

# US Virgin Islands

You can almost hear the three main islands squabbling at the family dinner table:

'I can't believe you sold out to the cruise ships,' St John says to St Thomas.

'Of course I did. But I did what I had to so my inhabitants would be prosperous. You can't feed an island on hippie idealism and ecotents,' St Thomas retorts.

'Pipe down,' says St Croix, covering its ears.

'What do you care? Tourism isn't your main source of income,' the other two shoot back.

So it goes in the US Virgin Islands' household, where St Thomas, St John and St Croix were all raised by Uncle Sam, but each grew up to have a very different personality.

St John is the greenest island, literally and figuratively. It cloaks two-thirds of its area in parkland and sublime beaches, ripe for hiking and snorkeling. It also leads the way in environmental preservation, with limited development and several low-impact tent-resorts for lodging. Dizzying cruise-ship traffic and big resorts nibbling its edges make St Thomas the most commercialized island. St Croix is the odd island out, located far from its siblings and offering a mix of rainforest, sugar plantations, old forts and great scuba diving. Its economy is *not* based on tourism, which makes it feel even more off-the-beaten path.

While the islands are American territories (and a favorite of American tourists since they don't require a passport), West Indian culture remains their strongest influence. Calypso and reggae rhythms swirl through the air, and curried meats, callaloo soup and mango-sweetened microbrews fill the tables.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 136 sq miles
- **Capital** Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas
- **Country code** ☎ 340
- **Departure tax** None
- **Famous for** Duty-free shopping, Virgin Islands National Park, Cruzan rum
- **Language** English
- **Money** US dollar (US\$); US\$1 = €0.65 = UK£0.51
- **Official name** US Virgin Islands
- **People** US Virgin Islanders
- **Phrase** Wind at your back, mon (a parting comment that means 'I hope you have an easy day'); limin' (pronounced 'lime-in'; means 'relaxing').
- **Population** 108,448
- **Visa** Unnecessary for most countries; see p386



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Virgin Islands National Park** (p372) Trek to petroglyphs, sugar mill ruins, and isolated beaches rich with marine life.
- **Christiansted** (p378) Sip microbrews, explore a Danish fort and dive 'the wall' at nearby Cane Bay
- **Leinster Bay and Waterlemon Cay** (p376) Snorkel with barracudas, turtles, spotted eagle rays and nurse sharks
- **Cruzan Rum Distillery** (p383) Drink the islands' favorite attitude adjuster at its fragrant source
- **Virgin Islands Ecotours** (p369) Kayak through a twisted mangrove lagoon

## ITINERARIES

- **One Day** What? Only 24 hours in the USVIs? Make it Cruz Bay, St John, where hiking trails with wild donkeys and beachside mojito bars are steps from the ferry arrival dock.
- **One Week** Spend a couple of days eating and beaching around Charlotte Amalie, then ferry over to St John to hike, snorkel and kayak.
- **Two Weeks** Island hop: spend a few days in Charlotte Amalie, then seaplane to St Croix to dive and hang out for four days. Hike and snorkel through St John's natural bounty for five days, then sail onward to the nearby British Virgin Islands. It's an easy return from there to Charlotte Amalie.
- **Go Green** For those watching their eco-footprint, you can rest easy at the VI Campground near St Thomas; at Maho Bay, Cinnamon Bay and Concordia tent-resorts on St John; and at Mt Victory Campground and Northside Valley on St Croix. To learn more about the islands' rich ecosystems, take a tour with Friends of the VI National Park and or an eco-hike on St Croix.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The balmy temperature averages 78°F (25°C) in winter (December through March) and 83°F (28°C) in summer (June through August). Easterly trade winds keep the humidity lower than on most other Caribbean islands. The wettest months are August through November; rain usually comes in brief tropical showers. Hurricane season peaks in August and September. High season is December 15

to April 30; those willing to risk a little rain will find much better hotel deals outside this period. November, early December and May are particularly good times to visit.

## HISTORY

### Pirates, Sugar and Powerbrokering

Folks have been living on the islands from as early as 2000 BC. The Tainos ruled the roost for a while, but the ruthless, seafaring Caribs eventually wiped them out.

Around this time Christopher Columbus sailed up to Salt River Bay (p381) during his second trip to the Caribbean. It was 1493, and he gave the islands their enduring name: Santa Ursula y Las Once Mil Vírgenes, in honor of a 4th-century princess and her 11,000 maidens. Mapmakers soon shortened the mouthful to 'The Virgins.'

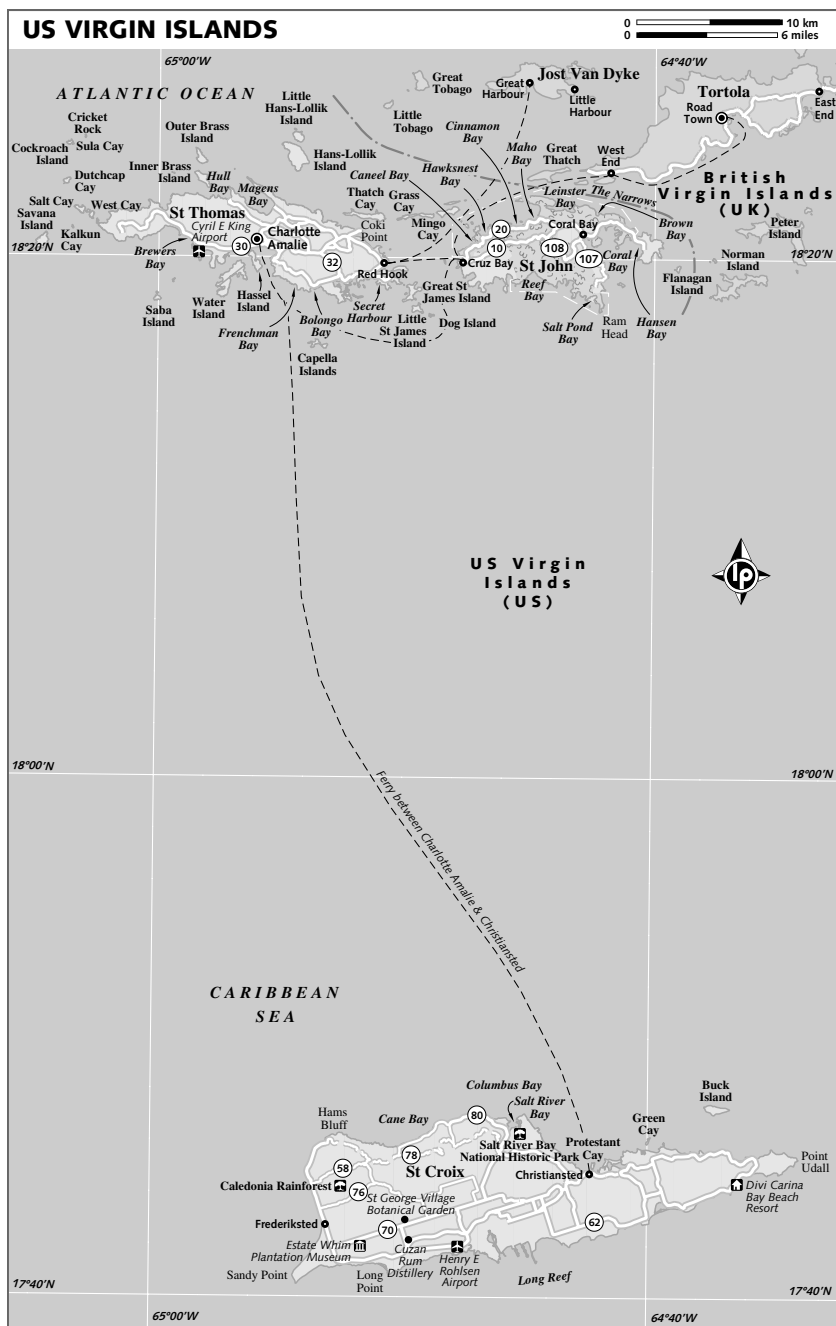
The islands remained under Spanish control until the English defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588. England, France and Holland were quick to issue 'letters of marque,' which allowed 'privateers' the rights to claim territory and protect those claims.

One king's privateer became every other king's pirate. Blackbeard (Edward Teach) operated in the Virgin Islands before 1720, with a collection of other rascals such as 'Calico' Jack Rackham, lover of colorful clothes and female pirate partners (see p361).

The Danes and English bickered over the islands, while each built vast sugar and tobacco plantations. The English held colonies on islands east of St John, while the Danes held St Thomas to the west. St John remained disputed territory. Finally, in 1717 the Danes sent a small but determined band of soldiers to St John and drove the British out. The Narrows, between St John and Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, became the border that has divided the eastern (first Danish, now US) Virgins from the British Virgins for more than 250 years.

## Slavery & Liberation

The West Indies grew rich producing sugar and cotton for Europe. In pursuit of profits, the Danish West India and Guinea Company declared St Thomas a free port in 1724, and purchased St Croix from the French in 1733. By the end of the century, the number of African slaves on the islands exceeded 40,000.



Harsh living conditions and oppressive laws drove slaves to revolt. Meanwhile, sugar production in Europe and American tariffs on foreign sugar cut into the islands' profits. The deteriorating economy put everyone in a foul mood. Something had to give and it finally did in 1848, when black people on St Croix forced the legal end to slavery.

But black people remained in economic bondage. Life in the islands was dismal. Average wages for field workers were less than US\$0.15 a day. A series of labor revolts left the plantation infrastructure in ruins.

### USA Eyes the Prize

The USA, realizing the strategic value of the islands, negotiated with Denmark to buy its territories. The deal was almost done in 1867, but the US Congress choked at paying US\$7.5 million (more than the US\$7.2 million it had just paid for Alaska).

As WWI began in Europe, the USA grew concerned that German armies might invade Denmark and claim the Danish West Indies. Finally, the USA paid the Danes US\$25 million in gold for the islands in 1917.

The US Navy then took control, bringing draconian rule, racism and gangs of misbehaving sailors. The USA tried to enforce Prohibition here, a hilarious concept for an economy tied to the production, sale and distribution of rum. In 1931 President Herbert Hoover traveled to the Virgins, stayed for less than six hours and made a speech in which he declared, 'It was unfortunate that we ever acquired these islands.'

In 1934, however, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt visited and saw the potential that Hoover had missed. Soon, the USA instituted programs to eradicate disease, drain swamps, build roads, improve education and create tourism infrastructure.

Islanders received the right to elect their own governor in 1970. Though local politics brought its share of nepotism, cronyism and other scandals, the next four decades also brought unprecedented growth in tourism and raised the standard of living. Hurricane Marilyn took a chunk out of the islands in 1995, but they got back to business quickly thereafter.

