

Majestic Sunsets

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Majestic Sunsets from every level

I first visited Virgin Gorda's Sunset Watch and Sundowner Villas for a photo shoot for Taste—a new cookbook from ALG Books. The villas' developer, Ajit George, wanted to showcase the availability of in-villa catering at the distinctive property in Nail Bay Resort, so they offered me and six friends a chance to spend a weekend wining and dining in Virgin Gorda.

Chef Donna Arter had already begun preparing the meal for us when we arrived, and the kitchen sizzled. Appetizers were immediately served on the verandah as Joel Brillert from Caribbean Cellars poured wines from past Winemakers Dinners, and we all sank into the outdoor seating area to chill from a hard week working on Tortola and St Thomas. Though we felt completely at home in the luxurious Virgin Gorda villa rental, Donna and Joel utterly indulged us, and I had an inkling to what royalty must feel like—at ease in their palaces while being pampered.

Comparing Sunset Watch and Sundowner Villas to palaces might mislead the reader into thinking they are stuffy or formal, but they are not pretentious at all. Rather, they are cozy, comfortable, affordable, kick-off-your-shoes accommodations on a secluded beach in Virgin Gorda. The joy of staying at Sunset Watch Villa and Sundowner Villa is in the fact that guests can truly relax and unwind without worrying about a thing, except perhaps their suntans.

The unique set up of the villas rests in the fact that they can be rented as one property or as a combination of three units—a three-bedroom villa, a two-bedroom villa, or three one-bedroom villas—each with its own charm and spacious outdoor areas. For our visit, my friends and I commandeered the entire property, starting at the top—Sunset Watch Upper-Level Villa—where we dined on Chilean sea bass and lamb shank on the covered, tiled deck that extends from the kitchen, living room and bedroom. The gourmet kitchen boasts modern appliances and accessories for every level of chef. The master suite in Sunset Watch Upper Villa comprises a luminous bedroom with a king-sized bed as well as a spa bathroom, while the Sunset Watch poolside villa comes complete with a jacuzzi and a stone-clad outdoor shower.

After dinner, a stone path led me to Sunset Watch Poolside Villa where I spent the night in a king-sized bed between deluxe cotton sheets. In the morning, I woke up to the sounds of the surf, so I strolled down to the secluded beach on Virgin Gorda's western shore for a quick pad in the sand. The rock pools reminded me of Italo Calvino's story "Big Fish, Little Fish" where young Zefferino explores the marine life while his father collects limpets on the boulder-strewn shore. "How could anyone be sad in this enclosure of sea crammed with every variety of fish to fill the heart with desire and joy?" Zefferino wondered. Peeking into the shallow pools and beyond to the resplendent reef, I felt a similar contentment. I clambered over a few boulders to watch some crabs scurry off before I returned to the villa and treated myself to a steaming Jacuzzi in the spa bathroom.

I traipsed a few steps down the stone path to wake up my friends who had slept at Sundowner Villa, and soon returned my initial impressions of the villa's royalty. Sundowner Villa—from the private plunge pool to the patio to the kitchen and dining room up to the king bedroom suite—exudes luxury and comfort. The layout of the rooms evoked an overstuffed throne—at once the perfect place to sink into and the symbol of majesty. I found my friends sitting out on the patio, dipping their toes in the villa's plunge pool when they told me about their late-night swim at the adjacent beach. It seems the moonlight and the murmur of the gently lapping waves were irresistible to them after everyone else had gone to bed. Though they live in St Thomas and are accustomed to Caribbean living, they couldn't believe the peace and solitude of Virgin Gorda and the beach at Sundowner Villa.

We joined our other two friends back upstairs at Sunset Watch Villa and drank some morning beverages on the shaded tiled deck, taking advantage of the view of the Caribbean Sea that we had missed the night before. The hammock in the corner beckoned, but I resisted its lure. I didn't want to find out if there was such a thing as being too relaxed.

While each villa suite has separate spacious outdoor patios and decks, the property also includes an expansive sundeck and luxury villa pool that overlook the Caribbean Sea. The stone and tile sundeck offers a sprawling area for dining, lounging, sunbathing and entertaining just steps from the romantic, secluded beach.

As far as amenities are concerned, each villa suite, in addition to fully equipped gourmet kitchens, king-sized bedroom suites and spa bathrooms with al fresco showers, features an iPad-controlled media center that serves as a visitor's guide—with maps, newspapers, local recommendations and tourist attractions—as well as a storage unit for thousands of songs, books and movies which can be enjoyed on the state-of-the-art entertainment centers featuring surround-sound speakers and flat-screened satellite televisions. We only took advantage of the sound system because we were enjoying each other's company too much to watch movies or read books, but I could certainly picture snuggling up in one of the living rooms and watching a late-night movie or two.

We hated to leave the villas, but we had to go back to the real world and our lives on the busier islands of Tortola and St Thomas. We returned well rested and well fed, each of us excited to return and spend more time there because, like Calvino's sea bed in "Big Fish, Little Fish," the private retreat "seems beautiful the first time, when you discover it, but, as with all things, the really beautiful part comes later, when you learn everything…";

These affordable beachfront luxury villas are available for rental year-round.

Book online at www.sunsetwatchvilla.com or call 1-888-734-8890.

Sunset Watch Poolside Villa (1 BR) rates start at \$275 per night*

Sunset Watch Upper Level Villa (1 BR) rate start at \$320 per night*

Sundowner Villa (1 BR) rates start at \$395 per night*

Sunset Watch (2 BR) rates start at \$530 per night*

Sunset Watch (3BR) rates start at \$650 per night*

* Rates do not include 7% government tax and 10% service charge