

Overview of US Virgin Islands

St Thomas, St John and St Croix are the biggest and most visited of the 60 islands making up the US Virgin Islands. Their appeal lies in the amalgamation of the exotic and the recognisable, an island paradise with modern comforts and a balance between Caribbean culture and American practicality.

The energetic capital of Charlotte Amalie and its attractive harbour lies on St Thomas, being the most Americanised of the chain and famous for its world-class duty free shopping. Nearby St John is an unspoilt nature lover's paradise, with most of its forests, pristine beaches, and reefs part of a protected national park.

St Croix is the largest of the islands and is fairly remote from the others. Historic remnants are scattered about the landscape, as are the picturesque Danish-influenced towns of Frederiksted and Christiansted. Additionally, snorkelling at Buck Island is also an attraction.

Surrounded by the crystal-clear waters of the Caribbean, these islands boast some of the most splendid coastlines in the world, with white sandy beaches, astonishing coral reefs, plentiful marine life, secluded coves and untouched rainforests rising up from the land.

Caribbean colour touches every aspect of the islands, blending with the strong Danish influence in the towns. White sails glide effortlessly across the emerald waters; local craftsmen display their unique island art along cobblestone alleyways; tiled villa roofs provide a splash of red against the verdant hillside; busy markets supply the essentials for a delicious cuisine; and the sounds of folk songs and calypso bands fill the air.

The Virgin Islands are among the most popular cruise destinations in the Caribbean and the port towns of Charlotte Amalie, Christiansted and Frederiksted are often swamped with newly arrived passengers in a frenzy of shopping and dining. The most popular beaches are seldom deserted and the key reef areas are often a flurry of flippers and snorkels.

Luxury resorts and fine hotels share the streets with old colonial architecture. In the US Virgin Islands, it's still possible to escape the crowds and find that elusive slip of paradise, away from the divers, tourists and the shopaholics.

Key Facts

Language:

English is the official language. Spanish, Creole and some French are also spoken.

Passport/Visa:

Entry requirements are the same as for the United States of America. It is highly recommended that passports have at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. There is no immigration control for visitors arriving from mainland USA. Visitors from countries that qualify for the Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) must have a machine-readable passport (MRP) that has a bar code on the photo page. Eligible travellers under the VWP must include biometrics in their machine-readable passports if they wish to enter the country without a visa; this means that unique personal data, such as fingerprints or iris details, must be included in passports. All passports must contain a digital photo image in order to travel visa-free. Those travelling under the VWP must also register on the US government ESTA website three days before departure, which allows the US to screen visitors before travel. All visitors to the USA will have a photograph and two fingerprints taken by an inkless scanner on arrival, including those travelling visa-free under the Visa Waiver Programme. All travellers arriving or departing by air, land or sea between the USA and Mexico, Canada, the Caribbean, Bermuda, and Central and South America are required to present a valid passport. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The official currency is the US Dollar (USD) divided into 100 cents. Most credit cards are accepted, including American Express, Diners Club, Mastercard, and Visa, and are useful for withdrawing cash at ATMs. Foreign exchange bureaux are available to exchange other currencies, but it is best to arrive with US Dollars as many banks and hotels will not exchange foreign currency.

Electricity:

120 volts, 60Hz. Two-flat-pin plugs are standard.

Travel to US Virgin Islands

Climate in US Virgin Islands

The islands are hot and humid throughout the year, with most rain falling between August and October. The busiest tourist season is from December to May, and outside of these months rooms are cheaper and the islands less crowded. Between April and August, the waters are calmer and underwater visibility is best for diving and snorkelling. Most travellers prefer to avoid the rainy season in the US Virgin Islands, but this Caribbean gem can be enjoyed at any time of year.

Health Notes when travelling to US Virgin Islands

Only bottled water should be drunk outside the major towns, but other than that there are no significant health risks. Medical facilities are of a high standard but travel insurance is vital as medical care is very expensive.

Safety Notes when travelling to US Virgin Islands

The US Virgin Islands are generally safe for travellers and the vast majority of visits are trouble-free. But normal precautions against petty crime should be taken, especially in the back streets of towns during the night. Don't leave valuables lying on the beach when snorkelling or swimming.

Customs in US Virgin Islands

In the US Virgin Islands, politeness is important. Greet people before asking questions or requesting assistance. You may hear locals thanking jumbi (spirits) for good luck, or blaming them for misfortune.

Duty Free in US Virgin Islands

Travellers may transport 100 cigars or 200 cigarettes or 2kg smoking tobacco; and a US quart of alcohol.

Doing Business in US Virgin Islands

The economy in the US Virgin Islands revolves primarily around tourism, though petroleum refining takes place off St Croix. Like many other Caribbean countries, things are pretty relaxed and formal business attire is generally not considered necessary. The people are friendly, polite and shaking hands is common upon introductions for men and women. Business hours are typically 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday, with lunch breaks around 12pm.

