

## **The Thorny Path Revisited ©2006**

**By  
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Sooner or later most sailors either return to the United States or simply wish to cruise the US East Coast from their new Caribbean home. Heading north from the Caribbean there are three obvious routes to consider: 1. Sail the Thorny Path northward from the Virgin Islands, 2. Sail offshore direct, or 3. Ship your vessel on Dockwise from the Virgin Islands. Option 1 is the most popular method with the greatest variety of cultural and sailing attractions.

You may have sailed down to the Caribbean using the Thorny Path but since that was such a long time ago, many things probably have changed since your keel last plied those azure waters. Or maybe this is your first time heading north and you would like some information on what lies ahead. Either way here is some information we gathered while sailing the Thorny Path to Florida this summer.

Obviously the wind and sea conditions remain unchanged from times long forgotten; yet the stops along the way have changed tremendously in the last 2-3 years. Most Caribbean sailors rarely sail north of St. Maarten in a cruising season before returning south to avoid hurricanes. We will therefore describe the changes from the BVI's northward.

### **British Virgin Islands**

Customs clearance can still be obtained at Spanish Town but they are not the friendliest officials. Yost Van Dyke is the best place to check in but be aware that you cannot stay in the BVI's longer than 30 days. You cannot clear in and out at the same time unless you are staying less than 24 hours either! There is a fee of approximately \$19 for a 40-foot boat.

Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbor is undergoing a tremendous renovation since its purchase by Sun Resorts in 2006. They have begun construction on their new "Town Centre" Development located on the NE corner of the present boatyard. All of the current shops will remain open and are unaffected by construction. Eventually, they plan to move the boatyard over to the N side of the marina and put in condos where the present boatyard is in the course of 10-15 years realistically.

Mooring buoys throughout the BVI's are \$20-\$25/night at most of the anchorages with \$65/night charged at Peter Island. Now for the sad news: Nude jumping from the Willy-T at Norman island is no longer permitted due to governmental decree, but body shots are still allowed at the bar. Times change...

The Bitter End Yacht Club is still very cruiser friendly and offers free WiFi everywhere near the resort. Saba Rock Resort also offers free WiFi on their grounds.

### US Virgin Islands

Customs clearance is still available at Cruz Bay (if you can find a place for your dinghy at the overcrowded National Park Service dinghy dock). A US Customs User Fee Decal is NOT accepted in the USVI. Upon check-in you will receive the new lecture about importing trash, fresh food and fresh vegetables. No trash, fresh vegetables or fresh meat are allowed into the USVI. Somehow you must dispose of all these items before you make landfall. You must also sign a form at Customs stating your adherence to this policy. Clearance is free. No Customs/Immigration checkout is needed to leave the USVI.

It is best to leave your vessel on a National Park Service mooring at Caneel Bay and dinghy into Cruz Bay. Taking a taxi to Cruz Bay from Caneel Bay Resort is no longer permitted. You may only land your dinghy at Caneel Bay Resort to use the bar.

Yacht Haven Grande Marina on St. Thomas is still under construction and is located where the old Yacht Haven Marina once stood. Completion of this Mega Yacht marina is set for sometime in 2007 if all goes as planned (yea right!). There will be space for 50 mega yachts in case you were wondering!

National Park Service moorings are available at all National Park anchorages on St. John for \$15/night. The fee is mandatory whether you anchor or pick up a mooring. Only Francis Bay has an anchoring area behind the mooring field. Pay Station boxes are located either on the beach or on a floating Pay Station vessel. Free Park Service moorings are available if you volunteer to be a seasonal Bay Host (limited positions are available!).

### St. Croix

The anchorage near St. Croix Marine is very busy with constant rooster tails from the go-fast boats passing through the anchorage at all hours of the day and night. The police vessels and police on patrol are heavily armed and wearing body armor at all times.

Cruisers normally cannot use the anchorage behind Protestant Cay due to the abundance of local derelict boats and moored day-trip boats.

A permit is mandatory to visit Buck Island aboard your vessel. This permit is obtained by appearing in person at the National Park Service office at the Fort in Christiansted with your passport AND driver's license. There will be a \$10 charge for this permit beginning this month.

