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## A new life on the high seas: Home aboard Eris Island

by Kiana Delamare

*Kiana Delamare and John Pugsley currently reside on board their 50-foot sloop, which they've named Eris Island. They plan to spend the next few years living on the high seas, sailing from port to port in the waters of the Caribbean. Here's a little of their story.*

Though I didn't leave my small hometown of Kailua, Hawaii, for my first 18 years, I always dreamed of travelling the world. At the first opportunity, I took off. I've been a wanderer ever since...Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. I've also lived in five U.S. states, in Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and South Africa.

My partner John has also traveled all over the world, and, like me, he's enormously curious. So it wasn't difficult for me to talk him into leaving California and moving to a more exotic location outside the United States. We both were tired of the rat race and wanted a simpler lifestyle. But where to go? We did some research and visited some of the places that sounded interesting to us, such as Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Chile. We tried to approach our move carefully and rationally.

### **Warm, safe, friendly BVI**

In the end, however, our choice was neither very scientific nor the result of extensive research or analysis. We chose the British Virgin Islands (BVI), simply because it was a place we both liked. It had been the destination of our first trip together, and we fell in love with the balmy January weather, the verdant hills, the clear, warm, turquoise waters, the vibrant, colorful landscape, and the smiling, relaxed people. One cannot help but slow down in a place like this.

We were excited by the idea of spending our free time sailing, snorkeling, scuba diving, and windsurfing. Yes, it seemed to us that the British Virgin Islands was a place where we could live the dream life.

So in October 1995 we packed up, put most of our belongings in storage, and took my cat, our clothes, our computers, and our books to Tortola. There the official language is English and the currency the U.S. dollar. The BVI have American banks, FedEx with overnight U.S. delivery, and an efficient phone system with Internet access, too.

### **But life wasn't all easy**

The first few months on Tortola were very frustrating, and we often wondered if we hadn't made a big mistake. Little everyday chores soon become big everyday chores when there's no dishwasher, garbage disposal, or clothes dryer. On Tortola, shopping for the week's groceries often means stopping at three or four different shops and even then coming away with only half of what was on your list. Planning a menu is futile. It's easier to see what there is in the stores that day and then to create meals around it. We learned to improvise and to make do.

And after a short period, it became relatively easy for us to trade modern comforts and convenience for the physical beauty, constant warm weather, balmy breezes, clean air, crystal turquoise seas, and magnificent sunsets, all of which are a part of everyday life in the Caribbean. Priorities change.

And in a world where locked doors, barred windows, security gates, and guards have become the norm, it was nice to live somewhere where we felt comfortable leaving the car unlocked and the windows and doors of our house wide open. It's great to have no fear of walking alone, even at night.

### **Wanderlust, again**

Yet, although we love Tortola and the BVI, we became restless after a couple of years there. From our house on Luck Hill, we spent countless hours watching boats sail by, tucking into secluded bays that could be reached in no other way. We began to fantasize about buying a boat and sailing from island to island, taking our home with us, traveling with no real schedule or deadlines, able to stay as long as we liked and to leave whenever the urge struck us.

We walked the docks at the marinas looking at other people's boats and dreaming, talking to sailors, many of them couples who lived on their boats while cruising the Caribbean or the world. Finally, we decided we had to get a boat of our own and become full-time live-aboard cruisers.

### **A whole new language**

John had sailed on and off for much of his life—a year-long trip from California to Mexico to Central America and shorter jaunts in Greece, the Bahamas, and the Virgin Islands. But most of his experience has been in chartered boats or the boats of friends. Buying, equipping, and maintaining a boat was to be a new experience for both of us.

I read a couple of dozen books on how to buy a boat, how to judge a good quality cruising boat, safety, how to "provision" a boat, and how to store things in small, damp, always shifting spaces. I learned how to shower and do laundry using saltwater pre-washes and freshwater rinses, to take "bucket baths," and to catch and store rainwater.

I read about different types of anchor windlasses, solar panels, wind generators, and 12-volt battery systems, as well as about wind-vane self-steering mechanisms and auto pilots. All this, and I still had never had a sailing lesson and couldn't tie a proper knot.

### **Is there a perfect boat?**

During this period of paper research, I also searched the Internet and started studying the "spec sheets" that brokers sent me on boats for sale. After a few physical boat inspections, the spec sheets began to make sense. I studied the specs of the boats that sounded interesting to us, and I memorized the sheets of the boats we had seen and liked.

We spent the better part of a year-and-a-half looking at boats and learning. I took about three-dozen rolls of boat photos. It was almost a full-time job. It was an often frustrating and confusing search, exhausting, but also a really good education. Buying a boat is about learning to prioritize and to compromise. There's no such thing as a perfect boat. Everyone has different ideas about what is good. We learned we just had to take it all in and then decide for ourselves.

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