Caribbean and the fourth largest in the world. Being the only all-coral atoll in the Caribbean, floating a mere 28ft above sea level, the BVI government closed anchoring in the Horseshoe reef in an attempt to preserve the coral. With other mooring spots scattered around the island, head to Anegada for their famous lobsters and to catch a glimpse of flamingos in their natural habitat. You won't want to miss the annual culinary extravaganza that is the Anegada's Lobster Festival held each year in November.

Salt Island, British Virgin Islands. Around three nautical miles south of Tortola, the aptly named Salt Island provided passing travellers and other islanders with salt for centuries. Being a valuable commodity for preserving meat and flavouring food, it became customary for the Governor of the Virgin Islands to send one pound of salt to the monarch on the Queen's birthday, a tradition that was recently renewed in 2015.



Moliniere Bay, Grenada. Located off the west coast of Grenada, this bay is home to the world's first underwater sculpture gallery. With over 60 stone installations created by British sculptor Jason deCaires Taylor, you'd be surprised to discover that some weigh as much as 15 tons. One of the most famous Moliniere underwater pieces, Vicissitudes, shows children holding hands and standing in a ring, which Taylor suggests signifies the adaptability of children in any environment. Do not miss the chance to dive or snorkel around these amazing ecological structures that are half sculpted by man and half created by the ocean.

**LEFT:** Beachside in British Virgin Islands (BVI).

**LEFT:** With over 700 islands in the Bahamas and Caribbean Sea you're literally spoiled for choice, Leopard 40, 45 and Leopard 43PC.

Saint Martin (St Maarten). Situated northeast of the Caribbean Sea, St Maarten holds the title of the world's smallest inhabited island divided between two countries, with a total surface area of just 34sqkm. However, this isn't the only interesting fact about St Maarten. Discovered by Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the West Indies in 1493, he named the island 'Isla de San Martin', and it has since had its fair share of smoky gun battles. With Spanish, French and Dutch all wanting to assert their claim over St Maarten, the Island is now split between the French and Dutch, after changing hands between the two nations 16 times.

St Lucia. Just south of Martinique, in the eastern Caribbean Sea, St Lucia is said to have the world's only drive-in volcano. With sulphur springs that erupted through a weak spot in a collapsed crater over 400,000 years ago, visitors can now enjoy a volcano mud bath in the sulphur springs of La Soufriere. Highly recommended is an afternoon taking in this rumoured nutrient-rich bath that is said to rejuvenate your skin and muscles. Afterwards, unwind in the warm waterfalls nearby while soaking in the beautiful scenery.



**TOP:** From the dock in St. Maarten (St Martin).

**ABOVE LEFT:** Snorkelling the aqua waters of the BVI's.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Explore by Scooter in St Martin.

Antigua. If you're able to pull yourself away from the candy-coloured villages and bustling capital of St John's, you're spoiled for choice when it comes to Antigua's white sands. With 365 beaches on Antigua, you could literally visit a different location every day of the year, making it the ideal year-round destination. And while you're there, don't forget to try Antigua's official fruit, the black pineapple. Grown only in Antigua, the sweet fruit is so delicate that it's rarely transported off the island. If heading to Antigua, you must time your visit to coincide with the iconic Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta. Held each year in April to honour age and beauty on the water, it is a standout event on the global yachting calendar.

### BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE ...

And if these nine destinations don't fill your headsail and raise the salt levels in your sailor's blood, how about the less travelled Abaco islands, to the north of the mainland Bahamas and not far off the east coast of Florida? Here are the top things to do there that make this destination one that beckons like a mermaid.

**Pig Roast Party at Nipper's.** It's one of the most sought-after weekly events in the Abacos. Drop anchor

at Settlement Harbour or Fisher's Bay and stroll over to the iconic Nipper's Beach Bar & Grill on the north side of Great Guana Cay. From bright multi-coloured bar stools to a mouth-watering barbecue buffet and strong exotic cocktails to stunning beach views, you just can't beat these legendary Sunday Pig Roast parties. Take a dip in the pool, jam out to live music and cut loose, Bahamian style.

