

On the Road

Virgin canvas... Cruising Cracow... Booming Katoomba. Misty in Namibia...Painterly in Paris...Cushy in Chicago

U.S. Virgin Islands: Sighted across Charlotte Amalie Harbor in St. Thomas, the 160-foot, three-masted schooner **Arabella** was a beacon of classical loveliness amidst monstrous cruise ships. (Among them was one from Disney's fleet, which periodically blasted out the first phrase of "When You Wish Upon a Star" on a giant foghorn.) Once on board, we got out of there fast, headed for open waters.

The prospect of four days on a small ship with a bunch of strangers raises certain questions. Will you hate them? Will you be required to chat with them before you've had your coffee? One clever girl put her finger right on it. "It's B&B times 100," she said. But, on this trip at least, everyone turned out to be perfectly pleasant, especially the crew. Jeff was the charming and even-tempered captain, V. the taciturn, but showy first mate (the garish tattoo on his arm proclaims BORN TO SAIL, in Latin), Jason the intense, straight-laced engineer and Ben the bright-eyed, affable deck-hand-cum-naturalist. No worries as far as the cabins were concerned, either. They were spare but elegant, each with its own bath, closet space and—thank you—telephone, AC and satellite television. Most mornings I awoke with sunlight streaming through the porthole, casting a brilliant circle on the wall that swayed with the rocking of the ship.

Arabella's itinerary is not unusual for the region. Most other destinations—the caves on Norman Island, the baths on Virgin Gorda—are those of numerous other sailboats cruising the area. The difference is, your ride is nicer than everybody else's. *Arabella* used to be a 112-foot schooner made by Palmer Johnson, the Wisconsin-based luxury yacht manufacturer. In 1999, she was given a mid-body extension, which means they sliced her in two and added 48 feet to her middle. Despite the invasive surgery, she has what salty-types call "graceful lines," and she sails like a dream. Captain Jeff allowed me to take the helm for the better part of an afternoon, and on a beam reach in light winds she



Daiquiri in the Jacuzzi, sir? The *Arabella* will ply the waters off New England this summer.