

PAGE
1

PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions
to help you put together your perfect trip

Welcome to the US &
British Virgin Islands 2

20 Top Experiences 6

Need to Know 16

If You Like 19

Month by Month 22

Itineraries 25

Diving & Snorkeling 30

Chartering a Boat 37

Travel with Children 44

Regions at a Glance 47



PAGE
201

UNDERSTAND THE US & BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP

Learn about the big picture, so you
can make sense of what you see

US & British Virgin
Islands Today 202

History 204

Island Life 211

Island Landscapes 219



ISBN 978-1-74104-201-6



9 781741 104201 6

5 1899





Look out for these icons:



Our author's
recommendation



A green or
sustainable option



No payment
required

On the Road

ST THOMAS.....52

Charlotte Amalie	55
Crown Bay & West End	69
South Side.....	71
Red Hook & East End	73
North Side.....	80

ST JOHN.....83

Cruz Bay	85
North Shore	97
Coral Bay, East End & South Shore	103

ST CROIX.....108

Christiansted	112
Buck Island.....	123
East End.....	123
North Shore	126
Frederiksted	129
West End	132

TORTOLA.....136

Road Town	141
Around Road Town.....	149
Cane Garden Bay Area	150
West Island	155
East Island.....	158

VIRGIN GORDA.....162

Spanish Town & the Valley.....	165
Mid-Island	170
North Sound	171

JOST VAN DYKE 175

Great Harbour.....	177
White Bay	180
Little Harbour & Around	182

ANEGADA184

West End	186
East End.....	190

OUT ISLANDS..... 191

Norman Island	192
Peter Island.....	193
Cooper Island	194
Salt Island	195
Marina Cay	196
Scrub Island	197
Necker Island	197
Guana Island.....	198
The Dogs	198
Ginger Island.....	198
Fallen Jerusalem	198
Dead Chest Island	198
The Indians/Pelican Island	199
Little Thatch Island	199
Mosquito Island	199

Top Experiences >



Water Island

USVI's laid-back
'Fourth Virgin' (p72)

Virgin Islands NP

Trails to petroglyphs and
windmills (p85)

St John

Scuba dive to see turtles,
rays and reefs (p83)

Out Islands

Pirates and treasure on
remote cays (p191)

St Croix

Dive into the deep
at the wall (p108)

Salt River Bay

Mangrove lagoons and
bioluminescent bays (p126)

Christiansted

Historic 18th-century fort
and wharf (p112)

Cruzan Rum Distillery

Sip at the source (p133)

Estate Whim Plantation Museum

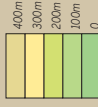
Sugar plantation (p132)

Buck Island

Protected sanctuary for
snorkeling (p123)



ELEVATION



18°00'N

CARIBBEAN

SEA



65°00'W

64°40'W

64°20'W

itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travelers.

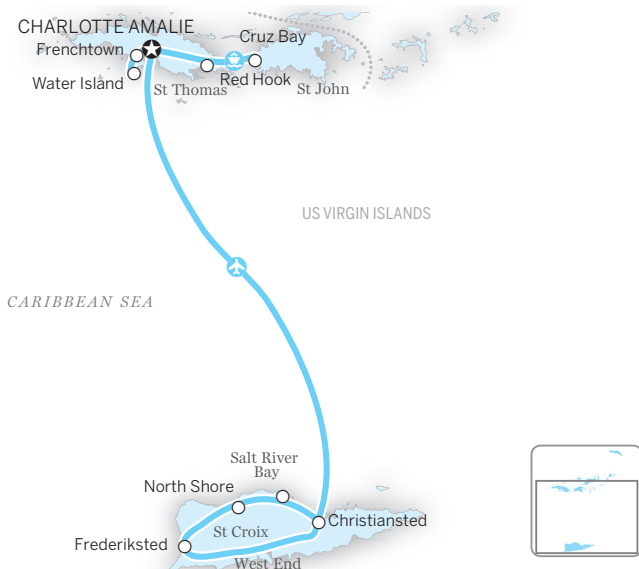


Nine Days Essential Virgin Islands

Hopscotch through the islands' greatest hits: St Thomas, St John, Tortola and Virgin Gorda huddle near each other, with frequent ferries connecting the dots.

You'll likely arrive via **St Thomas**. Spend a day or two taking in the sights and shopping in **Charlotte Amalie**, the good-time bars and bistros of **Red Hook**, and the water sports and sea creatures of **East End**. Then zip over to **St John**, whose main town, **Cruz Bay**, serves up mango-tinged microbrews at party-hearty happy hour bars. Don't get too stuck to your bar stool: **Virgin Islands National Park** cloaks two-thirds of the island in forests and sublime beaches, ripe for hiking, snorkeling and eco-camping.