Communication in US Virgin Islands

The international country code for the US Virgin Islands is +1 340. The main mobile service providers on the islands are AT&T Mobility, Sprint Nextel and T-Mobile USA.

Tipping in US Virgin Islands

Tipping of 15 to 20 percent is customary for good service. Some hotels and restaurants automatically add a service charge and room tax.

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Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

A valid US passport is required. A visa is not required.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadians require a passport valid for duration of stay but a visa is not required. Visitors should hold tickets and

documents required for return or onward destination.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

UK passport holders require a valid passport for travel to the US Virgin Islands. British Citizens require a passport valid for duration of stay. Passports with other endorsements must be valid for six months beyond period of intended stay. Under the Visa Waiver Programme (VWP), most British citizens do not require a visa for holiday, transit, or business purposes provided that their passports are machine-readable, the stay does not exceed 90 days, a return or onward ticket is held, and they check into the US government ESTA website prior to departure to register.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australian nationals require a passport valid for duration of stay but do not require a visa for tourist stays of up to 90 days. Passports need to be machine-readable, a return or onward ticket is required, and Australians must check into the US government ESTA website prior to departure.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish nationals require a passport valid for duration of stay, but as Ireland qualifies for the US Visa Waiver Programme, visas are not required for tourists or business stays of up to 90 days. Visitors must have machine-readable passports, return or onward tickets, and they must register on the ESTA site before departure.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand nationals require a passport valid for duration of stay but do not need visas for stays of up to 90 days. New Zealanders require machine-readable passports and return or onward tickets, and must register on the US government ESTA website before departure.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

South Africans must hold a passport valid for duration of stay, and a visa is required. Visitors must have return or onward tickets and the necessary documents for further travel.

Tourist Offices

US Virgin Islands Tourist Office, St Thomas: +1 340 774 8784 or <http://www.usvitourism.vi>

US Virgin Islands Embassies

In Canada:

United States Embassy, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 238 5335.

In the United Kingdom:

United States Embassy, London, United Kingdom: +44 (0)20 7499 9000.

In Australia:

United States Embassy, Canberra, Australia: +61 (0)2 6214 5600.

In Ireland:

United States Embassy, Dublin, Ireland: +354 (0)1 668 8777.

In New Zealand:

United States Embassy, Wellington, New Zealand: +64 (0)4 462 6000.

In South Africa:

United States Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa: +27 (0)12 431 4000.

Foreign Embassies in US Virgin Islands

Canadian Embassy

Canadian Embassy, Washington DC, USA: +1 202 682 1740.

British Embassy

British Embassy, Washington DC, USA: +1 202 588 6500.

Australian Embassy

Australian Embassy, Washington DC, USA: +1 202 797 3000.

Irish Embassy

Irish Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 462 3939

New Zealand Embassy

New Zealand Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 328 4800.

South African Embassy

South African Embassy, Washington DC, USA: +1 202 232 4400.

Currency

The official currency is the US Dollar (USD) divided into 100 cents. Most credit cards are accepted, including American Express, Diners Club, Mastercard, and Visa, and are useful for withdrawing cash at ATMs. Foreign exchange bureaux are available to exchange other currencies, but it is best to arrive with US Dollars as many banks and hotels will not exchange foreign currency.

