

ENCHANTED ISLE

BEWITCHED BY THE BVIS

📍 Charley Larcombe 📷 Courtesy of Valley Trunk

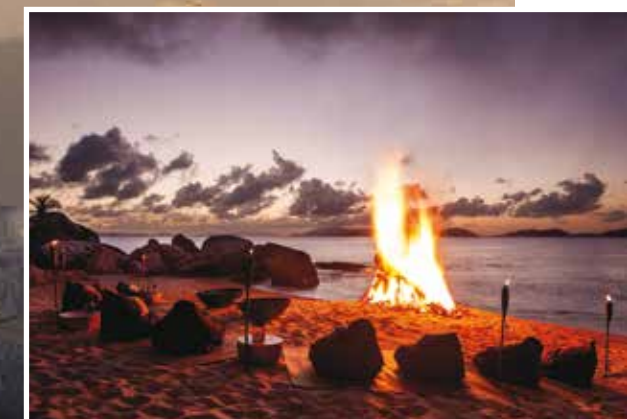
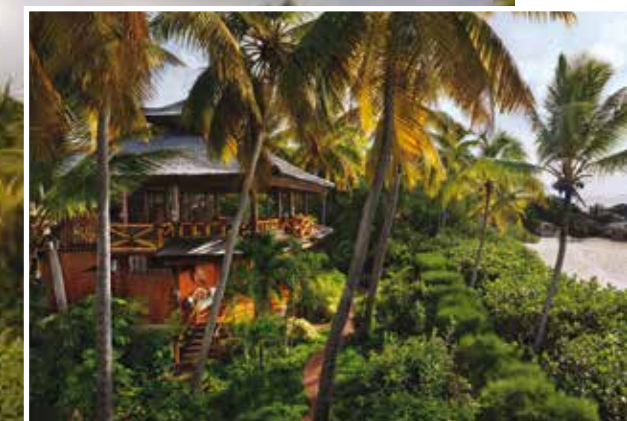
When Christopher Columbus passed a collection of jungle-lush islands marooned in azure waters on his voyage to the Americas, he christened them *Santa Ursula y las Once Mil Virgines* and one in particular, which he saw as a voluptuous woman lying on her side, Virgin Gorda. Still as beautiful and bewitching centuries on, *Charley Larcombe* discovers the British Virgin Islands, a hidden corner of the globe, which truly casts a spell on you.

It is the complete privacy at Valley Trunk which becomes apparent; there is nothing but the sound of nature and you truly feel as if you are in a world of your own," so explains Diane Wildenstein whose family owns a 20-acre, British Virgin Island hideaway of palm leaves and mango trees, talc-soft sand and waters as blue as the Argentine flag. "Daily stresses and emails fade as the hours go by, and what may have seemed like troubles when you landed, have soon been forgotten."

With a sport which is played out just as busily on the pitches of the world, as it is feverishly organised via emails on BlackBerrys and iPhones, a polo-free island with an opportunity to tune out of player visas and membership fees, sounds like complete bliss.

Valley Trunk, so named because of the seasonally nesting Trunk Bank turtles, which call the private 1,500 ft beach home, is just such a blissful paradise. Until recently, this hidden oasis was the luxurious private home of the Wildenstein family. During the 70s, the late Daniel Wildenstein discovered an undeveloped pocket of land on Virgin Gorda and set about creating his dream home away from the racetracks of Longchamp and the art galleries of Madison Avenue, which his family were – and still are – famous for. "Although Valley Trunk is a place that remains close to my heart, it has been a real pleasure opening its doors to other guests," Diane tells me. "In my eyes, special places are meant to be shared, so that others can experience them too. The greatest satisfaction is to have guests return, it tells me that they too have fallen in love with the place and mainly speaks a great deal for all of our wonderful members of staff, who for the most part have been with us for over 20 years."

To this day, the family's globe-trotting lives strongly influence the landscape; there are jade green roof tiles from Japan and wooden sculptures from New Zealand, whilst Far Eastern statues are dotted throughout the grounds. An obvious love for the island of Bali, means





Room Service
Location: Valley Trunk, Virgin Gorda, the British Virgin Islands
Rooms: Comfortably sleeps 16
FYI: www.valleytrunk.com
 info@valleytrunk.com
Sustenance: Your Michelin-starred chef can rustle up anything your heart desires
Best thing: The 1,500 ft private beach. No, Xanadu, the gin palace moored nearby. No, actually the views of the clear Caribbean waters of the Sir Francis Drake Channel. Wait... honestly, it's full of 'best things'
Price: From \$11,100 per night for 1-6 guests & \$1,500 for each extra person up to 16 guests
How to get there: Daily international flights into Tortola, St.Martin or Antigua followed by hiring a private charter to Virgin Gorda (15-60 minute flight depending on which island you fly into)



the highest point of the property. One of the biggest decisions of your entire trip will be deciding where to dine for supper – whether it's under the stars or down on the beach. The finest cuts of beef flown in from the States and rich wines from the cellar are on the menu so you won't have to try the local 'mannish water', a goat broth, which supposedly acts as an aphrodisiac. Make sure that you enjoy a bonfire on the sands at least one evening, where you can laze on Moroccan rugs and talk in the flickering shadows of the firelight or under the watchful gaze of the stars, which appear unbelievably close due to the lack of light pollution.