Every once in a while, USVI citizens get a bee in their bonnet and seek greater self-determination through a Virgin Islands Constitution. They've tried and failed to rat-

ify it four times during the last half century. They're giving it a fifth shot as we go to press. Stay tuned.

## THE CULTURE

The USVIs are a territory of the USA, and the islands participate in the political process by sending an elected, nonvoting representative to the US House of Representatives. All citizens of the USVIs are US citizens (and have been since 1927) with one exception: they cannot vote in presidential elections.

Though the USVIs wear a veneer of mainstream American culture, with conveniences like shopping malls and fast food, West African culture is a strong and respected presence.

Since 1970 the USVIs' population has quadrupled, although current growth has plateaued. Economic opportunities draw immigrants from other parts of the West Indies, along with US mainlanders who come to escape the politics and busyness of American life, or to retire in the sun.

Black people (most of whom are descendants of former slaves) outnumber white by more than four to one and dominate the islands' political and professional arenas.

## ARTS Architecture

Charlotte Amalie and Christiansted showcase traditional West Indian architecture, a loose adaptation of late-18th-century English Georgian (neoclassical) style. Construction used a mix of ship-ballast brick, 'rubble' (a blend of coral, molasses and straw) and wood.

## Literature

The University of the Virgin Islands sponsors the journal *The Caribbean Writer* ([www.thecaribbeanwriter.org](http://www.thecaribbeanwriter.org)), a compendium of poems and short fiction by major Caribbean writers.

### HOW MUCH?

- **One-liter bottle of Cruzan rum** US\$9
- **Snorkel gear rental per day** US\$10
- **Passenger ferry from St Thomas to St John** US\$5 to US\$10
- **Bottle of Blackbeard Ale** US\$3
- **Mango smoothie** US\$6

## AVAST! LADIES OF PLUNDER

Boatloads of pirates sailed through the Virgin Islands in the early 1700s. Most were indistinguishable in their eye patches and wooden legs, except for two buccaneers: Anne Bonny and Mary Read.

Anne was the daughter of a respectable Charleston, South Carolina family, who showed her wild ways early by marrying James Bonny against her father's wishes. Bonny was a small-time pirate working out of Nassau and, while he was out cavorting, he wanted Anne to stay home and cook for him. Instead, she began a series of affairs.

'Calico' Jack Rackham ultimately won her heart. 'Come sail away with me,' the sharp-dressed scallawag presumably said.

Anne disguised herself in men's clothing (women on ships were considered bad luck), and wielded her pistol and cutlass so fiercely no one questioned her gender. Well, one pirate did, and she stabbed him through the heart.

The thing that finally gave her away was pregnancy. Jack dropped her off in Cuba to have the baby, which died shortly after birth.

After Anne returned she discovered another woman on board. Mary Read also donned men's garb as a disguise. Anne walked in on her getting dressed and found out the truth. The two became pals.

The good times ended in 1720. The governor of Jamaica sent his troops to capture Jack's gang. They waited until the pirates were drunk and celebrating a recent ship-taking. The only crew left sober to defend the ship? Anne and Mary. They tried their best, but were outgunned.

The crew was condemned to hang, except for Anne and Mary, who were both pregnant. Mary died in jail. Anne was ransomed by her rich father and returned to Charleston. Some stories say she became a respectable society lady and lived to age 84. Others say she went back to life on the high seas.

## Music

Reggae and calypso tunes blast from vehicles and emanate from shops, restaurants and beach bars. *Quelbe* and *fungi* (*foon-ghee*, also an island food made of cornmeal and fish) are two types of folk music. *Quelbe* blends jigs, quadrilles, military fife and African drum music, with *cariso* lyrics (often biting satire) from slave field songs. *Fungi* uses homemade percussion like washboards, ribbed gourds and conch shells to accompany a singer. The best time to experience island music is during the 'jump up' parades and competitions associated with major festivals like Carnival on St Thomas and St John, or at St Croix's Cruzan Christmas Fiesta; see p385 for festival info.

## Painting

The most celebrated painter to come from the USVIs is Camille Pissarro. Born in St Thomas in 1830 as Jacob Pizarro, the son of Spanish Jews, young Jacob grew up on Main St in Charlotte Amalie. He eventually moved to Paris, changed his name and became known as the 'Father of Impressionism.' His original home is now a gallery (p368) that includes historical information about the family.

## ENVIRONMENT

### The Land

The USVIs consist of about 50 islands, 40 miles east of Puerto Rico. They are the northernmost islands in the Lesser Antilles chain and, along with the British Virgin Islands, form an irregular string of islands stretching west to east. The one exception to this string is the USVIs' largest island, St Croix, which lies 40 miles south.

St Thomas is the second-largest island. St John is east of St Thomas, the last of the USVIs.

As with almost all of the islands ringing the Caribbean Basin, the USVIs owe their existence to a series of volcanic events that built up layers of lava and igneous rock, creating islands with three geographical zones: a coastal plain, coastal dry forests and a high ridge of central mountains.

The mountain slopes are dense subtropical forests. All of the timber is second or third growth; the islands were stripped for sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations in the colonial era. There are no rivers and very few freshwater streams. Coral reefs of all varieties grow in the shallow waters near the seashores.

## Wildlife

Very few of the land mammals that make their home in the Virgin Islands are natives; most mammal species have been accidentally or intentionally introduced to the island over the centuries. Virtually every island has a feral population of goats and burros, and some islands have wild pigs, white-tailed deer, cattle, horses, cats and dogs. Other prevalent land mammals include mongooses and bats.

The islands are home to a few species of snake (none of which are poisonous), including the Virgin Island tree boa.

More than 200 bird species – including the official bird, the bananaquit – inhabit the islands.

## Environmental Issues

The USVIs have long suffered from environmental problems, including deforestation, soil erosion, mangrove destruction and a lack of fresh water. During the 18th century logging operations denuded many of the islands to make room for plantations. The demise of the agricultural economy in the late 19th century allowed the islands to reforest, and in recent years locals (especially on St John) have begun several forest conservation projects.

But population growth and rapid urbanization continue to pose grave threats. If not for the desalination plants (which make fresh water out of sea water) the islands couldn't support even a quarter of their population, let alone visitors. When a hurricane strikes, power and diesel facilities shut down. Islanders with enough foresight and money keep rainwater cisterns for such emergencies, but folks without suffer.

Rising sea temperatures from global warming are another topic of concern, as they impact local reefs and cause coral bleaching (see p48). In 2005 a particularly 'hot' period killed about half of the USVIs' coral.

Prior years of overfishing have put conch (a local shellfish) in a precarious situation. Currently, conch fishing is not allowed from July through September so stocks can replenish.

The past decade has seen an increase in the level of awareness, resources and action dedicated to conservation efforts. The following groups are working toward environmental preservation:

**Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park**  
(☎ 779-4940; www.friendsvinp.org)

**National Marine Fisheries Law Enforcement Division** (☎ 774-5226; www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ole/se\_south\_east.html)

**University of the Virgin Islands Conservation Data Center** (☎ 693-1020; http://cdc.uvi.edu)

**USVI Department of Planning & Natural Resources** (☎ 774-3320; www.vifishandwildlife.com)

## FOOD & DRINK

Soups and stews are staples in West Indian cooking. Many use root vegetables and fruits to add texture, taste and vitamins. *Dasheen* (taro root) tastes like potato. Its green leaves are a primary ingredient in the islands' famous callaloo soup, which also mixes in one or more types of meat, okra, spices and hot peppers.

*Pate* (*paw-tay*) is the islands' most popular finger food. It's a fried pastry of cassava (yuca) or plantain dough stuffed with spiced goat, pork, chicken, conch, lobster or fish. Plain, unfilled fried dough is called a johnnycake, often served as a side dish. Another popular food is roti, flatbread envelopes stuffed with curried meat, fish or poultry. Island cooks often serve *fungi* (*foon-ghee*), which is made from cornmeal, with fish and gravy.

Meat dishes are primarily curried or barbecued with tangy spices. *Daube* meat is pot roast spiced with vinegar and native seasonings. Fish and shellfish are common, and cooks will bake, grill, stew or boil whatever is the daily catch. Conch (pronounced 'conk') is often fried into crispy fritters. Be aware that commercial fishing of conch is halted from July through September (see left) so you're less likely to find it on menus then.

While tap water is usually safe, visitors with a sensitive stomach might want to stick to bottled water. 'Bush tea' is made from the aromatic leaves of indigenous plants.

Blackbeard Ale and mango-tinged VI Pale Ale are the slurpable local microbrews. Cruzan rum is served everywhere and is, literally, cheaper than the juice with which to mix it. You have to be 18 or over to legally consume booze. Open-container laws do not exist in the USVIs, so you can drink on the streets.

## ST THOMAS

pop 51,000

Most visitors arrive to the USVIs via St Thomas, and the place knows how to strike a first impression. Jungly cliffs poke high in the

sky, red-hipped roofs blossom over the hills, and all around the turquoise, yacht-dotted sea laps. Unfortunately, once you disembark from your plane or boat, you'll find you're sharing this scene with 20,000 tourists who've just piled off the seven cruise ships docked in the harbor.

Years ago, St Thomas made a bargain with the devil: provide us with a good and steady source of income and we'll give you our innocence and our environment. And so it became the darling of the cruise-ship industry and its two million passengers. In 2007 St Thomas ranked last in the 'world's most beautiful islands' survey by National Geographic, which called it 'totally spoiled' and 'one big ugly jewelry store.'

That's true...to an extent. Most of the mob-fest happens in Charlotte Amalie. Visitors who make the effort to move deeper into the 30-sq-mile island will find opportunities for surfing, kayaking through mangrove swamps and getting face-to-face with sea turtles.

## Orientation

Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas' main town and the USVI's capital, lies on the island's south shore, 2.5 miles east of the airport. The bulk of St Thomas' resorts and attractions lie along the island's East End, where Red Hook anchors the main business district and hosts the busy St John ferry terminal. The northwest coast has a string of spectacular bays, including world-renowned Magens Bay.

## Getting There & Away

See the p387 for details on airline, seaplane and ferry travel to and from St Thomas.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Taxis (ie multipassenger vans) are readily available. The fare for one passenger going between the airport and Charlotte Amalie is US\$7; it's US\$15 to/from Red Hook. Per-person fares come down a bit if two or more passengers share the taxi. Luggage costs US\$2 extra per piece.

