



Tortola

POP 19,600

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

Among Tortola's sharp peaks and bougainvillea-clad hill-sides, you'll find a mash-up of play places. Guesthouses and mountain villas mingle with beachside resorts. *Bon Appétit* cooks make island dishes next to elderly Mrs Scatliffe, who prepares them from her garden. You even get your choice of full moon parties – artsy with Aragorn or mushroom-tea-fueled with Bomba.

About 80% of the BVI's 25,000 citizens live and work on Tortola, so it's not surprising there's a lot of choice here. It's also the territory's governmental and commercial center, plus its air and ferry hub. And for all the sailors out there: Tortola is the Caribbean's charter boat capital.

Beyond busy Road Town, Cane Garden Bay's turquoise water and music-fueled nightlife beckons. Surfers will find plenty of groovy beaches and to top it all off, Tortola's funky West Indian settlements add local character to the scene.

When to Go

Mid-December through April is the prime weather high season, when visitors from northern climes descend and set sail in charter boats. Big bashes take place in spring and summer, including the BVI Spring Regatta (early April), BVI Music Festival (late May), HiHo windsurfing races (late June) and the year's biggest bash: the Emancipation Festival (late July to early August). Tortola also gets busy each month during the full moon when the parties at Bomba's and Aragorn's fire up the night.

History

Although no definitive record exists, many historians speculate that Tortola was the island that Columbus called Santa Ursula when he sailed past in 1493. The island got its present name around 1515, when outriders from Puerto Rico passed this way in search of gold. They called the island Tortola, which means 'turtle dove' in Spanish, after encountering flocks of the cooing birds. Most have since flown the coop (except on neighboring Guana Island).

The island was formally claimed by Holland in 1648, when the Dutch West India Company established a settlement and built a fort on the site that is now the Fort Burt Hotel. In 1666, a band of British drove the Dutch out and claimed the island for England.

In the 18th century an enterprising group of English religious dissidents known as Quakers arrived. Famed for their work ethic, business acumen and devotion to pacifism,

they established plantations throughout Tortola. Their surnames – Callwood, Lett-some etc – are still the most common among islanders.

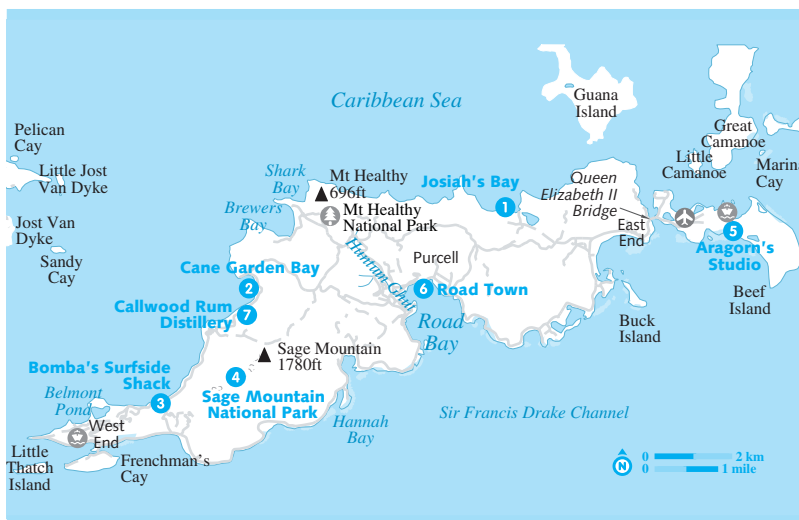
In the 1960s modern sailors discovered the BVI's fair winds and pristine anchorages, and bareboat yacht-charter companies – led by the Moorings – set up shop to serve them, using Tortola as their base. Soon sailors came by the tens of thousands from the US and Europe to charter cruising sailboats. And so began the modern development boom. Some 90% of the commercial buildings and homes on the island date from the last 35 years or so.

★ Festivals & Events

BVI Spring Regatta

SAILING

(www.bvispringregatta.org; late Mar-early Apr) The granddaddy of Tortola's myriad yacht races has become one of the Caribbean's biggest parties. It features seven days of small- and large-craft races and provides a time-honored excuse to swill beer, sip rum, listen



Tortola Highlights

1 Kick back on the dramatic strand of sand at **Josiah's Bay** (p158)

2 Dance to reggae at the beach bars along **Cane Garden Bay** (p151)

3 Knock back a beer with the board-toting crowd at

Bomba's Surfside Shack (p157)

4 Hike the trails at lush **Sage Mountain National Park** (p150)

5 Ring in the new moon with fungi music, stilt walkers and fire jugglers at **Aragon's Studio** (p160)

6 Set sail on a charter boat from **Road Town** (p143)

7 Check out the atmospheric copper vats and wooden casks at the **Callwood Rum Distillery** (p150)