

A HAPPENING HONEYMOON



**Heidi's Honeymoon Beach
Water Island, U.S. Virgin Islands**

by Louise Wollman

Heidi Erwig quite literally runs the show on Honeymoon Beach. Maybe you can't get Monday Night Football on your boat but you can easily show up at her Monday Night at the Movies. It is the kind of event that makes you smile like a kid again, maybe even break into a full-body grin.

The movie itself is free. You can't help but feel good walking up the creamy beach with the sun readying itself to set around Water Island. The happy smell of popcorn popping in the old arcade machine soon greets you. You will smile at first sight of the 40-foot sailcloth screen strung taut between palms, surrounded by a horseshoe of white plastic chairs set in the sand. But the side-by-side parked dune buggies behind and the two plastic chairs perched on a pickup truck's bed—the balcony seats—may make you laugh out loud. Welcome to Heidi's Honeymoon Beach Drive-in

Movie.

If you are a Baby Boomer you have entered a time warp. "Wimoweh" blasts from a projector showing a '50s Doo-Wop show. As the sky further darkens the screen you will see The Crystals in white tuxes snapping out "Why do fools fall in love."

Start a tab with one of the staff at Heidi's mini-truck. Pick up a mini-burger or marinated chicken cutlet sandwich (each \$4.50), still warm in foil jackets. Or maybe nachos and cheese. Dip into a basket of traditional movie munchies: Twizzlers, M&Ms, Butterfingers. Popcorn comes in an old-fashioned paper bag and not some Goodyear-sized waxed cardboard drum. Sometimes there is even cotton candy, and you will always find soda, wine and beer to wash all this irresistible junk down.

The Honeymoon Beach anchorage, on the southwest corner of Water Island, easily crams 25 boats but fellow moviegoers are more likely to be drawn from the 160 people who live or rent on this serene island, refresh-

ingly devoid of hotels, stores and tour buses. You only can get there on your own boat or via the 10-minute, people-only ferry from Crown Bay Marina, St. Thomas.

Showtime! Near 6:30 p.m., on-screen, a 4, 3, 2 minute countdown, between which come hardly subliminal messages advising you to buy more candy and drink more beer because "It's good for you."

Forget endless trailers. Befitting any vintage movie, next comes an old Loony Tunes cartoon: Bugs or Elmer or Tweety. Movies are sometimes first-run, like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, occasionally old Robin Williams' comedies, like *Club Paradise*, and frequently kid/grown-up animations like *Finding Nemo*.

It is quite amazing to watch *Pirates of the Caribbean* in the Caribbean, where the breath of the surf accompanies the sound track, where every onscreen palm tree is echoed in the sky above, where pirate ship masts trail off into palm tree trunks.

Palm fronds form a proscenium

Sailing On Your Stomach

In the wake of an insatiable food sleuth



arch above the screen. Inescapably, your attention strays from the screen to the magnificent backdrop of moored boats and inky mountain shadows. As after-sunset dark deepens, the moon scribbles orange twists of light deep into the shimmering water.

The energetic Heidi with her four-wheel road show plays all week. Mornings from 6:30 to 8:30 this 43-year-old blonde ball of motion stations herself at the St. Thomas ferry with coffee, hot breakfast sandwiches, cereals and granola. By 12:30 the mini-van and barbecue are parked on the beach with hot dogs, super dogs (\$2.30 and \$3.30) veggie burgers, chicken breast sandwiches, maybe a Caesar salad and the \$8.00 hamburger billed as a full 12 ounces, which does indeed drape over its large roll.

If you ask Heidi where she gets such big buns, she'll glance over her shoulder and retort, "I don't actually think they're that big."

Saturday night at six, "when

people just don't want to leave the beach," she brings the big chuck wagon and, in its mini-kitchen, cooks what one cruiser calls "Comfort Food Gourmet." There is always a 20-ounce rib-eye (\$24), a fish—sometimes Dungeness crab at \$24—and a chicken or pork dish, for example, Coconut Curry Chicken with Toasted Cashews over Ginger-Scented Rice, \$21. Sides could be corn, garlic-roasted potatoes and salad. Excellent carrot cake is a frequent dessert. Sundays she stages an all-day barbecue, 10 to 6, with chicken, fish and steak sandwiches.

Heidi arrived in the area 23 years ago, fell in love and simply never left. She started as a mega-yacht steward and worked her way up to chef. After Hurricane Hugo, when there were few jobs, she jumped into a house-painting business. She bought the big wagon seven years ago and the "little guy" two years ago.

In January, 2007, when Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett and a Paramount crew arrived on Honeymoon Beach

to film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Heidi & Friends served 1,117 meals in four days...and that was only film-people lunches. A day later she was back on the grill, cheery and vivacious, quipping and flipping burgers while manning a cell phone. If you ask her where she gets the energy, she'll observe, "Sleep is over-rated anyway."

Heidi is the feature attraction, but there are other "booths" on Honeymoon Beach. There is Joe Harris in a multi-color shed mixing island drinks and offering a battered old door as a dominoes table. Beached nearby on the sand, daily except Monday, is the bright yellow D'Pizza Boat, where former cruiser Diana Berryhill bakes scratch pies on a propane stove and even delivers them in her dinghy.

Honeymoon Beach may well be the Caribbean's first Food Court. ≈