### BUS

**Vitran** (☎ 774-5678; fare US\$1) operates buses over the length of the island. Look for the bus stop signs on Rtes 30 and 38. 'Dollar' buses (aka 'safaris') also stop along the routes. These

vehicles are open-air vans that hold 20 people. They look like taxis, except they're filled with locals instead of sunburned tourists. Flag them down by flapping your hand, and press the buzzer to stop them when you reach your destination. The fare is US\$2.

### CAR

Most of St Thomas' rental agencies have outlets at the airport and resort hotels. Prices start around US\$60 per day.

**Avis** (☎ 800-331-1084; www.avis.com)

**Budget** (☎ 776-5774, 800-626-4516; www.budgetstt.com)

**Dependable Car Rentals** (☎ 800-522-3076; www.dependablecar.com)

**Discount Car Rentals** (☎ 776-4858, 877-478-2833; www.discountcar.vi)

**Hertz** (☎ 800-654-3131; www.hertz.com)

### TAXI

Territorial law requires taxi drivers to carry a government-set rate sheet, and prices are listed in the readily available free tourist guide *St Thomas/St John This Week*.

Many taxis are vans that carry up to 12 passengers. These service multiple destinations and may stop to pick up passengers along the way, so their rates are usually charged on a per-person basis. The following table shows current per-person rates for popular destinations from Charlotte Amalie. Note the price drops a few dollars when more than one passenger goes to the destination.

Destination	Cost
Frenchtown	US\$4
Havensight	US\$6
Magens Bay	US\$10
Red Hook	US\$13

## CHARLOTTE AMALIE

Brace yourself: every morning thousands of cruise-ship passengers arrive and flood the streets of Charlotte Amalie (*a-mall-ya*). Sure, you can let the scene overwhelm you, but why not take a deep breath and focus on the town's lip-licking West Indian cuisine, Frenchtown wine bars and proximity to white-sand beaches?

### Orientation

Charlotte Amalie stretches about 1.5 miles around St Thomas Harbor from Havensight on the east side (where cruise ships dock) to

Frenchtown on the west side. Around the peninsula from Frenchtown lies Crown Bay, another cruise-ship-filled marina.

Upscale shops line the alleys between Waterfront Hwy (aka Veterans Dr) and Dronningens Gade (Main St). Street signs are labeled with original Danish names. North St, for example, is *Norre Gade* (*gaa-da*, which is 'street' in Danish).

## Information

There is no official tourist office in town, but the free *St Thomas/St John This Week* magazine has maps and everything else you'll need; it's available at most businesses. FirstBank, Scotiabank, Banco Popular and other banks are on Waterfront Hwy.

**Beans, Bytes & Websites** (☎ 776-7265; 5600 Royal Dane Mall; per half hr US\$3; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun) Connect with your electronic mailbox at the 12 or so terminals, plus wi-fi and data ports for laptops.

**Dockside Bookshop** (☎ 774-4937; Havensight Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) Excellent bookstore in Havensight, with plenty of regional titles.

**Main post office** (☎ 774-3750) On the west side of Emancipation Garden. There are several satellite post offices, including one west of the Marine Terminal (at Frenchtown's entrance), and one in the Havensight Mall. Most are open 7:30am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday and 8:30am to noon Saturday.

**ParadiseGate** (☎ 714-1400; ☎ 9am-7pm) In Havensight at the south end of the cruise ship dock, this multiuse facility has a 30 internet terminals (US\$2 per 15 minutes), free wi-fi, a gym (day pass US\$10), bar, restaurant and Western Union office. You also can burn digital photos onto a CD (US\$3).

**Roy Schneider Community Hospital** (☎ 776-8311; 48 Sugar Estate Rd at Rte 313; ☎ 24hr) On the east side of Charlotte Amalie, this full-service hospital has an emergency room, recompression chamber and doctors in all major disciplines.

## Dangers & Annoyances

Charlotte Amalie has some big-city issues including drugs, poverty, prostitution and street crime. Waterfront Hwy and Main St in the town center are fine at night, but move a few blocks away and the streets get deserted quickly. Avoid the Savan area, a red-light district that surrounds Main St west of Market Sq and north of the Holiday Inn Windward Passage hotel; this is where the island's underworld takes root. In general, savvy travelers who take reasonable precautions should have no problems.

## Sights

### EMANCIPATION GARDEN & AROUND

Emancipation Garden is where town officials read the emancipation proclamation after slaves were freed on St Croix in 1848. Carnival celebrations and concerts take place here, but mostly folks kick back under shade trees with a cold fruit smoothie from the **Vendors' Plaza**, where sellers also hawk batik dresses, souvenir T-shirts and Prada knock-offs under blue-canopied stalls.

Red-brick **Fort Christian** (☎ 776-4566; donation US\$1; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm) is the oldest colonial building in the USVIs, dating back to 1666. Over the years, the fort has functioned as a jail, governor's residence and Lutheran church; currently it serves as a local history museum. At press time, the fort was closed and undergoing renovations. Its reopening date had not been determined.

Nearby, the **Frederik Lutheran Church** (Norre Garde; admission free) is one of Charlotte Amalie's architectural gems. During the 19th century the church had segregated congregations – one West Indian, the other Danish. The church is open on Saturday and you can attend services on Sunday.

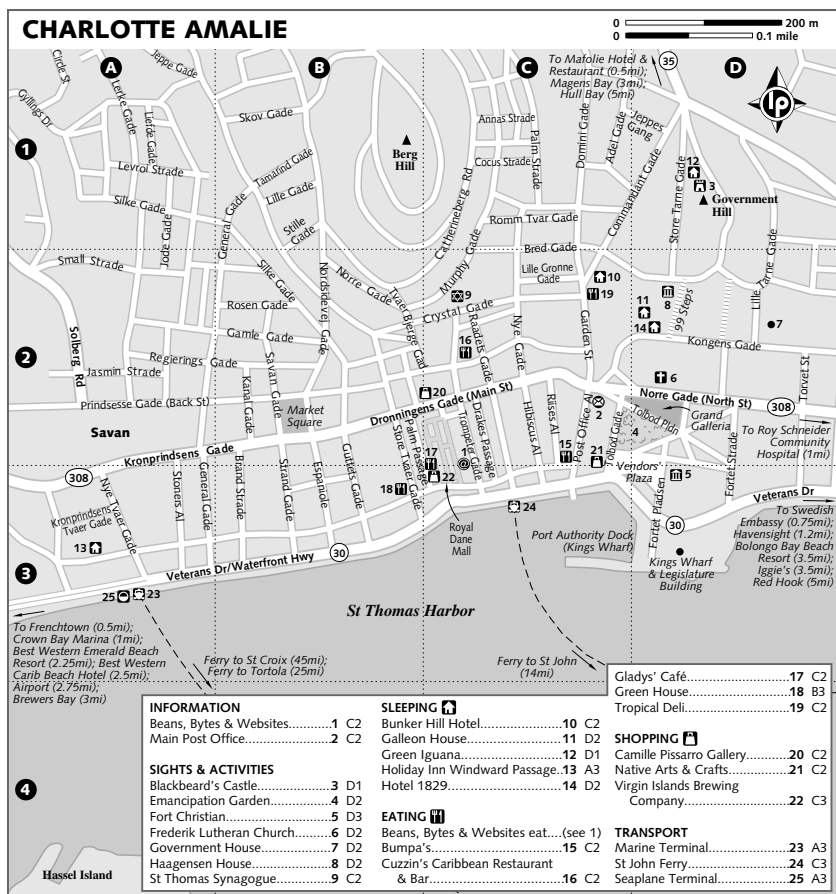
### GOVERNMENT HILL

**Blackbeard's Castle** (☎ 776-1234; admission US\$12; ☎ 9am-3pm) watches over town from atop Government Hill. In the 18th century this five-story masonry watchtower was said to be the lookout post of pirate Edward Teach, alias Blackbeard. Actually, historians don't lend much credence to the tale. What's known for certain is that the tower was built by colonial Danes as a military installation in 1678.

The admission fee includes use of the three pools on the grounds, photos with the myriad pirate statues that dot the property, and entrance to Villa Notman, Britannia House and Haagensen House – three colonial homes furnished with West Indian antiques. But unless you're a real history buff, it's kind of a hefty price without much payoff.

A better idea is to attack Government Hill from below and ascend the steep set of stairs – the so-called **99 Steps** – that lead from the commercial district near Kongens Gate up into a canopy of trees. These steps, of which there are actually 103 (though you'll be too out of breath to count), were constructed using ship-ballast brick in the mid-18th cen-





tury. At the top of the 99 Steps, and about halfway up to the watchtower, you'll see **Haagensen House**, which you can sometimes peek in for free. Explore the area in the cool of the morning, before the cruise-ship crowds arrive.

Also on the hill is the grand white **Government House** (☎ 774-0001; 21-22 Kongens Gade; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri), where the territorial governor has his offices. It was built between 1865 and 1867, and restored in 1994. You can walk around the first floor, though there's not much to see.

### ST THOMAS SYNAGOGUE

The second-oldest Hebrew temple in the western hemisphere (the oldest is on the

island of Curaçao), peaceful **St Thomas Synagogue** (☎ 774-4312; <http://onepaper.com/synagogue>; 16A&B Crystal Gade; admission free; ☎ 9:30am-4pm Mon-Fri) is a National Historic Landmark. The current building dates from 1833, but Jews have worshipped here since 1796, from Sephardic Jews from Denmark to today's 110-family Reform congregation. The temple floor is made of sand to symbolize the flight of the Israelites out of Egypt and across the desert. There's a tiny museum in the back room.

### FRENCHTOWN

The island's 'Frenchie,' aka Huguenots, who immigrated to St Thomas from St-Barthélemy during the mid-19th century, populated this community of brightly painted frame houses

on the harbor's western side. Nowadays the quiet neighborhood has several good restaurants that overlook the water.

To get here from town, take a taxi (per person US\$4), or walk west past the Seaplane Terminal and turn left just past the post office. The 1.25-mile walk takes about 25 minutes from Emancipation Garden.

### HAVENSIGHT

A hundred years ago, the area on the east side of St Thomas Harbor (known today as Havensight) was a bustling steamship wharf and coaling station. Today it's still busy, but with behemoth cruise ships that tie up to the **West Indian Company Cruise Ship Dock**.

When passengers disembark, they find **Havensight Mall**, a compound with dozens of shops and restaurants. They also find the **Paradise Point Skyride** (☎ 774-9809; www.stthomas.skyride.com; adult/child US\$19/9.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon & Thu-Sun, to 7pm Tue, to 9pm Wed Nov-Apr). From a base station across the street from the mall, gondolas whisk visitors 700ft up Flag Hill to a scenic outlook; the ride takes seven minutes. At the top you'll find a restaurant, bar, gallery of shops, cheesy tropical bird show and a short nature trail. From May to October, the Skyride is open only when a cruise ship is in port.