Move onward to the BVI for the last five days, starting with **Tortola**. The ferry will drop you in **West End**, then wind your way around to **Road Town** for a good base from which to wine and dine with ease. Check out the music-fueled nightlife in **Cane Garden Bay** and surfers' favorite **Josiah's Bay** before journeying to **Spanish Town** on **Virgin Gorda**. The island is the BVI's rich, plump beauty and the quintessential, blue-sea-lapped retreat to round out your trip.



Seven Days USVI in a Week

Get your feet on the ground in **St Thomas**, starting out with two days in **Charlotte Amalie**. Spend the first day strolling the historic downtown and making a dent in your \$1600 duty-free allowance in the shops. In the evening, swing by **Frenchtown** to check out the area's funky bistros and wine bars. The next day ferry over to the quiet fourth Virgin, **Water Island**, and walk to Honeymoon Beach to swim and snorkel.

Take the floatplane from downtown for the cool, 20-minute flight to **Christiansted**, on **St Croix**. Over the next three days drink at old windmills turned gin mills on the wharf, play like a pirate at the big yellow fort, and poke around the art galleries and colonial buildings scattered around town. Motor to the **West End** to visit the rum factory, botanic garden and evocative plantation museum. Drop by **Frederiksted** for a snorkel around the historic pier, or maybe a mountain bike ride into the spooky rainforest. Divers should set a course for the **North Shore** to immerse at the gaping coral-encrusted wall. Just east is **Salt River Bay**, where Christopher Columbus landed in 1493; modern-day explorers can rent a kayak and set off for a night-paddle through the glimmering bioluminescent waters.

From Christiansted, return to Charlotte Amalie via seaplane, then head to **Red Hook** to catch the ferry to **St John** for a couple of days. You can't beat it for snorkeling beaches with fish-frenzied reefs to explore, and for hiking trails that wind by petroglyphs, sugar mill ruins and feral donkeys. **Cruz Bay** makes a primo base thanks to its festive bars and restaurants, which plate up everything from Italian gnocchi to Mallorean paella to West Indian barbecue.



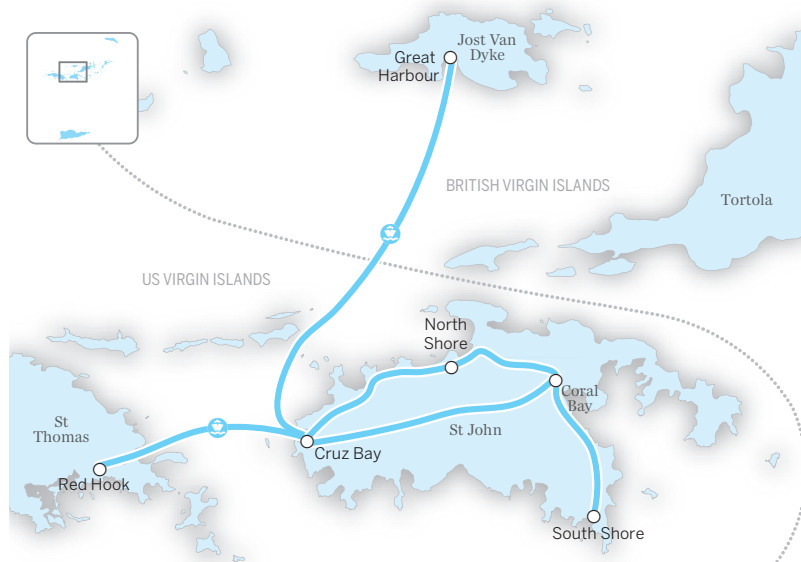
Seven Days Best of the BVI

Split your time between mountainous Tortola and prosperous Virgin Gorda, and day trip to the smaller isles by public ferry or charter boat.

Road Town makes a fine base for exploring **Tortola** if you want easy access to sophisticated eateries, gelato shops, pubs and boats. Fan out from there to inspect the island's beaches, such as **Apple Bay**, home to a world-famous, ramshackle surfers' bar, and **Cane Garden Bay**, the island's live music hot spot. To escape Tortola's 'crowds' head to **Jost Van Dyke** for a day. Fewer than 200 people live on the jovial little island, where yachters and rock stars like to drop by for drinks. Who can blame them? Jost is a rare, unspoiled oasis of green hills and blinding white sand. It even has a signature drink: the rum-bombed Painkiller. Ferries ply the route often from Tortola's **West End**.

From central Road Town, it's also easy to hop over to your next base on **Virgin Gorda**. **Spanish Town** is the gateway from which you can poke around the boulder-studded Baths, view-worthy Gorda Peak, and other national parks. Sea dogs can hail water taxis around **North Sound** to sail, kitesurf and drink with the yachtsfolk. It's also possible to day trip to **Anegada** from Spanish Town. The sleepy atoll might as well be from another planet compared to its BVI brethren. Flamingos ripple the salt ponds. Giant rock iguanas hide under blooming cacti. Hulking lobsters grill on beach barbecues. And hammocks lure around irresistible shores.

Spanish Town is also a great jumping off point for sailing expeditions to the Out Islands, too. Beauties such as **Ginger Island**, **The Dogs** and **Fallen Jerusalem** float nearby – uninhabited spots with just beaches and blue sea.



