

one vacation

CALL IT THE IDEAL CARIBBEAN COMBO OF **GO TIME** AND **SLOW TIME**: AT THESE THREE FOOLPROOF PAIRS OF YIN-AND-YANG GETAWAYS, YOU CAN MAKE THE SCENE — AND THEN HIT THE HAMMOCK.

SO CLOSE, AND YET SO FAR
The sleepy sands of Isla Mujeres
are a great place to recover
from clubbing in Cancún.



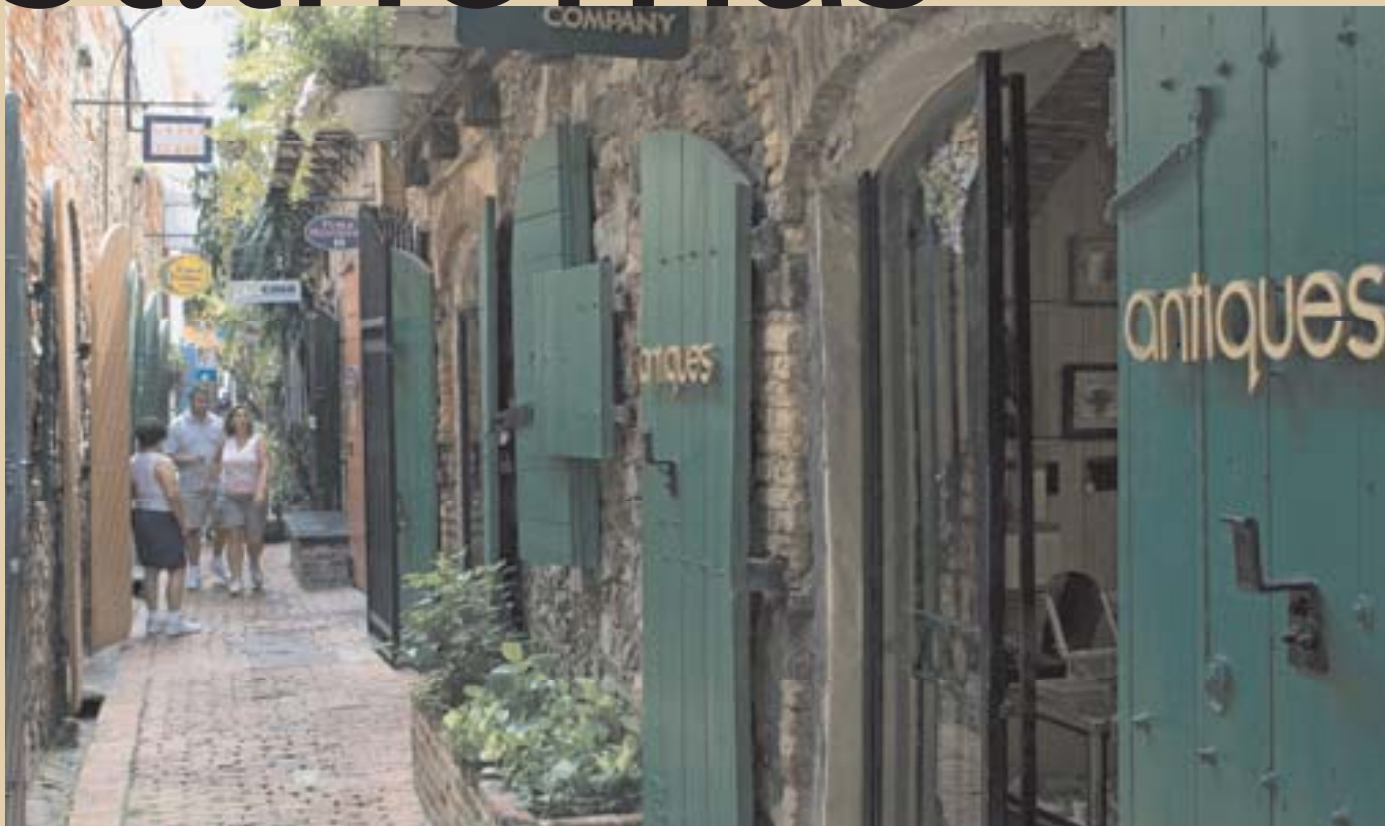
two different worlds

ZACH STOVALL; LEFT: AL ARGUETA

Caribbean Travel + Life 75

GO TIME

st.thomas



SHOP TILL YOU DROP, SEE THE SIGHTS AND PUT ON THE RITZ ...