The **Butterfly Farm** (☎ 715-3366; www.thebutterflyfarm.com; adult/child US\$15/9; ☎ 8:30am-5pm) lies at the cruise-ship dock's far south end. Amid the garden full of fluttering beasts, you'll learn about metamorphosis during a 25-minute guided tour. Wear bright colors and perfume if you want the butterflies land on you.

Taxis travel to and from Havensight regularly (US\$6 per person).

### Sleeping

The rates listed are for the high season and do not include 18% tax. Some places require a two- or three-night minimum stay in high season.

**Galleon House** (☎ 774-6972, 800-524-2052; www.galleonhouse.com; 31 Kongens Gade; r ind breakfast US\$85-155; ☎ ☎ ☎) The 'harbor view' rooms are the winners at friendly Galleon House, with wood doors that open onto a balcony overlooking the waterfront. The 'shared bathroom' and 'interior private bathroom' rooms are confining and not recommended unless you're truly strapped for dough. The veranda and pool are good for hanging out and munching breakfast. Offers wi-fi access.

**Bunker Hill Hotel** (☎ 774-8056; www.bunkerhillhotel.com; 7A Commandant Gade; d/ste incl breakfast US\$98/129; ☎ ☎ ☎) You're gonna get what you pay for: the 16 rooms are cheap, but they're also relatively dark, shabby and mosquitoey. Each unit does have a big bathroom; some have patios, and the sunny deck and cooked breakfast are nice touches. Still, Bunker Hill is basic to the bone.

**our pick Hotel 1829** (☎ 776-1829, 800-524-2002; www.hotel1829.com; 30 Kongens Gade; r incl breakfast US\$125-260; ☎ ☎) Built in 1829, this classy, 15-room inn blends the atmosphere of a Victorian gentlemen's club and a colonial villa. Exposed rubble walls, beamed ceilings and period West Indian furnishings characterize the rooms. The result is a romantic, Old World island vibe. Be aware the 'moderate' rooms are tiny.

**Green Iguana** (☎ 776-7654; www.thegreeniguana.com; 1002 Blackbeard's Hill; r US\$135-165; ☎ ☎) Way the heck up the hill behind Blackbeard's Castle, this homey place is set in lush gardens and overlooks St Thomas Harbor. The nine rooms come in several configurations, but all have private bathrooms, wi-fi access, microwaves, refrigerators and bright, welcoming decor; some also have fully equipped kitchens. It's great value if you don't mind the steep walk.

**Inn at Villa Olga** (☎ 715-0900; www.villa-olga-inn.com; r US\$150-175; ☎ ☎ ☎) Villa Olga offers 12 motel-like rooms off the beaten path in Frenchtown. While the rooms are a bit faded, they are spacious and scattered over pretty, palm-shaded grounds. The bonus here is free access to the beach and water-sports equipment at Bolongo Bay Beach Resort, Olga's sister property. Also offers wi-fi access.

**Mafolie Hotel** (☎ 774-2790, 800-225-7035; www.mafolie.com; 7091 Estate Mafolie; r ind breakfast US\$150-200; ☎ ☎) On Mafolie Hill, 850ft above town, the eponymous hotel offers a dramatic vista, the feel of a Danish colonial villa and a popular alfresco restaurant. The good points: killer harbor views and relatively low prices for such views. The not-so-good points: Spartan rooms and a location far from town.

**Holiday Inn Windward Passage** (☎ 774-5200, 800-524-7389; www.holidayinn.st-thomas.com; Waterfront Hwy; r US\$245-275; ☎ ☎ ☎) The four-story Holiday Inn is primarily a business hotel. It's useful for those seeking in-room wi-fi internet access, a fitness center, on-site eateries and quick taxi access. It's less beneficial to those seeking good value, since the peach-colored, cookie-

### TOP THREE OUTLYING BEACHES

To reach the sweetest stretches of sand, you'll need to motor beyond Charlotte Amalie.

#### Magens Bay

The sugary mile that fringes heart-shaped Magens Bay, 3 miles north of Charlotte Amalie, makes almost every travel publication's list of beautiful beaches. The seas here are calm, the bay broad and surrounding green hills dramatic, and tourists mob the place to soak it all up. The **beach** (admission US\$4; ☎ 6am-6pm) has picnic tables, changing facilities, food vendors and water-sports operators renting kayaks and sailboats (US\$20 to \$35 per hour). Alas, it's the only beach on St Thomas to charge an admission fee. A taxi from Charlotte Amalie costs US\$8 per person. On the road down, stop for a milkshake (alcohol-spiked if you want) at **Udder Delite Dairy Bar** (☎ 777-6050; ☎ 1pm-6:30pm Mon, 10am-6:30pm Tue-Sat, 11:30am-6:30pm Sun), part of a working farm.

#### Hull Bay

Also on the north coast and just west of Magens Bay, Hull Bay is the island's most popular surfing beach and usually a gem of solitude when Magens is overrun. The shady strand lies at the base of a steep valley and has a restaurant, bar and changing facilities. **Home's** (☎ 774-7606, 866-719-1856; [www.nightsnorkel.com](http://www.nightsnorkel.com); ☎ 10am-5pm, closed Mon mid-Apr-mid-Dec) rents surfboards (US\$50 per half-day) and kayaks (US\$40 per half-day) and conducts raved-about night snorkel tours (US\$38 per person). Taxis are scarce, so you'll need a car to get here.

#### Brewers Bay

This beach, located behind the University of the Virgin Islands, is beloved by students, local families and shell collectors alike. There are no facilities other than snack vans serving *pates* and cold Heineken beers. It gets deserted fast come nighttime. Brewers is right by the airport and accessible by taxis and public buses.

cutter rooms are overpriced. However, when other hotels are booked, there's usually room at the Inn. It's at the edge of downtown near the Marine Terminal, away from the town's restaurant core.

**Bolongo Bay Beach Resort** (☎ 775-1800, 800-524-4746; [www.bolongobay.com](http://www.bolongobay.com); 7150 Bolongo Bay; r US\$300-330; ☎ ☎) Family-owned Bolongo is a fun, casual resort. Its public facilities are its strength: a beach with a full array of free water sports (kayaks, sailboats, snorkel gear etc), tennis courts, a pool and fitness center. All 75 rooms and 20 villas have ocean views and private patios. The interiors won't win any awards for size or decor, but who cares? You'll be outside enjoying fun in the sun. It's about 3.5 miles east of town.

Some recommended beachfront properties by the airport:

**Best Western Carib Beach Hotel** (☎ 774-2525, 800-792-2742; [www.caribbeachresort.com](http://www.caribbeachresort.com); 70C Lindbergh Bay; r US\$159-179; ☎ ☎) As close as you'll get to the airport, just 0.25 miles away. Rooms are fine but nothing special.

**Best Western Emerald Beach Resort** (☎ 340-777-8800; 800-233-4936; [www.emeraldbeach.com](http://www.emeraldbeach.com); 8070 Lindbergh Bay; r US\$279; ☎ ☎ ☎) A step up from

the Carib, this is a full-on resort. Rooms are snazzier, with private beachfront balconies.

For local villa and condo rentals try **Calypso Realty** (☎ 774-1620; [www.calypsorealty.com](http://www.calypsorealty.com)) or **Paradise Properties** (☎ 779-1540, 800-524-2038; [www.st-thomas.com/paradiseproperties](http://www.st-thomas.com/paradiseproperties)).

### Eating & Drinking

#### CHARLOTTE AMALIE

**Beans, Bytes & Websites** (☎ 777-7089; 5600 Royal Dane Mall; sandwiches US\$4-6; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This chic little cyber-bistro has yummy coffee, bagels and toasted sandwiches.

**Tropical Deli** (☎ 776-7777; Garden St; mains US\$6-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch) To eat Cuban pork sandwiches, oxtail stew or burgers and drink ginger beer or bush tea with locals, pull up a chair at one of the six bare-bone tables.

**Bumpa's** (☎ 776-5674; Waterfront Hwy; mains US\$8-13; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Climb the stairs to the second floor, order at the counter, then carry your hearty, homemade oatmeal pancakes, pumpkin muffin, veggie burger, chicken *pate* or grilled fish wrap to the small patio overlooking the street.

**Iggie's** (☎ 775-1800; Bolongo Bay Beach Club; mains US\$8-14; ☺ lunch & dinner) Beachside at Bolongo Bay, good-time Iggie's serves top-notch sandwiches, burgers and seafood mains, plus a kids' menu. Things kick up at night, when the place grooves to a festive bar atmosphere.

**our pick Gladys' Café** (☎ 774-6604; Royal Dane Mall; mains US\$9-17; ☺ breakfast & lunch) With the stereo blaring beside her, Gladys belts out Tina Turner tunes while serving some of the best West Indian food around. There is no view here, but the bistro setting, art-covered walls and fun, breezy atmosphere make up for it. This is a great place to come for a full breakfast or a bowl of callaloo soup. Buy a bottle of Gladys' famous hot sauce for US\$5.

**Green House** (☎ 774-7998; cnr Store Tvaer Gade & Waterfront Hwy; mains US\$11-20; ☺ lunch & dinner) Cavernous, open-air Green House overlooks the harbor and rocks hard during happy hour (from 4:30pm to 7pm, when drinks are two for the price of one) and evenings after 10pm. The cuisine is predictable American pub fare, but the menu is extensive, with burgers, pizzas and seafood.

**Cuzzin's Caribbean Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 777-4711; 7 Back St; mains US\$14-24; ☺ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) With exposed brick walls, burnished wood furnishings and red-clothed tables, classy-but-casual Cuzzin's is everybody's favorite stop for West Indian cuisine. Try the conch (carried, buttered or Creole style) or the 'Ole Wife' fish alongside fungi, johnny-cakes and a Blackbeard Ale.

**Mafole Restaurant** (☎ 774-2790; 7091 Estate Mafole; mains US\$19-25; ☺ dinner, closed Tue) Sitting high above the bay at the Mafole Hotel, the dining patio here offers incredible alfresco dining. Cool breezes, candle light and striking vistas complement the Caribbean and Creole-infused seafood, such as seared tuna, crab and lobster, and coconut-crust chicken and BBQ ribs. An extensive wine list offers choices in all budgets, and the friendly staff can help you pick the perfect meal.

## FRENCHTOWN

The following restaurants huddle around the parking lot in Frenchtown.

**Frenchtown Deli** (☎ 776-7211; mains US\$4-8; ☺ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, to 4pm Sun) The deli is a popular stop for breakfast and lunch. Order

at the counter, then plop down in a booth with an egg sandwich, bagel or good ole cup of coffee. Lunch is all about thick-cut sandwiches.

