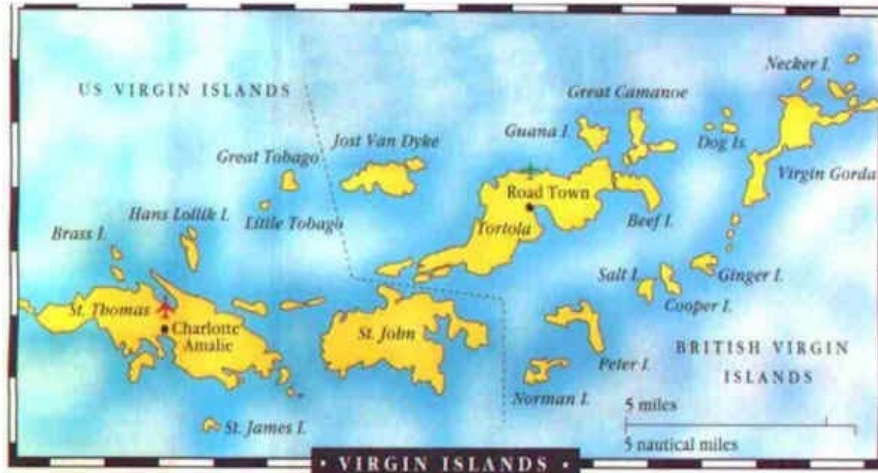


Virtual Virgins: Island Hopping in the Virgin Islands 37.2 Mile Swim

This 37.2 mile swim takes you through some of the most beautiful waters in the world. The clear blue seas, the brilliant white sand, the coral reefs, and varied marine life attract snorkelers, divers, sailors, and tourists in general from all over the world. This is an island-hopping swim. You can stop overnight or spend a week liming on each of the islands you visit. Who knows, you may find a hammock and some rum punch and never leave.



Begin on St. John, the smallest and least developed of the 3 main U.S. Virgin Islands. The island is two-thirds Virgin Islands National Park and so it will stay preserved for posterity. St. John has campgrounds, hiking trails, an underwater snorkeling trail, and ruins of Danish sugar plantations.

St. John looking from east to west



You will swim from Hawksnest Bay on the north shore, just east of Caneel Bay, a Rockefeller resort. You can see the white sand ocean bottom clearly even at 20 or 30 feet. Look for corals, including elkhorn, staghorn, and brain corals; also watch for colorful parrotfish, blue tang, yellowtail snapper, and even barracuda. The water is a comfortable 83 degrees in the summer and 79 degrees in the winter. Fall is the coolest, rainiest time. During hurricane season, storms can make sea travel impossible.

Hawksnest Bay, St. John

Swim 5.2 miles north into the Atlantic towards Jost Van Dyke, one of the least visited of the British Virgin Islands. Jost Van Dyke (the J is pronounced like a Y) until recently had no roads. It is famous for Foxy's Beach Bar in Great Harbour. It is the westernmost of the British Virgin Islands. As you swim, you'll see seabirds such as magnificent frigatebirds, brown and masked boobies, tropicbirds, laughing gulls, and brown pelicans.



White Bay, Jost Van Dyke

You will next swim 4.8 miles southeast to Tortola, the largest of the BVI. You will likely come ashore at Cane

Garden Bay on the north shore, a beautiful palm lined beach. You can visit the Callwood Rum Distillery there, still in operation since the 1700's. The peaks of Sage Mountain are above, a natural rain forest with hiking trails. In the forests, look for tamarind, mango, calabash, gumbo limbo, and genip trees. You may see or hear the introduced mongooses in the bush and find hermit crabs climbing the hills. Make your way to Road Town, the capital town of the BVI, for shopping, restaurants, and a hotel.



Road Town, Tortola

Leave Road Town and swim your longest leg to Virgin Gorda (the fat virgin), 10.2 miles. You are now on the Caribbean side of the islands in the Sir Francis Drake Channel which can be choppy. Look out for boat traffic, sharks, and green and hawksbill turtles. From January through March, humpback whales are heard and seen to the north of the BVI. On Virgin Gorda, you can visit the Baths, an area of huge, smooth, granite boulders forming wading canyons, trails and pools. You might stay at Little Dix Bay, another Rockefeller resort. If you

are feeling adventurous, take a swim over to Necker Island, just northeast of Virgin Gorda, and drop in on Sir Richard Branson of Virgin Atlantic Airways fame.



The Baths, Virgin Gorda

Your next swim is 5 miles heading southwest past Ginger Island to Cooper Island, famous for snorkeling, diving and the Beach Club. Manchineel Bay is named for a poisonous tree; don't stand under one during a rain or its poisons will drip onto your skin and cause burns. The wreck of the Rhone, a popular dive site, is nearby.



Cooper Island Snorkeling



Peter Island

Next swim 4 miles past Salt Island to Peter Island, home of the prestigious Peter Island Yacht Club. You will swim past Dead Chest and come ashore at Deadman's Bay, where Edward Teach (Blackbeard the Pirate) marooned some of his men with only a cutlass and a bottle of rum, hence the song "Yo Ho Ho..." (you know the rest.)

Begin your last 8 miles back to St. John. To your south you will see Norman Island, said to be the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island. Swim southwest towards St. John's East End. Many of these south-facing shores are rocky, arid, cactus-covered landscapes, providing a contrast to the lush, green northern shores. Look for century plants (agave) and pope's head cactus. Swim into the bay and into the relatively isolated town of Coral Bay. The bay is a deep harbor although inaccessible to large craft. Fortsberg Hill in Coral Bay harbor was the site of the 1733 slave insurrection against the Danes. The Danish West Indies were emancipated in 1848, 17 years before it happened in the United States. Don't step on any sea urchins as you walk ashore.



Coral Bay, St. John



Limin'- West Indian expression for relaxing-you deserve it!

This swim was created by Julie Adams. Julie lived on St. John while a teenager when her dad worked for Virgin Islands National Park. She belongs to Greater Knoxville Masters Swimming but practices with the USA and high school teams in Athens, Tennessee because Knoxville is 60 miles away.