

Virgin Gorda 2023

We stayed at:

Guavaberry Resort (5*)

Guavaberry Spring Bay Virgin Gorda Spring Bay, Spanish Town, British Virgin Islands
284 495 5527

<https://www.guavaberryspringbay.com>

We were in the cottage named “**Oleander**”, which is just perfect being a short walk to the beach and shorter to the office and commissary. The AC in the bedroom and WIFI both were very good.

This is a magically wonderful place to stay.

There are two tabs in this front page: One regarding the history of Guavaberry written by Claudia Colli and another giving details about Hurricane Irma in 2017 written by Kate Stout

Tina is the fifth-generation owner of this property and an amazing businesswoman. She is also extremely warm and helps in any way she can. Guavaberry is a wonderful place to relax, refresh, explore and invigorate.

Little Dix Bay (5*)

P.O. Box 70, Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. VG 1150
284 852 5500

Room 27 is just perfect. It has a larger patio than most so a lounge chair fits nicely. It is less than 20 yards from Little Dix Bay where the snorkeling was great.

<https://www.rosewoodhotels.com/en/little-dix-bay-virgin-gorda/overview#location>

Fish identifications are done using three guides by Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach titled “Reef Fish”, “Reef Creatures” and “Reef Coral”. The “Fish” book is only fish; the “Creatures” book includes many genera including arthropods, cephalopods, mollusks, worms, sponges, jellyfish and more. The “Coral” book includes many types of corals, algae and sea plants. Sometimes confirmation includes searching the hypothesized fish or coral or sponge in Google images or writing friends. The fish, algae and land animals are identified with a high confidence but the sponges and corals are to a lesser degree of confidence. Often algae imbed themselves in sponges, making them green or purple when the base color is brown, for example. Fish sizes are, of course, estimates. In some cases, I think I have the correct IDs, but if not sure, I add a “?” after the name.

Identification corrections are welcome!

About the Photography: Bob used a “**GoPro 4 Black**” and Sharon used a **RICOH WG4** underwater camera. Both are excellent cameras. The Ricoh does not have the fisheye distortion, so longer distance shots are better. Often the color balance is more uniform for the Ricoh as well. The GoPro has the pole for reaching under shelves. I set it to a 1-second time lapse, so when I dive down, I hit “go” and just let it shoot. Then I use “preview” in my computer to select the good shots. Most of the land pictures used our iPhone’s.

Most pictures are then shoved through Photoshop where “Auto Levels” removes constant background colors and some (few) needed “Shadows/Highlights” adjustments if in dark shadow of a cave or coral. I never use color balance or Hue/Saturation alterations. The pictures were then loaded into iPhoto for rotation and cropping. The iPhoto “Export/Web page” function was used to build the index sets for the webpage. The controlling “buttons” in

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the website are simply hand written in HTML pointing to the iPhoto built sets. This old Apple program was absolutely excellent and MUCH better than the pitiful "Photo". I am using a 2011 computer so the old operating system will run it. Why Apple destroyed iPhoto is hard to understand...

A humorous thing about the GoPro is that the waterproof casing has a flat plate over the lens, so the fish see their reflection in it. The Damselfish and Angelfish and some others will attack the reflection, so you get some really interesting "Here's lookin' at ya" pictures.

In the "Sea Life" set, there are 139 "sea life" species identified with 68% Fish, 13% Corals, 5% Sponges and 14% other.

Snorkeling Tips: The key is to be slow, try to shoot with the sun behind you, shallow is your friend but be weary of waves, NEVER touch anything, stay flat on top of the water, and not with legs down (it kicks up debris). To prevent mask fogging, each morning, we use an Oral-B power toothbrush with the non-gel type of toothpaste on the inside of the lenses, then very thoroughly rinse, also using the toothbrush. This eliminates all nucleation sites for fog to grow. Then, upon entering the water, spit and rub it around, and rinsing in seawater. This lays a thin layer of protein over the clean surface. We never have any fogging trouble.