**Hook, Line & Sinker** (☎ 776-9708; mains US\$13-25; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, brunch Sun) This open-air, mom-and-pop operation feels like a real sea shack, where you smell the salt water, feel the ocean breeze and see sailors unload their boats dockside. The menu mixes sandwiches, salads, pastas and seafood mains, such as the almond-crust seafood, with plenty of beers to wash it down.

**Epernay Wine Bar & Bistro** (☎ 774-5348; mains US\$19-28; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Epernay is a great place to meet fellow hipsters while hanging out at the bistro's bar, or to settle at a shadowy table. Delicious starters such as steamed mussels (US\$11) complement mains such as sesame-crust tuna or seared salmon.

## Shopping

Jewelry is the big deal in town. Shops fill the alleys between Waterfront Hwy and Main St, west of Emancipation Garden. US citizens can leave with up to US\$1600 in tax-free, duty-free goods.

The Vendors' Plaza (p364) is interesting to wander, as are the following places.

**Camille Pissarro Gallery** (☎ 774-4621; 14 Dronningens Gade) Located in Pissarro's boyhood home (a display case outside summarizes the family's history), the gallery sells a few reproductions of the famous impressionist's St Thomas scenes, but mostly focuses on works by contemporary artists.

**Native Arts & Crafts** (☎ 777-1153; Tolbod Gade) This is the place to buy spices, straw dolls and painted gourd bowls made by island craftspeople, as well as books by local authors.

**Virgin Island Brewing Company** (☎ 714-1683; 1C Royal Dane Mall) It's good for pirate-logoed T-shirts, ball caps and other souvenirs, plus Blackbeard Ale samples.

## RED HOOK & EAST END

The East End holds the bulk of the island's resorts. Red Hook is the only town to speak of, though it's small and built mostly around the St John ferry dock and American Yacht Harbor marina.

## Sights & Activities

### CORAL WORLD

This 4.5-acre **marine park** (☎ 775-1555; www.coralworldvi.com; 6450 Estate Smith Bay; adult/child US\$18/9;

## WATER ISLAND

Do the Charlotte Amalie crowds have you frustrated, and pining for peace and seclusion? Water Island is your answer. Sometimes called the 'Fourth Virgin,' it floats spitting distance from town. But with only about 100 residents and very few cars or shops, it feels far more remote.

At 2.5 miles tip to tip, it doesn't take long to walk the whole thing. Honeymoon Beach offers fine swimming and snorkeling. If you want to spend the night, Water Island has only one option, but it's an eco-winner: the **Virgin Islands Campground** (☎ 776-5488, 877-502-7225; <http://virginislandscampground.com>; cottages US\$135; 📶 ). Each wood-frame-and-canvas cottage has beds, linens, electrical outlets and a table and chairs inside. Guests share the communal bathhouse, cooking facilities and hot tub, plus there's wi-fi access through the grounds. Captured rainwater runs through the sinks and showers; solar energy heats it.

The **Water Island Ferry** (☎ 690-4159; one way US\$5) departs every few hours from outside Tickle's Dockside Pub at Crown Bay Marina. The journey takes 10 minutes. Taxis from downtown to the marina cost US\$5 per person.

(🕒 9am-5pm), at Coki Point, is the most popular tourist attraction on St Thomas. Pick up a schedule when entering – staff feed the sea creatures and give talks about marine biology and conservation throughout the day, and it's during these times that you'll engage in behaviors you never thought possible, such as petting baby nurse sharks, touching starfish and feeding raw fish right into a stingray's mouth. Many of the park's creatures have been rescued (ie the sea turtles were orphans; the sea lions were in harm's way in Uruguay, where fishermen were shooting them as pests). Pay an extra US\$25 to US\$80, and you can swim with the sharks, turtles or sea lions.

The site has restaurants and gift shops, along with changing rooms if you want to visit nearby Coki Beach. Look for Coral World discount coupons in the free tourist guides.

## EAST END BEACHES

**Coki Bay**, right at the entrance to Coral World, is a protected cove with excellent snorkeling, but beware – the small, festive beach can get very crowded.

A west-facing beach in front of the eponymous resort, **Secret Harbour** could hardly be more tranquil. It is protected from breezes as well as waves, and the water remains shallow a long way offshore. It's an excellent place to snorkel or to learn to windsurf with equipment rented from the resort's water-sports operation.

To reach **Vessup Beach**, a long, broad strand overlooking St John, follow a dirt road around the south side of the harbor at Red Hook until you reach Vessup Bay

Marina. Serious windsurfers love this spot. Beachfront **West Indies Windsurfing** (☎ 775-6530; 🕒 10am-5pm Sat & Sun, by appointment Mon-Fri) rents equipment and provides lessons.

**Sapphire Beach Resort**, just off Rte 38, is perhaps the most welcoming of all the island's resorts to transient beach visitors. The volleyball games here can get spirited, as can the party scene on Sunday afternoon, when the resort brings in live bands.

## DIVING & SNORKELING

St Thomas features several premier dive sites, and most island resort hotels have a dive service on the property. Dive centers charge about US\$75 for a one-tank dive, or US\$105 for two. They also rent snorkeling gear for about US\$10. Recommended dive shops are:

**Chris Sawyer Diving Center** (☎ 775-7320, 877-929-3483; [www.sawyerdive.vi](http://www.sawyerdive.vi)) The retail center is at American Yacht Harbor. It offers mostly boat dives out of the Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort, also night dives and trips to the British Virgin Islands' wreck *RMS Rhone*.

**Coki Beach Dive Club** (☎ 775-4220; [www.cokidive.com](http://www.cokidive.com); 🕒 closed Sun) Just steps away from Coki Beach, offers shore and night dives, plus Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) courses.

**Dive In!** (☎ 777-5255, 866-434-8346; [www.diveinusi.com](http://www.diveinusi.com); Sapphire Beach Resort) Mostly boat dives, plus PADI certification courses.

## KAYAKING

**Virgin Islands Ecotours** (☎ 779-2155, 877-845-2925; [www.viecotours.com](http://www.viecotours.com); 2.5hr tours adult/child US\$65/35; 🕒 9am & 1pm) offers a guided kayak-and-snorkeling expedition where you'll paddle through a mangrove lagoon to a coral rubble

beach. Tours depart just east of the intersection of Rtes 30 and 32, at the entrance to the Inner Mangrove Lagoon Sanctuary. There's also a three-hour tour (adult/child US\$75/35) that adds hiking to the mix.

### BOAT TRIPS

Expect to pay US\$70 per person for a four-hour trip and about US\$125 for a full-day adventure. The trips generally include a catered lunch, free drinks and snorkel gear, and depart from American Yacht Harbor in Red Hook. The **Winifred** (☎ 775-7898; www.sailwinifred.com; full-day tour US\$125), helmed by Captain Sharon Allen, wins raves. You also can organize fishing trips at the yacht harbor.

### Sleeping

Resorts are the East End's only option.

**Pavilions and Pools** (☎ 775-6110, 800-524-2001; www.pavilionsandpools.com; 6400 Estate Smith Bay; r ind breakfast US\$260-360; 🍷 📺 📶) The cool thing about this small hotel is that each of the 25 suites has its own pool – yeah, you read that right! Suites have full kitchens, wi-fi access and separate bedrooms with sliding doors that open to your own pool. You can spend days here and never put on a stitch of clothing. When you're ready to get dressed, the friendly staff will shuttle you to nearby Sapphire Beach.

**Point Pleasant Resort** (☎ 775-7200, 800-524-2300; www.pointpleasantresort.com; 6600 Estate Smith Bay; r US\$300-550; 🍷 📺) On a steep hill overlooking Water Bay, the property has lots of charm though the rooms are somewhat dated (in a flowery way, akin to your grandma's 1980 Florida condo). The 128 suites are in multi-unit cottages tucked into the hillside forest. Each unit has a full kitchen, separate bedroom and large porch. The grounds have walking trails, three pools and a beach.

These Mondo family favorites offer lots of beachfront and water activities:

**Sapphire Beach Resort & Marina** (☎ 775-6100, 800-524-2090; www.sapphirebeachresort.com; 6720 Estate Smith Bay; d US\$335-495; 🍷 📺 📶)

**Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort** (☎ 777-7100, 800-996-3426; www.wyndhamsugarbayresort.com; 6500 Estate Smith Bay; d from US\$350; 🍷 📺 📶)

### Eating & Drinking

**Señor Pizza** (☎ 775-3030; slice US\$2.50-3.25, large pizza US\$21; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Next door to Red Hook

Plaza, this place serves the island's best pizza. It can get busy with takeout orders in the evening.

**Burrito Bay Deli** (☎ 775-2944; American Yacht Harbor; sandwiches US\$7-12; 🍷 breakfast & lunch) Longing for healthy-leaning sandwiches, wraps or breakfast foods (including tofu and vegetarian options)? Burrito Bay is your place.

**Duffy's Love Shack** (☎ 779-2080; 650 Red Hook Plaza; mains US\$9-16; 🍷 lunch & dinner) It may be a frame shack in the middle of a paved parking lot, but Duffy's creates its legendary atmosphere with high-volume rock and crowds in shorts and tank tops. The food is classic, burger-based pub fare. The big attractions here are the people-watching and killer cocktails.

**Molly Malone's** (☎ 775-1270; American Yacht Harbor; mains US\$10-22; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A recreation of a friendly Irish pub, Molly's has a huge menu, from omelets to shepherd's pie to veggie lasagna. It's a great place to watch sports on overhead TVs, or cool off with a brew at the bar.

You'll find two excellent restaurants at the Point Pleasant Resort, including the highly respected **Agavé Terrace & Bar** (☎ 775-4142; mains US\$30-50; 🍷 dinner only), whose deck hangs out in thin air over a steep slope, giving diners a breathtaking view of St John and the British Virgin Islands. It specializes in fish, lobster and crab legs. Also here is **Fungi's on the Beach** (☎ 775-4142; meals from US\$13; 🍷 lunch & dinner), a fun, waterside place to try local dishes.

## ST JOHN

### pop 4300

Outdoor enthusiasts and ecotourists: welcome to your island. Two-thirds of St John is a protected national park, with gnarled trees and spiky cacti spilling over its edges. There are no airports or cruise-ship docks, and the usual Caribbean resorts are few and far between. Instead, the island hosts several tent-resorts (aka campgrounds with permanent canvas structures), keeping costs reasonable and the environment intact.

Hiking and snorkeling are the big to-dos. Trails wind by petroglyphs and sugar-mill ruins, and several drop out onto beaches prime for swimming with turtles and spotted eagle rays. Add to the scene mystical mojito bars, wild donkeys and goodtime happy hours, and you've found paradise.