Bored of beaching and eating? Head off on Xandu, the private 68ft yacht. Your Captain, Blondie – an old 'sea dog' with stories to match – will take you island hopping past the famous Little Dix hotel and bar (a lively place full of colourful characters during the season) and for a snoop around Richard Branson's Necker Island and his new property, Mosquito. For those who love their diving and snorkeling, you can go past Tortola, the largest of the BVIs and home to the Capital, Road Town – a settlement of offshore company offices and private banks – and sail on to Norman Island (the reputed inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*). Also talk to the crew about the best shipwrecks to visit including the HMS *Astraea*, a 32-gun frigate, which saw action in the Napoleonic Wars. Virgin Gorda is also close to the 'North Drop' a world-renowned sports' fishing site so you can get your competitive fix away from the polo pitch.

Undoubtedly all that salty sea air and lounging around doing very little on the foredeck means you'll need a relaxing massage or spa treatment back at Valley Trunk. We wouldn't want all the hard work from getting on and off the boat to undo all that email-free stress relief... The team back at the house can arrange hour-long massages and treatments in your room to ease away the ache of a long polo season and to restore your sun-kissed skin and tresses back to glossy health.

Other tips? Opt for 8am Hatha yoga with a private instructor. The most supple 6ft man with the voice of an Ashtanga angel will help you start your day centered and happy. What else? An obvious choice, but a cocktail at sundown is very well rewarded – the skies are beautiful and the colours are an incredible Caribbean kaleidoscope. Essentially the private home away from home has a mantra of 'anything is possible' and the charming group of staff will ensure your every whim is catered for.

As soon as you've stepped off your private charter – the Fly BVI planes are best – and left your phones/tablets/laptops in your room, you'll very quickly settle into island life. Whether that's gently rocking in a hammock on the beach or leaping into the ocean from the top of Xanadu, you'll be left enchanted by Valley Trunk.

that an original Balé pavilion has been reconstructed overlooking the private beach. The estate is a melting pot of different cultures, but it works.

This unusual property, set in a verdant enclave of carefully manicured jungle, is home to electric-blue hummingbirds, inquisitive lizards and shy iguanas. On arrival, you're greeted by Roselyn – who possibly has the widest, most dazzling smile in the Caribbean – with strong rum daiquiris and a view over the infinity pool to the neighbouring islands, which you can imagine are laden with pirate treasure and secrets from the West India Trading Company. Having drunk in the vista – and the cocktail – your host, Chris Tilling, will show you to your room. Whether you're in the main house with its opulent bathroom – the size of a decent Chelsea apartment – or down a palm-shaded path to a private villa, which sits atop volcanic rock formations, you're guaranteed another spectacular view. With Hermes

products in the shower and crisp, white Frette bed linen, it would be quite easy to sink into a relaxing bath followed by a restful sleep.

However, I'd suggest immediately digging out your flip-flops and Vilebrequin swim shorts and heading down to the water. Either hop into a golf buggy and hit the beach in mere moments or opt for seeing a little more of the property. A winding stone path weaves amongst the Aloe Vera plants and the mango trees, which during the months of July and August makes the air so sweet you can almost taste it. The route twists and turns amidst the foliage, with wooden steps and pathways taking you safely over the volcanic rocks. You'll finish up in a palm grove before ambling through a private gate onto the beach – a stretch of sand, which dreams are made of. Sun loungers are set up if you wish to catch up on reading of *The Polo Magazine* but should you prefer to add some action to your summer

holiday there's plenty to encourage you away from your beach towel. Cast off in the glass bottomed kayak to row around to The Baths – a geological masterpiece of granite rock formations and hidden sea pools – or work your abs whilst paddle boarding up the coast. Make like Ursula Andress in *Dr. No* and reach for the snorkeling gear to swim amongst the coral and tropical fish mere steps from your lounger. After all that exertion, an ice-cold bottle of Carib beer will miraculously appear which you can leisurely sip whilst you reapply your sunscreen in the 40 degree heat.

Feeling peckish? A feast of salads, Maui Maui and plates of pulled pork (if you like a bit of spice, ask if they have any Calypso hot sauce... it will blow the roof off your mouth) can be eaten in the cool of the Balé beach house, or head back up to catch the breeze at the table near the pool and next to the 17th century bronze cannon, which stands on sentry duty at