There are three ways to find an octopus: 1) On a "walkabout" is just luck, 2) Look for fresh shells all in one place with a hole nearby with the octopus sleeping inside – this is the "Octopuses Garden" (The Beatles did not coin that phrase, they barrowed it). 3) Notice a group of grouper family nosing under a rock. You will find either an octopus or an eel there. They like to wait for little fish to run for their lives only to be scarfed up by the grouper.

Several damselfish species are much easier to ID from their juveniles. The adults need a good sideways view.

Reefs Visited

Spring Bay: This bay is very sandy and has many fish in it. As you approach the rocks in the center or either side, the numbers multiply to be hundreds of fish. Over the years of snorkeling there, we have seen octopus, squid, trunkfish, nurse shark and barracuda among so many others. From Spring Bay, we snorkeled south to the baths and on to Devil's Bay and back. To the north, after the large rocks is Little Trunk and then Valley Trunk.

Cooper Island: This island is always spectacular snorkeling. We use Dave of "Double D" charter to take us there and he drops us off at a pinnacle rock about 100 yards from the beach. When snorkeling back, you pass through many ecosystems including rocky coral reef, grassy plains. Shoreline shelves and sandy bottom. Each with their own population of fish. This island is energy independent, mostly using solar/battery power with a generator backup. They brew their own beer, that never sees a bottle, so it the freshest and delicious beer you will ever sit. The food in the restaurant was also excellent.

George Dog: This is not my favorite snorkeling place because the coral heads are very near to the surface and covered with fire-coral. Waves are constantly endangering the snorkeler. Did not see anything particularly exciting. A much better island of the Dogs is "Great Dog", which has reefs facing north and one facing south, so pick the best based on wind direction.

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Little Dix Bay: This reef area was sand-blasted by Hurricane Irma but it recovering nicely. This year the octopuses have returned and so are other nesting fish. Turtles, remoras and all sorts of snappers are always there. It is well-sheltered, so even if the seas are rough, the bay is still nice.

Long Bay: This is a bay that is essentially only accessible by boat (there is a “road”, but is almost vertical!). The bay is steep and rocky and beautiful with very many fish.

Mountain Trunk: This is one of our favorite snorkeling spots. To the North, the coral is healthy all the way to Nail Bay and to the south, it is huge coral heads. Over the years, we have seen so many fishes there, including octopuses, eels, spotted eagle ray and so much more.

Restaurant Reviews (in the order that we visited):

Note that the star rating is balanced on expectations. A hamburger joint is on a different scale than a fine dinner restaurant. Both can earn a 5*.

Mama Africa (5*): Her chicken or Beef Roti's are the best you will EVER eat. She is only there on Thur, Fri & Sat and runs out by mid morning. You need to get there at 8 or 8:30 to get her delicious Roti's.

Island Pot (4*): The BBQ ribs and BBQ chicken were good, but small portions, and slow service.

CocoMaya (3*): The setting is absolutely beautiful and the service excellent. But the food was not good.

Mad Dogs Cafe (5*): The cheeseburger was delicious and generous and the “Deep-water Red Snapper” sandwich was superb. Their drinks are also very well made and delicious. Jude is the owner and chef and very nice.

Cooper Island Beach Club (5*): Sharon had the tuna salad was amazing and FULL of chunks of delicious tuna. The dressing was light and flavorful. I had the “Fish & Chips” with the locally brewed beer. It is brewed on the island and never sees a bottle, so it the freshest been there can be.

Hog Heaven (5*): OMG! The BEST ribs ever. Whitey's BBQ sauce has ginger in it that gives it a unique and savory flavor. Perched on the mountain above North Sound, the view is spectacular of Bitter-End, Saba Rock, and the entire sound. Others have had their BBQ chick and their fried chick, saying they were also delicious – but we never vary from the ribs.

Reef House (4*): Did not like the salad, had to beg for water and to turn off the heat lamps! Pork chop and lobster were very good.

Sugar Mill (5*): Again, the salad was very bitter. But the rack of lamb and the grouper were both delicious.

Pavilion (5*): We enjoyed a Caesar salad and a large NY Strip steak that was good. We shared everything since it was a 16 oz steak! The staff are all very helpful and friendly.

Top of the baths (5*) restaurant where my Mahi sandwich and Sharon's chicken Roti were both delicious.