## Orientation

At 9 miles long and 5 miles wide, St John rises above the surrounding sea like a peaked green cap. All but the extreme east and west ends of the island lie within the borders of the national park and will remain forever wild. Cruz Bay at the West End is St John's port of entry, with constant ferry traffic and most of the island's shops, restaurants and pubs.

The settlement of Coral Bay at the East End is the sleepy domain of folks who want to feel like they're living on a frontier. Centerline Rd (Rte 10) scales the island's heights and proceeds east-west along the mountain ridges to connect St John's two communities. The North Shore Rd (Rte 20) snakes along the north coast and connects the most popular beaches, bays and campgrounds.

St John floats just 3 miles from St Thomas.

## Getting There & Away

Passenger ferries between Charlotte Amalie and Cruz Bay run about every two hours and cost US\$10 one way. Ferries run almost every hour between Red Hook and Cruz Bay, costing US\$5 one way. For more information, see p388.

Ferries also travel to the British Virgin Islands, departing for Tortola three times daily and to Jost Van Dyke on Friday, Saturday and Sunday; see p387 for details.

## Getting Around

### BUS

**Vitran** (☎ 774-5678; fare US\$1) operates air-con buses over the length of the island via Centerline Rd. Buses leave Cruz Bay in front of the ferry terminal at 6am and 7am, then every hour at 25 minutes after the hour until 7:25pm. They arrive at Coral Bay about 40 minutes later.

### CAR

St John has a handful of rental agencies. Most provide Jeeps and SUVs to handle the rugged terrain. Costs hover near US\$75 per day. The following agencies have outlets in Cruz Bay near the ferry terminals:

**Cool Breeze Jeep/Car Rental** (☎ 776-6588; www.coolbreezecarrental.com)

**Delbert Hill Car Rental** (☎ 776-6637; www.delberthillrental.com)

**O'Connor Car Rental** (☎ 776-6343; www.oconnorcarrental.com)

**St John Car Rental** (☎ 776-6103; www.stjohncarrental.com)

### TAXI

Territorial law sets the island's taxi rates. They're listed in *St Thomas/St John This Week* magazine. From Cruz Bay it costs US\$9 per person to Coral Bay, US\$9 to Maho Bay and US\$7 to Cinnamon Bay. Call the **St John Taxi Commission** (☎ 774-3130) for pickups.

The street in front of the Cruz Bay ferry dock swarms with cabs offering island tours. A two-hour circuit of the island costs US\$50 per person for one or two passengers; it drops to US\$25 per person when three or more take the tour.

## CRUZ BAY

Nicknamed 'Love City,' St John's main town indeed wafts a carefree, spring-break party vibe. Hippies, sea captains, American retirees and reggae worshippers hoist happy-hour drinks in equal measure, and everyone wears a silly grin at their great good fortune for being here. Cruz Bay is also the place to organize your hiking, snorkeling, kayaking and other island activities and to fuel up in the surprisingly good restaurant mix. Everything grooves within walking distance of the ferry docks.

## Orientation & Information

Ferries from St Thomas and the British Virgin Islands arrive at separate docks, though they are within steps of each other. Most businesses offer free island maps plus the biweekly *St John Sun Times* (with entertainment and restaurant bargain listings). Note that the 'visitor's connection' kiosks sprinkled around town are fronts for Westin time-share sales.

**Book & Bean** (☎ 799-2665; Southside Rd; ☎ 7am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) In the Marketplace building, about a 15-minute walk northeast from the ferry dock. This is a good place to pick up *Trail Bandit* hiking maps.

**Connections** (☎ 776-6922; per 30min US\$5;

☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Sat) Internet access. There's a sister outlet in Coral Bay (☎ 779-4994) by Skinny Legs restaurant.

**FirstBank** (☎ 776-6881) Branch with ATM near Woody's Seafood Saloon.

**Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center** (☎ 693-8900; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri) About 2 miles east of Cruz Bay on Centerline Rd, this is the place to come for routine medical attention.

**Post office** (☎ 779-4227) Across the street from the British Virgin Islands ferry dock.

**US Customs & Immigration** (☎ 776-6741; 🕒 8am-noon & 1-5pm) Adjoins the British Virgin Islands ferry dock. If you arrive on a ferry or on a yacht from the British Virgin Islands, you must clear immigration here (typically a no-hassle process) before you head into town.

**Visitors center** (☎ 776-6450; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) A small building next to the post office.

## Sights & Activities

### VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

In the early 1950s, US millionaire Laurence Rockefeller discovered and fell in love with St John, which was nearly abandoned at the time. He purchased large tracts of the land, built the Caneel Bay resort, and then donated more than 5000 acres to the US government. The land became a national park in 1956, and over the years the government added a couple thousand more acres. Today Virgin Islands National Park covers two-thirds of the island, plus 5650 acres underwater.

It's a tremendous resource, offering miles of shoreline, pristine reefs and 20 hiking trails (see below). The **park visitors center** (☎ 776-6201; www.nps.gov/viis; 🕒 8am-4:30pm) sits on the dock across from the Mongoose Junction shopping arcade in Cruz Bay. It's an essential first stop to obtain free guides on hiking trails,

snorkeling spots, bird-watching lists and daily ranger-led activities.

For the record: more than 30 species of tropical birds nest in the park, including the banana quit, hummingbird and smooth-billed ani. Green iguanas, geckoes, hawksbill turtles, wild donkeys and an assortment of other feral animals roam the land. Largely regenerated after 18th-century logging, the island flora is a mix of introduced species and native plants, with lots of spiny cacti.

A great way to give back to the park is by volunteering for trail or beach **clean-ups** (🕒 8am-1pm Sat, Nov-Apr); meet at the maintenance parking lot (it's well marked) by the visitors center. Clean-ups also take place at Maho Bay and Cinnamon Bay beaches during the same timeframe on Thursdays.

### KAYAKING

Both these groups offer guided kayak tours with snorkeling time built in:

**Arawak Expeditions** (☎ 693-8312, 800-238-8687; www.arawakexp.com; half/full day US\$50/90) Departs out of Cruz Bay; snorkel gear not included. Offers mountain biking tours (same prices), as well.

**Hidden Reef Eco-Tours** (☎ 877-529-2575; www.hiddenreefecotours.com; 3hr/5hr tours US\$65/115) De-

### THESE TRAILS ARE MADE FOR WALKING

St John's greatest gift to visitors (aside from the awesome snorkeling, feral donkeys, ecocamps and happy-hour booze) is its hiking trails. The national park maintains 20 paths, and any reasonably fit hiker can walk them safely without a local guide. The park visitors center provides trail details in the helpful free *Trail Guide for Safe Hiking* brochure. Uberenthusiasts should also buy the **Trail Bandit map** (www.trailbandit.org; US\$4) that lists several additional footpaths; it's available at Book & Bean (p371), the Maho Bay Camps store (p376) or online.

If you prefer guided hikes, the National Park Service sponsors several free ones, including birding expeditions and shore hikes, but its best-known offering is the **Reef Bay Hike** (☎ 776-6201 reservations ext 238; US\$21; 🕒 9:30am-3pm Mon & Thu year-round, plus Fri Dec-Apr). This begins at the Reef Bay trailhead, 4.75 miles from Cruz Bay on Centerline Rd. The hike is a 3-mile downhill trek through tropical forests, leading past petroglyphs and plantation ruins to a swimming beach at Reef Bay, where a boat runs you back to Cruz Bay (hence the fee). It's very popular, so try to reserve at least three days in advance.

These other favorite trails are each 2 to 3 miles round trip; all have identifying signs at the trailheads and small lots to park your car.

- **Leinster Bay** Goes from the Annaberg sugar-mill ruins to fantastic snorkeling at Waterlemon Cay.
- **Brown Bay** Breezy, butterfly-laden hike up and over a small ridge and past a conch-scattered beach.
- **Ram's Head** Rocky, uphill slog to a worth-every-drop-of-sweat clifftop view.
- **Lind Point** Departs from behind the visitors center, past the occasional donkey and banana quit, to secluded Honeymoon Beach.



## DIVING & SNORKELING ST JOHN

St John offers loads of snorkel hot spots accessible from shore. The park service publishes an oft-photocopied but useful brochure called *Where's the Best Snorkeling?* – pick it up at the park visitors center. Gold stars go to Leinster Bay/Waterlemon Cay (p376) and Salt Pond Bay (p376); see p375 for more locations.

The island also has cool dive sites, all of which are accessed by boat, including wreck dives on the *General Rogers* and *RMS Rhone*. A two-tank trip including gear costs US\$95 (about US\$150 to the *Rhone*). The following shops in Cruz Bay also offer dive certification, snorkel gear rental (US\$7 to US\$10 per day for a full set) and boat trips to the BVIs (about US\$130 plus \$25 in customs fees for a full day):

**Cruz Bay Watersports** (☎ 776-6234; www.divestjohn.com; Palm Plaza; 🕒 8am-6pm) Behind the Lumberyard.  
**Low Key Watersports** (☎ 693-8999; www.divelowkey.com; Wharfside Village; 🕒 8am-6pm)

parts from Haulover Bay at the island's more remote east end; snorkel gear is included. Also offers night paddles.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

The nonprofit group **Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park** (☎ 779-4940; www.friendsvnp.org) provides hiking, sailing and snorkel trips all over the island, as well as cooking, painting, jewelry-making and West African drumming workshops. Activities occur on various Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays; costs range from US\$25 to \$80.

## Festivals & Events

**8 Tuff Miles** (www.8tuffmiles.com) Popular road race from Cruz Bay to Coral Bay in late February.

**St John Blues Festival** (☎ 693-8120; www.stjohnbluesfestival.com) All-day music bash in Coral Bay on the third Saturday in March; tickets cost US\$30.

**St John Carnival** (☎ 776-6450) The island's biggest celebration; surrounds Emancipation Day (July 3) and US Independence Day (July 4).

## Sleeping

St John's accommodations appeal to two groups: one group is upper-middle-class vacationers fond of villas and resorts, the other adventure travelers keen on camping and ecotourism (for which they must head to the North Shore). There's not much in the middle range. If you want to splash out and live the resort lifestyle, Gallows Point and Caneel Bay in particular do it well. Prices listed below are winter high-season rates; add 8% for tax.

**Samuel Cottages** (☎ 776-6643; www.samuelcottages.com; 4-person cottages US\$125; 🏠) These three peach-colored cottages are a stiff 10-minute walk uphill from the ferry dock, but you'll be hard-pressed to beat the value. They're sort of like state park cabins – nothing fancy,

but clean and spacious enough, with a fully equipped kitchen and deck for sitting and contemplating how much cash you're saving.