**Green Turtle Cay.** For a genuine Bahamian experience, visit Green Turtle Cay, known for its shops, restaurants, historical sites, colourful buildings, and distinctive white picket fences. Strolling the lovely streets of New Plymouth will take you on a delightful journey back in time to when British colonists first established the Loyalist settlement. There is plenty to see and explore throughout Green Turtle Cay, making it an idyllic location for visitors. Modern day charm is married with remnants of fascinating stories from the past.

**Full Moon Party at Cracker P's.** If you're fortunate enough to find yourself in the Abacos during a full moon, a visit to Cracker P's is a must. Complete with a delicious buffet, breathtaking deck views, dancing, and a beach bonfire, the good times never seem to end. You can join in the fun and maybe even make some new friends by playing volleyball, bocce ball, croquet, and horseshoes. There is also a nature trail on site for those that wish to explore more of the lush tropical scenery at the 7.5-acre estate.

**Meet the Swimming Pigs.** Animal lovers and those with an adventurous side will adore the wild swine encounter with the world-famous swimming pigs at No Name Cay. Due to their immense popularity with travellers, the pigs that live on this uninhabited little island are used to human interaction and are not shy about how much they enjoy being fed. If you choose to feed them, do so with caution and be sure to give them non-processed food items like fruit and vegetables. It's entirely up to you how up-close you get. Just don't forget to capture this Instagram-worthy moment on camera before saying goodbye to your new four-legged friends.

**Climb the Lighthouse.** An Abacos stopover is simply not complete without a visit to Elbow Cay's Hope Town. Climb 101-steps to the top of the candy-stripe

painted lighthouse to bask in unspoiled panoramic views of the Out Island Bahamas. Easily the region's most recognisable landmark, Elbow Reef Lighthouse stands 89ft tall and has guided boats safely into harbour since 1863. There are also plenty of shops and restaurants to enjoy during your time in Hope Town, including a local gem, the Sugar Shack ice cream shop – a treat for your eyes and your taste buds.

**World-Famous Fishing.** In and offshore fishing is renowned throughout the Abacos, with popular hot-spots located in Marsh Harbour and Walker's Cay. The

shallow, marshy flats of Great Abaco have become well-known amongst the outdoor sports community for top-notch bonefishing, while a number of big game trophy catches, including but not limited to billfish, marlin, sailfish, tuna, and wahoo, attract rod-and-reel enthusiasts to the deeper waters beyond the drop-off.

#### WHAT DOES ALL THIS LEAD?

Well, apart from the sights, the sailing, the culture, the food and all the people you'll meet along the way, you'll gain such splendid sailing experience on the Leopard



**TOP:** St Lucia as the sun sets.  
**ABOVE:** Stunning blue hues in the BVI's.  
**RIGHT:** The wind in your sails – Leopard 45.

Enjoy a world class charter experience with The Moorings (or Sunsail) and discover the blissful white sands of the Caribbean islands from the deck of your private state-of-the-art yacht! Choose from nine exotic locations across the Caribbean, cruise through protected anchorages and into full-service marinas offering first-class facilities.

Sailors with all levels of expertise will find accommodating waterways that make for some of the most enjoyable sailing experiences, you can choose to bareboat, hire a skipper, join a flotilla or indulge in our fully crewed option.

See [www.moorings.com.au](http://www.moorings.com.au) or [www.sunsail.com.au](http://www.sunsail.com.au) for details

of your choice in this part of the world, you will be fully prepared to head downwind and through the Panama Canal for a sensational passage via all the great stop-offs through the Pacific on your journey back home. Take as long as you like. You and I both know that with a proud history of deliveries from the factory in Cape Town to all the major cruising destinations across the globe, Leopard catamarans are designed for serious blue water destination sailing. They are literally designed to go anywhere you choose to take them.

Boxes ticked ... Bags packed. What's stopping You?

With acknowledgement to sources including *The Moorings and Sunsail Blogs*.

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