



# US Virgin Islands

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## Why Go?

Hmm, where to go for consistent 80°F (27°C) weather, calypso-wafting beach bars and a taste of West Indian culture, but without any border crossing or passport hassle? The US Virgin Islands (USVI) have your back, mon.

St John is the greenest island, literally and figuratively. Two-thirds of its area is cloaked in parkland and sublime beaches, ripe for hiking and snorkeling. It also leads the way in environmental preservation, with several low-impact tent-resorts for lodging. Dizzying cruise-ship traffic and big resorts nibbling its edges make St Thomas the most commercialized island. St Croix is the odd island out, floating far from its siblings and offering a mix of rainforest, sugar plantations, old forts and great scuba diving. And wait – there's a fourth Virgin that often gets overlooked. That's Water Island, a stone's throw from St Thomas' airport but a world away in its taxi-less, shop-less atmosphere.

## Best Beaches

- » Lindquist Beach (p843)
- » Magens Bay (p840)
- » Salt Pond Bay (p851)
- » Cinnamon Bay (p850)
- » Cane Bay (p849)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Green Iguana (p839)
- » Concordia Eco-Tents (p851)
- » St John Inn (p847)
- » Garden by the Sea B&B (p847)
- » Hotel on the Cay (p855)

## When to Go

Mid-December through April is the dry and sunny high season, when activities are in full swing. St Thomas' big bash is the whopping, party-hearty St Thomas Carnival from mid-April to early May. St Croix throws a cheery Cruzan Christmas Fiesta from mid-December until early January. Sailors, swimmers and snorkelers might like spring best, when the water is calmest. May and November are shoulder-season months for bargains and decent (if wet) weather; early December is the best of all for fair weather and fare deals.

## AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** US dollar (US\$)
- » **Language** English
- » **Money** ATMs in main towns; dispense US dollars
- » **Visas** Not required for citizens of US, Canada and most EU countries

## Fast Facts

- » **Area** 136 sq miles
- » **Population** 109,700
- » **Capital** Charlotte Amalie
- » **Telephone country code** 21
- » **Telephone area code** 340
- » **Emergency** 911

## Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** US\$90
- » **Two-course dinner** US\$30
- » **Coral World admission** US\$19 (adult)
- » **Bottle of beer** US\$3
- » **St John ferry** US\$6

## Resources

- » **USVI Department of Tourism** ([www.visitusvi.com](http://www.visitusvi.com)) Official tourism site with a 'hot deals' page
- » **Virgin Islands Now** ([www.vinow.com](http://www.vinow.com))
- » **St Thomas/St John This Week** ([www.virginislandsthisweek.com](http://www.virginislandsthisweek.com))
- » **St Croix This Week** ([www.stcroixthisweek.com](http://www.stcroixthisweek.com))
- » **See St John** ([www.see.stjohn.com](http://www.see.stjohn.com))

## Itineraries

### FOUR DAYS

Start on St John. Spend day one at the North Shore beaches: Cinnamon Bay with wind surfing and trails through mill ruins; Maho Bay, where sea turtles swim; or Leinster Bay/Waterlemon Cay, where snorkelers can jump in amid rays and barracudas. Toast your beach in rollicking Cruz Bay.

Spend day two on the South Shore at Salt Pond Bay, where hikes, beachcombing and snorkeling await. Drink, dance and dine with the colorful characters in Coral Bay afterward.

Devote day three to hiking the Reef Bay trail, kayaking along coastal reefs or another favorite activity. Hop on a ferry on day four to check out St Thomas' East End.

### SEVEN DAYS

Spend the first day in Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas, strolling downtown and making a dent in your US\$1600 duty-free allowance. The next day ferry over to the fourth Virgin, Water Island, to swim and snorkel at Honeymoon Beach.

Take the seaplane to Christiansted, St Croix. Over the next three days drink at old windmills turned gin mills on Christiansted's wharf, dive the north-shore wall, sip at west-end rum factories and paddle through Salt River Bay in a see-through kayak.

Return to Charlotte Amalie, then catch the ferry to Cruz Bay, St John. You can't beat the green island for beaching, snorkeling and hiking trails that wind by petroglyphs, sugar mill ruins and wild donkeys.

## GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

Ferries run between St Thomas and St John hourly (a 20-minute trip). They glide between St Thomas, St John and the British Virgin Islands (BVI) frequently each day; trips average between 30 and 60 minutes. Seaplanes fly the 20-minute route between St Thomas and far-flung St Croix at least once per hour. Regional airlines make daily runs to Puerto Rico, Tortola, Antigua, Anguilla and St Kitts from St Thomas, and to St-Martin/Sint Maarten from St Croix.

## Essential Food & Drink

- » **Callaloo** Spicy soup stirred with okra, various meats, greens and hot peppers.
- » **Pate** (*paw-tay*) Flaky fried dough pockets stuffed with spiced chicken, fish or other meat.
- » **Fungi** (*foon-ghee*) A polenta-like cornmeal cooked with okra, typically topped by fish and gravy.
- » **Mango Pale Ale** Fruit-tinged microbrew by St John Brewers.
- » **Cruzan Rum** St Croix's happy juice since 1760, from light white rum to banana, guava and other tropical flavors.