**Inn at Tamarind Court** (☎ 776-6378, 800-221-1637; www.tamarindcourt.com; s/d/q US\$75/148/240; 🏠) The rooms are small, thin-walled and lack frills such as private decks and water views, but Tamarind Inn does try hard with its friendly staff, bamboo-and-tiki decor and jumpin' courtyard bar-restaurant. A separate building holds six single rooms sharing two bathrooms.

**ourpick St John Inn** (☎ 693-8688, 800-666-7688; www.stjohninn.com; r incl breakfast US\$160-215; 🏠 🏠) A step up in value (and steps away down a quiet side street) from Tamarind Inn, rooms here are decked out with tiled floors, hand-crafted pine furniture and iron beds. Many also have water views or a kitchen. A homey atmosphere pervades, and guests grill fresh fish on the communal barbecue, laze on the sun deck or dip in the small pool.

**Gallows Point Resort** (☎ 776-6434, 800-323-7229; www.gallowspointresort.com; r US\$435-575; 🏠 🏠 🏠) It stands out for being small (only 15 suites), independently owned and walkable to Cruz Bay. Each suite has a full kitchen, a private deck and French doors that open onto water views. There's wi-fi access in the lobby.

**Caneel Bay** (☎ 776-6111, 888-767-3966; www.caneelbay.com; r from US\$550; 🏠 🏠 🏠) It's the resort that started it all, back in 1955. Located 2 miles north of Cruz Bay, Caneel Bay is where folks such as Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt come when they need seven beaches, 11 tennis courts, five restaurants and all-round elegance. There are no phones or TVs in rooms.

Villa rentals can be reasonable, especially if you're accommodating more than two

people. One-, two- and three-bedroom properties are all common. Most require a week-long stay in high season. One-bedroom villas could cost US\$1500 to US\$2700 per week.

**Carefree Get-Aways** (☎ 779-4070, 888-643-6002; [www.carefreegetaways.com](http://www.carefreegetaways.com))

**Caribbean Villas** (☎ 776-6152, 800-338-0987; [www.caribbeanvilla.com](http://www.caribbeanvilla.com))

**Catered To** (☎ 776-6641, 800-424-6641; [www.cateredto.com](http://www.cateredto.com))

**Coconut Coast Villas** (☎ 693-9100, 800-858-7989; [www.coconutcoast.com](http://www.coconutcoast.com))

## Eating & Drinking

**our pick** **Hercules Pate Delight** (☎ 776-6352; pates US\$3; ☎ 6am-2pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat) *Pates* can be overly greasy, but not the pillowy puffs of dough that Hercules fries. Stuffed with spiced chicken, beef, shrimp or salt fish, they're perfect for a morning or early afternoon snack. You'll find the wee joint behind Cool Breeze Jeep Rental, on the road leading toward the Lumberyard buildings.

**Mojo Café** (☎ 776-8399; Wharfside Village; mains US\$7-14; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Mojo makes dishes that are all over the map. For breakfast and lunch it's American fare such as egg sandwiches, burgers and turkey clubs. Come evening, pork vindaloo, vegetarian dhal and other Indian food takes over. Eat at the three outdoor tables, or order as takeaway and walk a few steps to the beach for a picnic. Cash only.

**Woody's Seafood Saloon** (☎ 779-4625; mains US\$8-17; ☎ lunch & dinner) St John's daily party starts here at 3pm, when the price on domestic

beers drops to US\$1. By 4pm the crowd in this tiny place has spilled over onto the sidewalk. Bartenders pass beers out a streetside window. While lots of folks just show up to cram in and whoop it up with fellow tanned bodies, you can actually get some reasonable pub food, such as grilled fish or corn-crust scallops.

**Uncle Joe's BBQ** (☎ 693-8806; mains US\$10-14; ☎ dinner) Locals and visitors go wild tearing into the barbecue chicken, ribs and corn on the cob at this open-air restaurant across from the post office. The chef grills the meats outside, perfuming the entire harbor-front with their tangy goodness. Cash only.

**Inn at Tamarind Court Restaurant** (☎ 776-6378; breakfast US\$4-8, dinner mains US\$10-14; ☎ breakfast & dinner, closed Sat eve) Each night brings a different themed menu to this jovial courtyard eatery. Monday is for Greek dishes, Tuesday is Mexican food, Wednesday is Thai fare, and Friday is for chowing prime rib. Fruit-filled pancakes, omelets and French toast fill breakfast plates.

**Morgan's Mango** (☎ 693-8141; Mongoose Junction; mains US\$15-28; ☎ dinner) Take in a view of the harbor while dining on imaginative Caribbean recipes for dishes such as Haitian voodoo snapper or Cuban citrus chicken. The owners often bring in live acoustic acts (usually on Tuesday and Friday), making Morgan's a good choice for a fun or romantic night out.

**Rhumb Lines** (☎ 776-0303; Meada's Plaza; mains US\$16-24; ☎ dinner, closed Tue) Tucked in a lush courtyard, this little restaurant has superb salads, sandwiches and fresh, healthy tropical cuisine served by happy, friendly hippies. At night, try selections from the 'pu pu' menu (US\$4 to US\$7 each), a mix of tapas-like treats. There's air-conditioned indoor seating, or outdoor seating under palms and umbrellas.

Self-caterers can head to **Starfish Market** (☎ 779-4949; Southside Rd; ☎ 7:30am-9pm), a full-service supermarket with good produce, a deli, and a wide selection of beer and wine. It's in the Marketplace building, about a 15-minute walk northeast from the ferry dock.

## NORTH SHORE

Life's a beach on the tranquil North Shore. A rental car is the easiest way to see the area via North Shore (Rte 20) and Centerline (Rte 10) Rds, but taxis also will drop you at the beaches for between US\$5 and US\$9 per person.

### TWIST MY ARM: THE SPOTS THE AUTHORS WANTED TO KEEP SECRET

A mysterious bar with no phone, no address and no physical presence during certain hours of the day, **Joe's Rum Hut** (Wharfside Village; ☎ from 11am) is the Shangri-la of beachfront boozers. To find it, follow the 'Balcony Restaurant' signs through Cruz Bay's Wharfside Village shopping mall (Joe's sits on the floor below the eatery), and arrive after 11am, when a bartender materializes along with rum and a whopping bowl of limes. After that, it's all about sitting at the open-air counter, clinking the ice in your mojito (US\$6) and watching porpoises glide through the bay out front.

## MONGOOSES, DONKEYS AND GOATS – OH MY!

Whether you are camping, hiking or driving on St John, it won't be long before you have a close encounter with the island's odd menagerie of feral animals. According to National Park Service estimates, 500 goats, 400 donkeys, 200 pigs and hundreds of cats roam the island, descendants of domestic animals abandoned to the jungle eons ago. White-tailed deer and mongooses are two other introduced species that multiplied in unexpected numbers.

Park rangers are most concerned with the goats and pigs, whose foraging wipes out underbrush and leaves hillsides prone to erosion. Many of the animals have grown adept at raiding garbage cans and food supplies in the camping areas, and the donkeys meandering on island roads pose a serious hazard to drivers.

Do not tempt these animals by offering them food or leaving food or garbage where they can get at it. And do not approach them for petting or taking a snapshot. While most have a live-and-let-live attitude and don't mind you stepping around them on the trails, they are all capable of aggression if provoked.

## Sights & Activities

### ANNABERG SUGAR MILL RUINS

Part of the national park, these ruins near Leinster Bay are the most intact sugar plantation ruins in the Virgin Islands. A 30-minute, self-directed walking tour leads you through the slave quarters, village, windmill, rum still and dungeon.

The schooner drawings on the dungeon wall may date back more than 100 years. Park experts offer **demonstrations** (🕒 10am-2pm Tue-Fri) in traditional island baking, gardening, weaving and crafting.

When you're finished milling around, hop on the **Leinster Bay Trail** that starts near the picnic area and ends at, yep, Leinster Bay (p376). It's 1.6 miles, round trip.

### BEACHES

Most beaches have rest rooms and changing facilities, and most are excellent for snorkeling. You can rent snorkeling gear at dive shops in Cruz Bay (p373), or at tourist-favorites Trunk and Cinnamon Bays. These sand patches to unfurl your towel upon are listed starting from Cruz Bay and moving eastward.

### Honeymoon Beach

Honeymoon is a mile hike from the park visitors center along the Lind Point Trail. It has no facilities, other than sea-grape trees to hang your clothes on, which perhaps accounts for the few visitors.

### Caneel Bay

This is the main beach in front of Caneel Bay resort. The resort has seven beaches, but this is the one it permits visitors to use. It's a lovely

place, with fair snorkeling off the east point. You must sign in as a visitor at the guardhouse when you enter the resort property.

### Hawksnest Bay

The bay here is dazzling to behold, a deep circular indentation between hills with a broken ring of sand on the fringe.

### Oppenheimer's Beach

On the eastern edge of Hawksnest Bay, the beach and house here belonged to Dr Robert Oppenheimer, one of the inventors of the atomic bomb. His daughter left the land to the children of St John.

### Jumbie Bay

Jumbie is the word for ghost in the Creole dialect, and this beach east of Oppenheimer's has a plethora of ghost stories. Look for the parking lot on the North Shore Rd that holds only three cars. From here, take the wooden stairs down to the sand.

### Trunk Bay

This long, gently arching beach is the most popular strand on the island and charges a US\$4 fee. The beach has lifeguards, showers, toilets, picnic facilities, snorkel rental, a snack bar and taxi stand. No question, the sandy stretch is scenic, but it often gets packed. Everyone comes here to swim the underwater snorkeling trail, which truth be told, is pretty lame and murky.

### Cinnamon Bay

This exposed sweeping cove is home to the Cinnamon Bay Campground. The beach has

showers, toilets, a restaurant, grocery store and taxi stand. It also offers a full slate of activities through its **Watersports Center** (☎ 8:30-4:30pm), where you can rent snorkel gear (US\$5 per day) or sailboats, windsurf boards and sea kayaks (each about US\$20 per hour). Lessons including equipment cost US\$60 per hour.

### Maho Bay

Maho's beach is the longest on St John. The water is shallow and less choppy than elsewhere, and it's a good bet you'll see green sea turtles in early morning or late afternoon. The bay fronts the island's premiere eco tent-resort, Maho Bay Camps.

### Leinster Bay

This bay adjoins the Annaberg mill ruins. Park in the plantation's lot and follow a dirt road/trail around Leinster Bay. Some of St John's best snorkeling is at the bay's east end, offshore at Waterlemon Cay, where turtles, spotted eagle rays, barracudas and nurse sharks swim. Be aware the current can be strong.