### Spanish Virgin Islands

#### Culebra

Customs clearance is obtained in Dewey on Culebra. A US Customs User Fee Decal is required. Customs is rarely at the airport office so simply call 787-253-4533 to obtain your easy clearance. There are pay phones at the airport and a notice on the door giving the most recent information. People without decals have waited more than 7 days for Customs officials to open the airport office. A US Customs Decal can be obtained online at <http://www.cbp.gov>

Mooring buoys that are installed around Culebra are still free! The largest grocery store on Culebra is now closed and up for sale. Limited supplies are still available at several other small grocery stores in Dewey.

#### Vieques

Customs clearance is available at the airport if needed. Again, a US Customs User Fee Decal is required.

Military operations have ceased on Vieques and the clean up has begun. The clean up may take years but in the meantime we can enjoy the pristine anchorages that the military preserved for cruisers!

No anchoring is permitted at the extreme east end of Vieques. Off limits are the anchorages of Bahia Icacos and Bahia Salina del Sur. The US Navy is currently cleaning up these anchorages so dropping the hook here may explode the ordnance that litters the bottom! You will be told to leave if you happen to visit these places. Ensenada Honda is a beautiful anchorage

where you can stay as long as you like. There is a short 7-foot deep channel to navigate through to get to the anchorage. There are absolutely no facilities here or nearby.

Bio Bay (Puerto Mosquito) is off limits for anchoring and outboard motors of all kinds. Several companies offer kayak trips from Esperanza to Bio Bay.

#### Puerto Rico

No new Customs formalities are necessary if you cleared in at the Spanish Virgin Islands.

#### Salinas

The anchorage is obtained by navigating a narrow deep-water channel that is difficult to read since the water is murky. A new small private buoy sits in the middle of the channel so it is unclear which side it must be taken on. We tried both sides and did not run aground on either side.

The small village of Salinas is still in shambles because most of the businesses have moved north to the newer section of town. However, Playa Marine is still open in the old town and is a spectacular marine hardware store with very friendly people who also speak English.

#### Ponce

The Ponce Yacht Club still welcomes cruisers to their excellent marina. Expect to roll a bit at the dock if the wind pipes up. Clean fuel is also available at the fuel dock. This is the best place to rent a car, do self-service laundry, explore Ponce and Puerto Rico, go to a modern mall or reprovision at the nearby Walmarts (2!). An incredible bulk food store called Santiago's Cash and Carry store is very close to the Yacht Club.

#### Gilligan's Island (Cayos de Cana Gorda)

The island is closed on Mondays!

#### Boqueron

During the week most restaurants are closed or have limited opening hours. Diesel is available at the gasoline station across the street from Club Nautico. Club Nautico also has a fuel dock that is operated by the same gas station so you have to walk over to the gas station to have an attendant open the fuel dock. The dockside water depth at the fuel dock is 6 feet.

## Dominican Republic

### Samana

We were advised not to stop in Samana by several cruisers due to security issues. The port captain is currently not friendly toward cruisers so obtaining a clearance can be very expensive.

### Luperon

The entrance channel is still not buoyed. Sea Comber Mike is no longer permitted (by the DR Navy) to guide boats into the harbor UNLESS you contact him directly when you are waiting outside. Every day we were there at least 1 boat went aground coming into Luperon or exiting Luperon. Helpful cruisers were always trying to guide vessels in and out of the harbor with dismal results.

Customs, Immigration and port clearance is time consuming and fairly expensive. We paid \$101 US for a 7-day stay. That included a negotiated \$20 for the Commandante's pocket ("You want to leave right?" as he smiles and rubs his fingers together).

The Luperon Yacht Club is now open and has a commanding view of the harbor. Puerto Blanco Marina still has the Sunday flea market. Andy-Andy offers good clean diesel from tanks on his vessel that cruises through the anchorage every day. He also has a great bottom cleaning service! The cruiser's net is broadcast on Wednesdays and Sundays. 22 oz Presidente's and Bohemia are \$1.50 US.

Luperon remains a final destination for cruisers who have decided to pursue their Caribbean sailing dreams another year.

## Turks and Caicos

### Providenciales (Sapadilla Bay)

Customs clearance is obtained by walking about 1/2 mile to the commercial pier. The Customs officer seems to have lost her receipt book (for clearing in and again upon clearing out) so don't expect a receipt.

The nice pier at the head of the anchorage that used to belong to the Provo Aquatic Center is now off limits to dinghies (according to the Spanish speaking attendants) so you must haul your dinghy up onto the beach. We

could not find a rental car company to deliver a car to Sapodilla Bay so we went to their office near the airport instead.

