



## Live the Yacht Life Without Befriending a Billionaire

We quietly cruise mostly during the evening and overnight, the gentle rocking lulling me to sleep, the state-of-the-art stabilizers minimizing the movement. Come morning, we anchor early and begin an on-shore excursion or merely relax on the boat. A marine platform is set up at the aft of the ship on most days, a hub of watersports at the ready for whomever wants to swim

**M**Y FIRST GLASS OF champagne goes down a treat. Chloe, the voyage leader – all gorgeous smiles and English accent – pours us another while we wait in the silver-clad reception area for our suite to be ready. From that moment on, my week aboard the *Emerald Sakara* – the new motorized superyacht from Emerald Cruises – delivers the opulent vibe of a small, private yacht but with all the amenities of a larger cruise ship, for an intimate party of 100 guests and 76 crew.

Anchoring in smaller bays that bigger ships can't manage, the *Sakara* is nimble enough to reveal lesser-known destinations on the billionaire's yacht circuit – secluded bays that regular cruise passengers never see. It's rather like being the big 110-metre fish in a small pond, cosying up to the catamarans and reaching deep into little pockets of local culture.

Our island-hopping itinerary takes us from San Juan and sails, first, to Puerto Rico's Culebra Island. We fall asleep under umbrellas on Flamenco Beach, which consistently makes the world's top-10 lists, its powder-fine sand stretching around a horseshoe-shaped bay of azure waters. On neighbouring Vieques Island, we tour about, taking pictures of the herds of resident wild horses who seem pretty good at posing.

At St. John, in the U.S. Virgin Islands, we take an easy hike to Honeymoon Beach to sit among the palm trees and chat with other sailors, as if we're part of the yacht crowd (we are!). And on Jost Van Dyke, the smallest of the British Virgin Islands, the *Sakara* crew awaits with a delicious barbecued lunch at White Bay, for an afternoon with practically the whole ship together on the beach.

The next day in St. Barths (which you may know as the global elite's winter party island), we cab it to isolated Plage de Saline – a bottle of rosé and paper cups tucked inside our towels – and spend a peaceful few hours on the island's most beautiful, far-flung beach. Later, we sail westward to BVI's Virgin Gorda for our final stop before carrying on back to San Juan.

off inflatable platforms, kayak, paddleboard or make use of the James Bond-like SEABOB diving scooters. There's also a hot tub, an infinity pool and a spa section with a gym and an infrared sauna. Morning yoga with Mahesh on the Observation Deck is the perfect way to start the day.

Sustainability is part of the design. Efforts to reduce the *Sakara's* carbon footprint include emission compliance, advanced heating and cooling designs, wastewater treatment that meets rigid requirements to allow access to smaller islands and bays, and the recycling of energy from exhaust gases to heat water. Eco-friendly waste solutions in the kitchen and the sourcing of local ingredients further augment sustainability measures.

As you would expect, superyachts have super-high thread counts, the suites bright and modern, simplistic and spotless. Our bathroom is filled with amenities from all-natural spa brand ESPA, the shower big enough for two. The slippers are the softest wool. My naps are perfect. *Sakara* comfort comes complete with modern art, whimsical sculpture and furniture from the likes of European design icons Missoni, Gervasoni, Tribù and Freifrau.

Come cocktail hour, we meet our pals among the pink orchids and low-slung seats of the Amici Lounge on the Emerald Deck to discuss the day. Nixon, the bartender, already knows what I like without me having to ask. After yet another fabulous multicourse meal – seafood bisque, truffle risotto, perfect halibut, decadent cheeses, lemon tarts – we head up to the Sky Bar for maybe a dance or two, the lights of distant Caribbean islands twinkling in the moonlight. — *Doug Wallace*

■ West Indies Island Hopping yacht cruise, from \$5,645 per person. Visit [EmeraldCruises.ca](https://www.emeraldcruises.ca).

PHOTOGRAPHY, DOUG WALLACE (LANDSCAPE); COURTESY OF EMERALD CRUISES (SHIP)



The cascade of decks at the *Emerald Sakara's* aft. Opposite: A view of Dog Islands from Savannah Bay on Virgin Gorda, British Virgin Islands