Blink! When you turn into the driveway of the Ritz-Carlton, you might do a double-take: What's an imposing Florentine palazzo, all arches and campaniles, doing on St. Thomas? Blink again: You enter a high-ceilinged, marble-and-art lobby and look through tall windows to a turquoise cove framed by low headlands and distant isles. After a \$40 million makeover, the Ritz-Carlton St. Thomas is grander than ever. The resort has restyled its beachfront restaurants, expanded its spa and up-Ritized its 180 guest rooms with sumptuous linens and Posturepedic mattresses. Stroll around its 30 acres, and you'll find flower gardens, a curve of lovely white sand and a 53-foot catamaran bobbing at anchor, waiting to take guests on sunset cruises. It's an oasis of calm on a go-go island.

With a water-sports pavilion offering sailing, snorkeling, windsurfing, parasailing or scuba diving on your doorstep, you'll find a zillion excuses for not leaving the beach. But do it anyway. The island's top attraction, Coral World, with a three-story underwater tower for gawking at sharks and morays, is just up the road. Farther afield, you can take in a 22-island view from the hilltop St. Peter Greathouse and Botanical Garden, play a round at Mahogany Hill Golf Course or kayak and hike around a mangrove lagoon.

Next, stop off for a dip in gorgeous Magens Bay, or window-shop for tax-free Rolexes and Armanis in Charlotte Amalie. (Among the new boutiques at Yacht Haven Grande, you can also lunch at W!kked, the island's buzzy new waterside restaurant.) At dinnertime, take a short cab ride to Red Hook and choose from a slew of options: mango sakijitos and green-apple pad Thai at Lotus Asia Grill, say, or the freshest seafood on the deck at Off the Hook. After dinner, one of the island's most stylish lounges is right there at the Ritz — just a moonlit stroll through the garden away from those 400-thread-count sheets. — Ian Keown



PLACES TO GO, THINGS TO DO
Shopping in Charlotte Amalie goes well beyond the routine duty-free fare (top).
Above: Coral World.

MICHAEL DEFREITAS

... THEN LEAVE CIVILIZATION BEHIND AND TAKE TO THE SEA ON A SLOOP.



UNDER SAIL

What better way to get away from it all than by chartering a handsome boat and letting the wind take you?

You've commemorated Magens Bay to pixels, power-shopped St. Thomas' boutiques, maybe even succumbed to a seaweed exfoliation. Now it's time to deep-six the to-do list. What better way to change longitude and attitude than on a chartered yacht plying the untroubled waters of the Virgin Islands, an archipelago renowned for its fair winds and snug harbors?

If you're lucky, when your ship comes in, it will look a lot like Phaedrus, the classy 50-foot sloop that's part of a vanishing breed — it's a "two-pack" that accepts just two passengers per cruise. Think of a floating, one-bedroom B&B skippered by a gourmet chef who will drop anchor every night somewhere new.

After pick-up at St. Thomas' bustling Red Hook marina, the island's condo-covered hills soon fade astern as Captain Charles Swaim sets a course for Maho Bay on laid-back St. John. There, deprogramming continues with an afternoon snorkel amid schools of reef fish. Then nibble tapas and sip superb French wine while sunset burnishes the mountains girdling the beach-rimmed bay, one of the jewels of Virgin Islands National Park. This is the perfect time to stow the BlackBerry and cede command to Swaim, who's sailed these waters for 15 years. Phaedrus' voyages can last from four days to two weeks. "We have no itinerary," he says. "Any given day is purely spontaneous."

Is there a better ethos for embracing the Caribbean? The wind, weather and your energy level determine the boat's bearing. You can grab a bleu-cheese burger at Skinny Legs in St. John's funky Coral Bay, drink painkillers at the Soggy Dollar on Jost Van Dyke or poke around Blackbeard's former hideout at Soper's Hole. Then ponder the meaning of Great Camanoe's Throw Away Wife Bay. Repeat process daily until cell phone slips overboard. — Christopher R. Cox

For THE ESSENTIALS on these combination vacations, turn to page 108.



STEVE SIMONSEN

sailing

the virgins

SLOW TIME