Exchange rate for 1 USD - U.S. Dollar

0.00 BMD Bermudan Dollar	0.93 EUR Euro	0.80 GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	152.99 JPY Japanese Yen	1.37 CAD Canadian Dollar	0.91 CHF Swiss Franc
1.52 AUD Australian Dollar	39.40 UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	443.91 KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	93,075.00 LBP Lebanese Pound	4.86 LYD Libyan Dinar	6.86 BOB Bolivian Boliviano
0.00 NPR Nepalese Rupee	0.00 OMR Omani Rial	0.00 QAR Qatari Rial	1.35 SGD Singapore Dollar	10.82 SEK Swedish Krona	0.00 TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar
0.00 VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	58.11 DOP Dominican Peso	0.00 HRK Croatian Kuna	16.95 MXN Mexican Peso	610.53 XOF West African CFA Franc	0.00 PGK Papua New Guinean kina
0.00 BSD Bahamian Dollar	0.00 FJD Fiji Dollar	0.00 HNL Honduran Lempira	133.87 DZD Algerian Dinar	0.00 MMK Myanma Kyat	0.00 BWP Botswana Pula
3.72 PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	938.44 CLP Chilean Peso	386.84 AMD Armenia Dram	23.29 CZK Czech Koruna	17.63 MDL Moldova Lei	139.89 ISK Icelandic Krona
12,582.40 UZS Uzbekistan Sum	3.72 ILS Israeli New Sheqel	0.71 JOD Jordanian Dinar	0.00 KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	38.15 UYU Uruguayan Peso	0.00 MUR Mauritian Rupee
0.00 NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	10.88 NOK Norwegian Krone	4.03 PLN Polish Zloty	3.75 SAR Saudi Riyal	0.00 LKR Sri Lanka Rupee	36.79 THB Thai Baht
3.66 AED U.A.E Dirham	5.09 BRL Brazilian Real	4.63 RON Romanian New Leu	7.81 HKD Hong Kong Dollar	610.53 XAF Central African CFA Franc	25,405.70 VND Vietnamese Dong
878.36 ARS Argentine Peso	0.00 XCD East Caribbean Dollar	0.00 GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	10.06 MAD Moroccan Dirham	0.00 BHD Bahrain Dinar	1.00 PAB Panamanian Balboa
1.70 AZN Azerbaijan Manat	3,920.00 COP Colombian Peso	88.42 KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	362.00 HUF Hungarian Forint	10.89 TJS Tajikistan Ruble	16,073.70 IDR Indonesian Rupiah
47.95 EGP Egyptian Pound	1,358.84 KRW South Korean Won	7,456.52 PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	4.74 MYR Malaysian Ringgit	508.31 CRC Costa Rican Colón	1.67 NZD New Zealand Dollar
277.87 PKR Pakistani Rupee	91.39 RUB Russian Rouble	18.51 ZAR South African Rand	3.13 TND Tunisian Dinar	0.00 BBD Barbadian Dollar	1.82 BGN Bulgarian Lev
32.33 TRY Turkish Lira	57.28 PHP Philippine Peso	32.31 TWD New Taiwan Dollar	1,164.84 NGN Nigerian Naira	0.00 XPF CFP Franc	0.00 GHS Ghanaian Cedi
0.00 JMD Jamaican Dollar	0.00 ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	0.00 BND Brunei Dollar	108.90 RSD Serbian Dinar	7.24 CNY Chinese Yuan	6.94 DKK Danish Krone
3.49 TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	83.42 INR Indian Rupee				

Port of Call - St Croix (Frederiksted)

Quieter than St Thomas or St John, the port of St Croix doesn't see nearly as many cruise liners as it could, and for some travellers this is a big draw card. The unspoilt island is a haven for those who enjoy a less touristy destination and it offers a multitude of activities for day visitors. Key sights include the rainforest, which can be seen on foot or horseback; the beautiful St. George Botanical Gardens; scuba diving in Buck Island National Park; and a visit to Fort Christiansvaern in Christiansted, which is one of the best-preserved colonial forts in the Virgin Islands and a US National Monument. Most ships dock at the pier in Frederiksted, but smaller ships carrying less than 200 passengers dock in Christiansted, the larger of the two cities. Transport into either one of the cities and between the two is quick and cheap.

Shopping in St Croix (Frederiksted)

There is plenty of duty-free shopping to do in St Croix with the usual duty-free items available. Most of the shopping in Frederiksted is centred between two main streets, namely Strand St. and King St. In Christiansted there are more smaller shops selling jewellery and art around the tiny narrow streets.

Best Buy: Cruzan Rum and Crucian "hook" bracelet

Dining in St Croix (Frederiksted)

The Blue Moon - great affordable lunch spot with views over the water
Stixx on the Waterfront - casual eatery in Christiansted
Eat @ Cane Bay - popular brunch spot in Frederiksted.

Best Dish: Local linefish

Port of Call - St Thomas

Perhaps the most bustling town in the US Virgin Islands, Charlotte Amalie on the island of St. Thomas is arguably the most popular cruise port in the Caribbean. The cruise port combines the convenience of being on US territory (no passport for US citizens) with a decidedly Danish culture and atmosphere. Among vying attractions, the vibrant and scenic town of Charlotte Amalie is the most alluring. The European-styled city, coloured with the pastels of the Caribbean, is set against deep green hills and a rich and deep bay. Cruise ships come to St. Thomas via two ports: the more often used Havensight or the newly built Crown Bay Centre. Havensight is next to Charlotte Amalie city centre and Crown Bay is just to the west. When berths are full passengers are tendered into the port docks. Both ports have all conceivable passenger amenities, although Havensight is the larger and has a bit more on offer.

Shopping in St Thomas

Havensight has an enormous shopping centre that will take some time to peruse. In Charlotte Amalie great boutique stores are best found along its Main Street also called Dronningens Gade. Cheaper souvenirs are best sought at Vendors Plaza near Fort Christian. US residents get extra duty-free allowances.

Best Buy: Jewellery or rum

Dining in St Thomas

Dinghy's Beach Bar and Grill - scenic spot for drinks and light meals. Heidi's Honeymoon Grill Restaurant - great fresh seafood on the beach. Paradise Point - top of the tram ride, with the best island view.

Best Dish: Callaloo soup

Overview of the Attractions in US Virgin Islands

Public Holidays in US Virgin Islands