



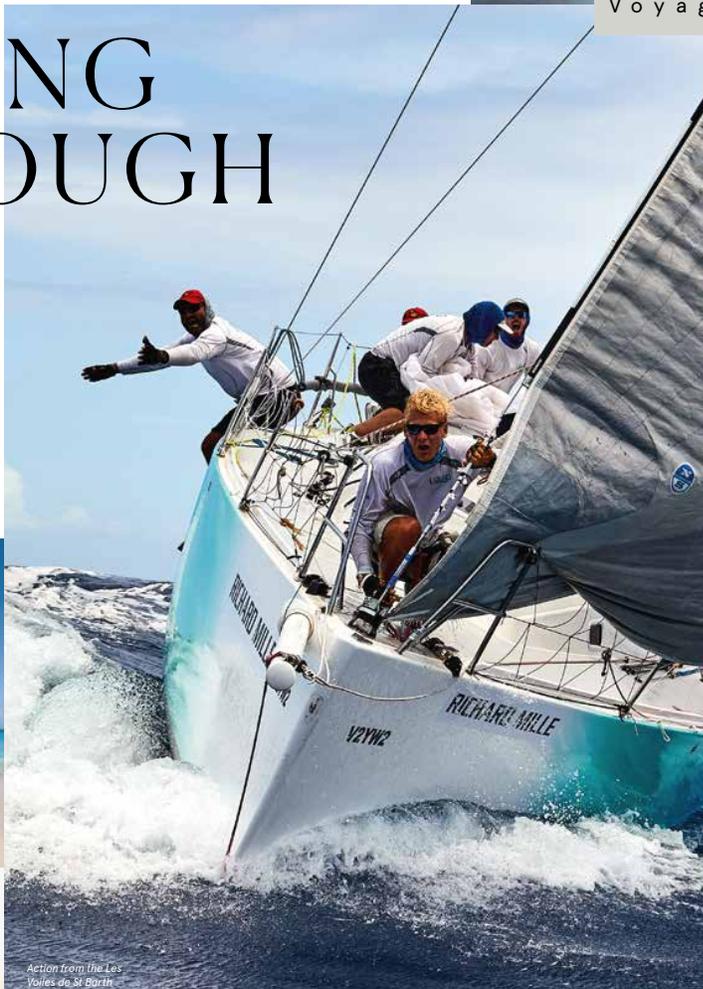
BOAT

International

SAILING THROUGH

The boating community has been pivotal to the post-Irma recovery of St Barths. Risa Merl finds the island on the right tack for the winter season

Voyage



Action from the Les Voiles de St Barths

V o y a g e



*Clockwise from near right:
Eden Rock seen from the air;
getting competitive in last
spring's Les Volles de
St Barths 2018*



Hotels reopening this season include the Cheval Blanc St Barth Isle de France, top, and Hotel Le Toiny, right



Le Toiny, Hotel Christopher St Barth and Le Sereno Hotel - are also set to reopen this December. Nearly every restaurant has reopened already, except those connected to a hotel, and most of Gustavia's 150 shops opened a few months after Irma hit.

Whether sipping a strong margarita or a glass of perfectly chilled rosé, even the saltiest of sailors appreciates a good beach bar, and those are also back up and running. Returning visitors this winter can go to Shell Beach, which is home to the Greek restaurant of Cheloni, to dine under sail-shaped awnings hung in the palm trees shading tables set in the sand. Or head to white-tented Nikki Beach on the other side of the island at Plage de St Jean (dancing on the tables after a seafood feast is de rigueur).

While its most glamorous hotspots took a battering, St Barth's natural assets have remained largely unharmed and offer a different aspect of island life. Experienced surfers flock to the wild, southern coast of the island, catching a wave at Toiny Beach, while St Jean and Lorient beaches on the north coast are better suited to beginners. There is also excellent diving and snorkelling thanks to the Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan for the Netherlands Antilles, which was signed in the early 1990s. St Barth's Marine Reserve was created shortly after in 1996 and over the past two decades turtles have started to reappear on the island. A great place to don mask and flippers and spot them is the harbour off Grand Colombier beach. This remote cove is only accessible by foot or boat, with stunning views on the hike down, dodging cacti along the way. If taking the easier option and arriving by tender, the cove is also the

ideal spot for sipping a sundowner of your choice in complete solitude.

There are more lofty lookout points and remote beaches that are without a club or any man-made commotion that you might imagine on the island. Sailing around its shores, taking in the views of the turquoise sea meeting wide sandy bays and rocky islets, it is easy to see why people gravitated to St Barth's a long time before the luxurious establishments came to typify it.

The island packs everything into its petite shores, which Nils Dufau, St Barth's Tourism Committee's president, says is one of its charms: "You have everything you need in one place - shopping, restaurants, beaches, sailing, beauty and the French touch. That's why 50 to 60 per cent of our visitors are returning guests." This winter, superyachts are expected to be among the returning visitors, which is credit not just to the sailing community but also to this island's tenacity. "The storm might feel like five years ago, but it was less than a year ago," says Craig, speaking at the time of our going to press. "If you didn't see the photos and videos, you could take for granted what a remarkable feat was accomplished."

If there's one thing that last year's storm season proved, it's that this little island is well loved and resilient. St Barth's can take a hit and get back up again, handling any rogue waves that come her way. ■