An enormous building boom has taken over Provo. The main tourist road is now 4 lanes and high-rise condos and luxury brand name hotels have sprouted along nearly every inch of Grace Bay. Provo reminded us of South Florida.

#### West Caicos

A channel has been dredged near Company Point for a new luxury marina. Presently there is no marina, only a dredged channel and a nice protected area in which you can anchor. The marina is rumored to open next year or within about 20 years at the current pace of construction!

#### Bahamas

##### Mayaguana

Mayaguana is now an official Bahamian port of entry. However, you must be anchored off the village of Abraham Bay since the Customs officers will board your vessel (you provide the transportation for them). Most cruisers anchor inside the western end of Abrahams Bay, hoist their Q flag and later clear in at Georgetown. The east entrance to Abrahams Bay is still not buoyed and is a very shallow and tricky entrance.

The fee for clearing into the Bahamas is \$300 US if your vessel is 35 feet or greater (\$150 for all others). The vessel is issued a Cruising Permit for 12 months yet immigration allows you to stay for 70 days before you must re-apply for an extension. There is no onward clearance needed from the Bahamas when traveling to the USA.

As a point of interest, we talked with several Caribbean cruisers who refused to pay the \$300 but hoisted the Bahamian courtesy flag anyway or simply flew the Q flag for their journey through the Bahamas, avoiding all major ports.

#### Rum Cay

The Sumner Point Marina offers clean fuel but you must tie up on the windward side of the dock so if you have a sailboat, getting off is a problem with any normal wind conditions. The marina is home to the Green Flash restaurant, home to the most expensive hamburger you will eat in the Bahamas!

A ground-breaking ceremony featuring Prime Minister Perry Gladstone Christie took place on May 18th for the new Rum Cay Resort mega marina to be built on Rum Cay. The construction will be finished in 2010! The Florida weekend sport-fishing crowd is very popular on Rum Cay!

#### Georgetown

The channel into Lake Victoria may be open sometime soon. It seems that the road over the entrance channel was in danger of collapsing so they removed the road and closed the channel. Construction was at a frenzied pace (?) to reopen the road and channel.

The second and third holes on Stocking Island are now off limits to anchoring. Mooring balls have been placed by private individuals in these two popular anchorages and can be rented.

Crab Cay, just south of Georgetown in the Red Shanks area, was purchased by a private N. Carolina investor who has huge plans for development. The investor also decided that he purchased the waters surrounding the Cay including the Red Shanks anchorages! Someone regularly patrols to make the anchorages uncomfortable for those who use them. The inside dinghy passage from Red Shanks to Georgetown may soon be blocked by a low bridge between Crab Cay and the mainland as well.

#### Normans Cay

McDuff's beach bar/restaurant is closed and has been sold. A skeleton staff is keeping the generators running for the new owners.

#### Shroud Cay

Rumor has it that Johnny Depp of Pirates of the Caribbean fame has purchased the Cay.

#### Nassau

Hurricane Hole Marina has been purchased by Atlantis Casino and Resorts so will soon be off-limits to cruisers as is Atlantis Marina. Both will cater only to mega yachts.

#### Chub Cay

The new marina on Chub Cay may open any month now! They have dredged a deeper channel from the Northwest Providence Channel into the

marina and placed steel pilings at the outside edge of the channel. Only one of the steel pilings was lit at night when we were there! The marina boasts floating docks and appears very well constructed.

#### Miami and Ft. Lauderdale

Customs and Immigration clearance can be obtained by telephone when you tie up at a marina. You must have a US Customs User Fee Decal! Normally you will be put on hold for only 20 minutes before getting your clearance. That is the easy part. You will then be told to report to either the Miami Cruise Ship dock if you check in at Miami (\$42 taxi and bus ride) or Port Everglades if you check in at Ft. Lauderdale within 24 hours. So in that period of time make sure all the illegal aliens have disembarked! You are required to report to the specified office for an unknown reason but at least you will have the company of other cruisers. After 10 minutes of examining your passport in a back room you are impolitely told to leave. Very strange!

Changes in the islands seem to happen more quickly every year. The Thorny Path is no exception as you can see. Treasure your memories of sailing in the Caribbean, as it doesn't get any better than that!

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