

HiHo Ho Ho & a bottle of Rum!

Story & images by Chris Hafer

The Legend of the Black Pearl? Yeah, I've heard those stories too. For ten years its crew looted ships and settlements - never to leave a living soul behind. No survivors you say? Hmm, I wonder who tells the stories then?

Most windsurfers may have heard tales about the famous Hook in and Hold On (HIHO) Race, but only very few have ever taken part. Strange, especially if you take a closer look at the concept behind this distinctive form of competition. The deep blue Caribbean sea, desert islands, incredible beaches, luxury Charter Yachts, action packed racing with constant trade winds, wild parties –an extraordinary combination of cruising and windsurfing - what more could a Drag Racer yearn for? With its time-proven concept the Highland Spring HIHO celebrated a landmark 25th anniversary in 2009.

Treasure Island, Dead Chest Island, Bitter End, Sir Francis Drake Channel. All these names indicate the wild and cutthroat history of the region. The British Virgin Islands, a cluster of around 60 slithers of land, was an El Dorado for pirates in former times,

with their hidden uncharted bays providing perfect cover for pouncing on passing Spanish stacked with gold from the New World.

But annually now a different fleet assembles in the Moorings Charter Base on Tortola that would terrify even the Spanish Armada ships. Consisting of 18 boats, mostly catamarans in the 40-50ft range, loaded not with plundered Inca gold, but windsurfing gear and provisions. Especially liquid supplies. The 300-year old tradition of the British Navy's daily rum ration was revived by not only the many real members of the Royal Navy present, but strictly followed by all competitors during the event as well.

Our boat was a true showcase of the attraction of the event. Skipper Marley, a true hearted Rastafarian who normally works on a fishing boat, captained our boat in a laidback yet professional

Opposite:
Top:
All aboard
Bottom:
Crystal clear perfection





Start line hustle







Above:

The fleet becalmed at anchorage before a day of racing fun

Far Left:

Shiver me timbers

Left:

**Ho ho ho and a bottle of rum
Hiho style**



Left:

Our Carribean host

manner around the islands, always succeeding in anchoring right next to the beach - even when arriving late. Basically, the use of the dinghy wasn't necessary judging by the numbers on our depth meter.

Gabriel was a proud ambassador of the Virgin Islands, living on Prickly Pear Island – a really tiny island in the North Sound. There he runs a bar for passing ships with just his mother for company otherwise.

Nat, who completed our crew, had no hassles with connecting flights or luggage restrictions. He simply put on his backpack and sailed his Formula gear over to Tortola from St. Thomas. Turns out he was lucky, as during the competition he was plagued by gear failure, with nearly everything breakable breaking...

But let's concentrate on the competition. Racing here is definitely unique. All through the islands, mostly on a down-winder, with the finish always right on the beach. To kick start proceedings the entire fleet sailed from Tortola to the North Sound, next to the infamous Bitter End Yacht Club. A paradoxical name for a place to start

the week. A quick explanation: the name originates from the fact that this Yacht Club is the last stop for Yachtsmen leaving to cross the Atlantic back to Europe - basically the bitter end of a great time. For us, however, it was just the beginning, with a great dinner on a little island named Saba Rock, just large enough for the bar that was built on it. Next morning was the infamous Anegada Race, an outer island of coral and sand barely visible above the water-line. The boats lined-up in deep water for the start but no vessels were present near the shallow reef right in front of the beach finish and its spectacular crashes.

At dinnertime those were already forgotten, with the Anegada Reef Hotel being the stage for a beautiful tropical night, dancing barefoot in the soft sand and enjoying the best lobster we'd tasted so far. And that was only the first of many wild party nights to come. In the thick of it was one supposed descendant of the notorious Jack Sparrow - Ed Sparrow, CEO of the main sponsor Highland Spring Water. He came all the way from Scotland to experience the event firsthand –

Below:

**Competitive yet fun racing
standard**

Main:

Beachside finish line



and he definitely showed-off some true pirate heritage!

Most sailors showed up a bit tired next morning for the skippers meeting and were glad to hear that next on the agenda was the Sailboat Race from Anegada back to Virgin Gorda. At least the sound of the start gun jolted any stragglers back into action. With competitive juices flowing, ditching unwanted ballast were seriously discussed, although there was agreement that windsurfing gear and rum were not to be discarded overboard at any cost.

Ambition faded away and was displaced by pure astonishment at the arrival at The Baths, a postcard-perfect beach on Virgin Gorda. For us it was merely the background for a delicious lunch under the shady palm trees before starting the 2nd windsurfing race - a splendid broad reach to Trellis Bay.

On a little Rock in Trellis Bay lies the so-called Last Resort, a bar that offers the perfect location for the traditional Pirate party. It was hard to believe how much effort most competitors put into their costumes, but maybe for some competitors it wasn't that hard to transform into pirates?

Trellis Bay to Deadchest. Quite a distance criss-crossing the Sir Francis Drake Channel to a movie set finish at the jagged and wave-battered rocks of Deadchest Island. Allegedly, Blackbeard left 15 of his buccaneers here with a coffin and a cask of rum. We couldn't find the empty cask nor the skeletons, only another delicious lunch prepared directly on the beach, before setting-sail for the anchorage of Peter Island.

With the sparkling lights of Tortola in the background, the tropical sounds from Peter Island and Gabriel's reggae CD

running 24/7, this was definitely one of the most relaxing nights on our boat, a night filled with long stories and empty rum bottles...

Small islands and 14 perfect beaches in 7 days followed with heaps of racing in unbelievable conditions. Somehow we made our way back to the Moorings Charter base, sad that the race was over. The bar offered a stable and safe place for the prize giving; compensating for the rolling motion the yachts had left in our bodies. And apart from the race winners there were a couple of special trophies, such as the 'Grief on the Reef' award for the most spectacular crash on the treacherous coral beds. A justly wild party followed that Captain Sparrow would have been truly proud of.

We would like to thank Andy Morell, Air France, Liat, and the British Virgin Islands Tourist board for their great support!



Below:
Boats and boards in harmony

Family Fun

Words by Torben Kornum



Above:
The victorious Kornum family
Pic by: Roddy Grimes-Graeme



The Highland Spring HIHO event represents everything that we love- great windsurfing, sailing, adventure and fun parties. All this in the beautiful British Virgin Islands. I have been to the event many times- in 1986, the early 1990's and now racing with my son who won this year. I cannot think of a more ideal family holiday than the HIHO. With two teenagers (boy and girl) it can be difficult to make a programme that makes both of them happy, but with HIHO on the schedule, this is just not a problem. In our family only two of us took part in the races, but there are lots of opportunities for the non-racers too, - so passionate windsurfer or not, - the HIHO week is a fantastic experience for all of us!

How to get there:

Air France
(www.airfrance.de)
from Paris to St. Maarten,
from there with LIAT
(www.liat.com) to Tortola.
Windsurfing gear only to
St. Maarten with Air
France possible!
www.britishvirginislands.de

Spot info:

Steady trade winds with
around 12-15knots, flat
and mostly sheltered and
warm water.

Race info:

Check: www.go-hiho.com
Or ask:
racebvi@surfbvi.com