

welcome to the US & British Virgin Islands



Patches of Tropical Bliss

The Virgin Islands have the tropical thing down: consistently balmy weather, ridiculously white sandy shores, diving and snorkeling and calypso-wafting beach bars. But then they kick it up a notch. They float the Caribbean's most profuse and tightly packed group of islands, with more than 90 little landmasses bobbing in a 45-mile triangular patch of sea. Add steady trade winds, calm currents and hundreds of protected, salt-rimmed bays, and it's easy to see how the Virgins became a sailing fantasyland.

Exploring the archipelago is easy aboard the public ferries. Or hoist your own sail

from the region's largest fleet of charter boats.

Island by Island

Hmm, which island to choose for secluded beaches and conch fritters? Easy: any one, though each differs slightly in personality. The US Virgins hold the lion's share of population and development. St Thomas has more resorts and water sports than you can shake a beach towel at. St John takes a different tack: it cloaks two-thirds of its area in parkland – above ground and underwater. The largest Virgin, St Croix, pleases divers and drinkers with extraordinary scuba sites and rum factories.



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Prediction for your Virgin Islands arrival: it's sunny, 83°F (28°C). Soon you're on a boat gliding across the teal-blue sea. You sip a Painkiller and think of the suckers at home shoveling snow.

(left) White Bay Beach, Jost Van Dyke.
(below) Diving at Lind Point, near Cruz Bay, St. John.



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If you're a US citizen and have a passport, you can hop onward to the British Virgins. These are officially territories of Her Majesty's land, but aside from scattered offerings of fish and chips, there's little that's overtly British. They're more like their US brethren, only quirkier and less developed.

Take Jost Van Dyke, population 200, where a man named Foxy is the island's main man. Chief island Tortola is known for its full-moon parties, fungi bands and fire jugglers. Virgin Gorda is beloved by movie stars and yachties; you'll understand the ardor once you've seen her national parks. And Anegada? It's so baked-in-the-sun mellow we can't be bothered to get out of our hammock to find better words for it.

From Beach to Adventure

Believe it or not, a day will come during your Virgin stay when you decide enough with the beach lounging. Then it's time to slap on the mask and flippers and snorkel with turtles and spotted eagle rays. Or dive to explore a 19th-century shipwreck. Or hike to petroglyphs and sugar mill ruins. Or kayak through a bioluminescent bay. Or fork into garlic chicken and fried johnnycakes at a West Indian snack shack. Or surf, bonefish, day-sail or eco-camp...