



Virgin Gorda

POP 3500

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

Virgin Gorda is the BVI's rich, plump beauty, beloved by movie stars and feisty billionaires. You'll understand their ardor once you've seen her national parks. The otherworldly, granite megaliths at the Baths put on the main show. Boulders hulk over the shore and form sea-filled grottoes, making for a wet and wild climb up, over and around them to Devil's Bay. Trekkers can summit Virgin Gorda Peak and then head south to meander around wind-pounded Copper Mine National Park. Sea dogs can take ferries over to Bitter End Yacht Club to sail, kitesurf and drink with the yachtsfolk.

It's the way these extraordinary sights blend with easy access, good restaurants, and no rampant commercialism that catapults Virgin Gorda to most-favored-island status. A prosperous, well-tended atmosphere permeates. Sure, you'll probably come across roaming chickens sooner or later, but they will be snowy white and an islander will have named them all.

When to Go

Mid-December through April is the high season, when prices go up but all the businesses are in full swing. Virgin Gorda's main events throughout the year also get a lot of attention. The late February/early March BVI Kite Jam attracts a hip group for activities around North Sound. The Virgin Gorda Easter Festival brings revelers for parades and bands in Spanish Town, usually in late March or April. The two weeks leading up to Christmas are also a local party time in Spanish Town.

History

After leaving St Croix in 1493, Christopher Columbus sailed north and anchored to the southeast of Virgin Gorda. He named the island the 'Fat Virgin' because to him, its silhouette resembled a full-bodied woman sleeping on her back.

Virgin Gorda thrived in the centuries that followed. Large plantations on the island produced sugarcane, ginger, indigo and cattle. By 1812, the island's population reached an all-time peak of 8000. Alas, the plantation economy soon collapsed, and Virgin Gorda sat all but abandoned until the 1960s. That's when Laurence Rockefeller constructed the Little Dix Bay resort, which brought jobs, roads and utilities and put the island back on the map.

🌟 Festivals & Events

Spanish Town around the yacht harbor fills with mocko jumbies (costumed stilt walkers representing spirits of the dead), fungi bands, a food fair and parades for the **Virgin Gorda Easter Festival** (www.bvitourism.com), held

Friday through Sunday during the Christian holiday (usually late March or April).

The **BVI Kite Jam** (www.bvikitejam.com; late Feb–early Mar) is a weeklong event packed full of 'freestyle, sliders, big air and wave riding' around North Sound, Necker Island and Anegada. Sir Richard Branson is the co-founder and an active participant.

📍 Getting There & Around

AIR

Virgin Gorda Airport (VIJ; ☎284-495-5621) is on the Valley's east side, about a mile from Spanish Town. At press time, only private charters were permitted to fly in. **Air Sunshine** (www.air sunshine.com), a commercial carrier with flights from St Thomas, is trying to change that. In the interim, it flies into Tortola's airport and provides a free ferry to Spanish Town.

BOAT

Check the **BVI Welcome Guide** (www.bviwelcome.com) for schedules. Between Spanish Town and Road Town, Tortola, ferries sail almost every hour during the daytime (round trip \$30, 30 minutes):



Virgin Gorda Highlights

- 1 Wade around boulders and through grottoes at sunrise at **the Baths** (p165)
- 2 Hike to island-spanning views atop **Virgin Gorda Peak** (p170)
- 3 Sail or kitesurf in the bay at **North Sound** (p172)
- 4 Walk the long beach at **Savannah Bay** (p171)
- 5 Join the yachties for happy hour at **Saba Rock** (p173)
- 6 Snorkel in the protected pools at **Spring Bay** (p167)
- 7 Explore the forlorn, windswept ruins of **Copper Mine National Park** (p166)