Four Days

Quick Escape: St John

Short on time but still want the maximum Virgin experience? Hang your hat on **St John**. You can easily spend all four days hiking different trails and snorkeling off distinct beaches. What's more, St John floats near several other islands for day trips.

Cruz Bay is the main town and social hot spot. Nicknamed 'Love City,' it wafts a carefree, spring-break vibe, where hippies, sea captains and American retirees and reggae worshippers hoist happy hour drinks in equal measure. It's also the place to organize your active endeavors, and to fuel up in the surprisingly good restaurant mix.

Life's a beach on the **North Shore**, ripe for a day of adventure. Lengthy Cinnamon Bay has the most going on: an archaeological dig, stand up paddle boarding and trails through mill ruins. Families and snorkeling newbies may prefer shallow Maho Bay, where sea turtles swim. Experienced snorkelers can jump in amid rays and barracudas at Leinster Bay/Waterlemon Cay.

Next up: **Coral Bay**. Sure, it's a heckuva lot smaller than Cruz Bay, but it makes up for it in personality. Colorful characters run the handful of diners and taverns – and they like to dance, so shine up your shoes beforehand. From here head down to the **South Shore**, and spend some quality time at Salt Pond Bay partaking of cool hikes, groovy beachcombing and turtle-and-squid snorkeling. Don't forget to earmark a day for hiking the Reef Bay trail, kayaking along coastal reefs or another favorite activity.

Or go island hopping. With a passport you can ferry from Cruz Bay to **Jost Van Dyke**. Arrive in Great Harbour in the morning, people watch and sip microbrews at Foxy's in the afternoon, and return home before sunset. No passport? No problem. Whiz over to **Red Hook** on **St Thomas** and quaff a flaming drink at Duffy's.



14 Days Island Hopper

With two weeks you can swoop through St Thomas and St John in US territory, the four main British islands, plus a scattering of pirate-spiced Out Islands.

Spend a day on **St Thomas** eating johnnycakes and browsing shops in **Charlotte Amalie**, then head to **Red Hook** on the island's East End for a few days of Margaritaville ambience. Both towns lie close to beaches where true-blue water worthy of Hollywood movies splashes ashore (indeed, St Thomas regularly hosts film crews around its coast).

Next up: **St John**. Scores of cafes and pubs await in **Cruz Bay** and scores of wild beaches and hiking trails await in Virgin Islands National Park. Get your snorkel mask ready, because this is the island to come face to face with sea turtles and mighty swimmers.

Spend week two in the BVI. Grab a ferry to **Great Harbour** on **Jost Van Dyke** and kick back on the 'barefoot island.' A calypso musician named Foxy Callwood is Jost's unofficial mayor, and he presides over a fun-loving clutch of beach bars and guesthouses. Ferry onward to **Tortola's West End** and its dandy collection of surfer hangouts and shores, particularly around **Cane Garden Bay**, where live music pumps nightly. **Road Town** is the island's restaurant and transport hub, so you'll wind up there eventually.

From Tortola, it's easy to charter a day-sail excursion, a DIY boat, or a crewed yacht and glide to barely inhabited **Norman, Peter** and **Cooper Islands**. Here, life is reduced to the pleasures of snorkeling, diving and sleeping under a shade tree. Spend a few days chilling with yachties on pretty **Virgin Gorda** (a half-hour ferry ride from Tortola). To really get away, sail on to **Anegada**, a magical and lonesome place to hang your hammock for a stretch.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Karla Zimmerman

During her island travels, Karla hiked past wild donkeys on St John, ate an embarrassing number of johnnycakes on St Thomas, got splashed by beer-guzzling pigs on St Croix, bashed through the Baths on Virgin Gorda and felt no pain on Jost Van Dyke. She first bounced around the Virgins when she was a kid, and still remembers the awe of seeing the true-blue hue of Magens Bay on that initial visit. Karla is based in Chicago, and writes travel features for newspapers, books, magazines and websites. She has authored or coauthored several Lonely Planet guidebooks covering the USA, Canada, Caribbean and Europe.

Read more about Karla at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/karlazimmerman

Published by Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd

ABN 36 005 607 983

1st edition – Sep 2011

ISBN 978 1 74104 201 6

© Lonely Planet 2011 Photographs © as indicated 2011

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be copied, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, except brief extracts for the purpose of review, and no part of this publication may be sold or hired, without the written permission of the publisher. Lonely Planet and the Lonely Planet logo are trademarks of Lonely Planet and are registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Lonely Planet does not allow its name or logo to be appropriated by commercial establishments, such as retailers, restaurants or hotels. Please let us know of any misuses: lonelyplanet.com/ip.

Although the authors and Lonely Planet have taken all reasonable care in preparing this book, we make no warranty about the accuracy or completeness of its content and, to the maximum extent permitted, disclaim all liability arising from its use.

© Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'