### Sleeping

Travelers unenthused by big swanky resorts will love the two ecofriendly options here. Bring the insect repellent.

**Cinnamon Bay Campground** (☎ 776-6330, 800-539-9998; [www.cinnamonbay.com](http://www.cinnamonbay.com); campsites/equipped tents US\$27/80, cottages US\$110-140; ☎ closed Sep) About 6 miles east of Cruz Bay on North Shore Rd (Rte 20), this campground-ecoresort sits along a mile-long crescent beach at the base of forested hills. It's really a campers' village with a general store, snack bar and restaurant, but with thick vegetation giving plenty of privacy. There are three accommodations options. You can use your own tent; stay in a 10ft x 14ft tent that sits on a solid wood platform and comes equipped with four cots, a lantern, ice chest, charcoal grill and gas stove; or stay in a cottage – a 15ft x 15ft concrete shelter with two screened sides, electric lights, grill, stove and ceiling fan. The best bets are using your own tent or the cottages; the equipped tents are a bit gloomy. Everyone uses the public toilet facilities and cold-water showers.

**Maho Bay Camps** (☎ 776-6226, 800-392-9004; [www.maho.org](http://www.maho.org); tents US\$135, Harmony Studios US\$215-240) Stanley Selengut's mega-popular, ecosensitive tent resort lies 8 miles east of Cruz Bay on North Shore Rd (Rte 20). The complex offers 114 'tents,' akin to fabric-lined cabins, which

sit on wood platforms on a steep, forested hillside. Each unit has a sleeping area with twin beds, a propane stove, electrical outlets and an open-air terrace. The tents are so far off the ground, and the surrounding vegetation is so thick, it's like living in a tree house. To conserve water, guests use community low-flush toilets and pull-chain showers. The resort also recycles glass and other trash into crafts sold in its Arts Center; guests can take part in classes or watch free nightly glassblowing demonstrations. For those seeking higher-grade amenities, the resort's adjoining Harmony Studios are condos with a private bathroom, kitchen and deck, plus solar-generated electricity, rainwater collection and roof wind scoops for cooling. Now for the sad news: Maho sits on leased land, and the lease runs out in 2011. Everyone is bracing for the land owners to sell out to big developers, and Maho will cease to be. Get here while you still can.

## CORAL BAY & AROUND

Coral Bay, St John's second town, is really just a handful of shops, restaurants and pubs clustered around the 1733 hilltop Emmaus Moravian Church. Two hundred years ago, it was the largest settlement on the island. Known then as 'Crawl' Bay, presumably because there were pens or 'crawls' for sea turtles here, the settlement owes its early good fortune to being the largest and best-protected harbor in the Virgin Islands. Today it serves as the gateway to the island's most remote beaches and coastal wilderness, ripe for hiking, horseback riding and ecocamping.

### Sights & Activities

Strap on your walking shoes for two essential hikes near Coral Bay. The first one is at **Salt Pond Bay**, a few miles from town down Rte 107 and a 10-minute walk from the road. The bay itself provides excellent snorkeling, though the water can get rough; keep an eye out for turtles and squids. At the beach's south end, the **Ram's Head Trail** takes off and rises to a windswept cliff jabbing out into the sea. The trek is a 2-mile round trip through rocky exposed terrain, so bring ample water and sun protection.

The second must-hike is the **Brown Bay Trail**, which starts a mile east of Coral Bay. The path runs for 3.2 miles, round trip, going over a small ridge and past a conch-scattered

beach; sweet viewpoints and butterflies pop up en route.

Horseback riding enthusiasts can saddle up a trusty steed or donkey with **Carolina Corral** (☎ 693-5778; rides adult/child US\$75/55; 🕒 10am & 3pm Mon-Sat) for a 1.5-hour beach, trail or sunset jaunt.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Our pick Concordia Eco-Tents** (☎ 693-5855, 800-392-9004; [www.maho.org](http://www.maho.org); d US\$155-185, apt US\$150-225; 🏠) With the possible loss of his Maho Bay lease (see opposite), Stanley Selengut has pumped up his other ecocamp at Concordia. Each 'tent' has a private bathroom (unlike Maho), with composting toilet and solar-heated shower that, sigh, makes water temperature difficult to control sometimes. A kitchen (small refrigerator and two-burner propane stove) and sea view complete the package. The camp also offers studio apartments with slightly upgraded amenities, plus a café, activities center (for yoga and water sports), swimming pool and store for everyone to use. It's all strung together by boardwalks and steps up the steep hillside. About 2.5 miles south of Coral Bay, Concordia is quiet and remote. You'll likely want a rental car, though patient souls can access it by public bus.

**Vie's Snack Shack** (☎ 693-5033; mains US\$7-12; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) Vie Mahabir opened this plywood-sided restaurant next to her house in 1979, just after the government paved the road. She wanted to make a living while raising her 10 children. In the process, she perfected the art of garlic chicken with johnny-cakes. Vie also will let you lounge (US\$2.50 per day) or camp (US\$25 per night) on her low-key beach. She's located east of town (on East End Rd) by Hansen Bay.

**Skinny Legs** (☎ 779-4982; mains US\$8-11; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Salty sailors, bikini-clad transients and East End snowbirds mix it up at this open-air grill just past the fire station. Overlooking a small boatyard, it's not about the view, but the jovial clientele and lively bar scene. Burgers win the most raves, so open wide for a cheeseburger, or try a grilled *mahimahi* (white-meat fish) sandwich.

**Miss Lucy's** (☎ 693-5244; mains US\$16-25; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, brunch Sun) Miss Lucy, the island's first female cab driver and one heck of a cook, passed away in 2007 at age 91. Her restaurants lives on, as famous for its Sunday jazz brunch and piña colada pan-

cakes as for its weekday conch chowder, jumbo crab cakes and toasted goat-cheese salad – all served at water's edge under the sea-grape trees. Take Rte 107 to Friis Bay; it's en route to Concordia.

## ST CROIX

pop 53,200

St Croix (saint-croy) is the USVI's big boy – it's more than twice the size of St Thomas – and it sports an exceptional topography spanning mountains, a spooky rainforest and a fertile coastal plain that, once upon a time, earned it the nickname 'Garden of the Antilles' for its sugarcane growing prowess.

The sugar plantations are colonial history, and today St Croix is notable for its scuba diving, rum distillery, hikes, marine sanctuary and, dare we say it, beer-drinking pigs.

St Croix is also distinguished by the fact that tourism is not its main income source. That honor goes to the Hovensa Oil refinery on the south shore. It's the world's fifth-largest facility, bringing in most of its oil from Venezuela. With so many locals working in 'regular' jobs, the vibe on St Croix is more suburban than bash-you-over-the-head idyllic – which actually makes for a refreshing, less-congested change of pace.

More than half of the island's residents are the descendants of former slaves; about 30% are second- or third-generation immigrants from Puerto Rico; and quite a few are young white Americans who come to run restaurants, inns and sports operations.

## Orientation

Geographically isolated St Croix drifts 40 miles south of the other Virgins. The island has two main towns: Christiansted, the largest, sits on the northeast shore. Frederiksted, its much sleepier counterpart, resides on the west end (the island's wet, mountainous and forested region). South of the mountains is the broad coastal plain that once hosted sugar plantations. Today it's a modern commercial zone where most of St Croix's population lives.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Henry E Rohlsen Airport** (STX; ☎ 778-0589; [www.viport.com/avifacilities.html](http://www.viport.com/avifacilities.html)) is on St Croix's southwest

side and handles flights from the US, many connecting via San Juan, Puerto Rico or St Thomas. For airline details, see p387.

**Seaborne Airlines** (☎ 773-6442, 888-359-8687; www.seaborneairlines.com) flies seaplanes between St Thomas and St Croix – a sweet little ride (one way US\$85, 25 minutes). They land in Christiansted's downtown harbor. For more information, see p388.

## BOAT

**VI Seatrans** (☎ 776-5494; www.goviseatrans.com) operates a passenger ferry from St Croix to St Thomas (one way US\$50, 90 minutes) at 7:30am and 4:30pm Friday through Monday. Departures are from Gallows Bay, about a 0.75-mile walk east of downtown Christiansted.

## Getting Around

### BUS

**Vitran** (☎ 778-0898; fare US\$1) buses travel along Centerline Rd between Christiansted and Frederiksted. The schedule is erratic; buses depart roughly every hour or two.

### CAR

Rentals cost about US\$55 per day. Many companies, including the following, will pick you up at the airport or seaplane dock.

**Budget** (☎ 778-9636; www.budgetstcroix.com)

**Centerline Car Rentals** (☎ 778-0450, 888-288-8755; www.ccrvi.com)

**Olympic** (☎ 773-2208, 888-878-4227; www.olympicstcroix.com)

### TAXI

Taxis are unmetered, but rates are set by territorial law. Prices are listed in the readily available free tourist guide *St Croix This Week*. Taxis from the airport to Christiansted cost US\$16 per person.

## CHRISTIANSTED

Christiansted evokes a melancholy whiff of the past. Cannon-covered Fort Christiansvaern rises up on the waterfront, and arcaded sidewalks connect several other colonial buildings. They abut Kings Wharf, the commercial landing where, for more than 250 years, ships landed with slaves and set off with sugar or molasses. Today the wharf is fronted by a boardwalk of restaurants, dive shops and bars. It all comes together as a well-provisioned base from which to explore the island.

## Orientation & Information

The main arteries are King St (eastbound) and Company St (westbound). Banks with ATMs cluster around Prince St.

**Governor Juan F Luis Hospital** (☎ 776-6311; ☎ 24hr) Next to the Sunny Isle Shopping Center on Centerline Rd, 2 miles west of Christiansted.

**Post office** (☎ 773-3586; cnr Company St & Market Sq)  
**St Croix Landmarks Society** (☎ 772-0598; http://heritagetrails.stcroixlandmarks.org) Maps to ruins and cultural sites island-wide.

**Surf the Net** (☎ 692-7855; 1102 Strand St; per half hr US\$5; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Internet access.

**Visitors center** (☎ 773-1460; cnr Hospital & King Sts; ☎ 10am-5pm) It's located in the historic Scale House and operated by the National Park Service. The knowledgeable staff can provide information on island-wide attractions, plus town and island maps.

## Sights

Several painters, jewelry makers and photographers have galleries in town, with most on Company St near Queen Cross St. The **Art Thursday** (www.artthursday.com; admission free; ☎ 5-8pm, 3rd Thu of month) gallery hop takes place November through June.

## CHRISTIANSTED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

This **historic site** (☎ 773-1460; www.nps.gov/chri; 2100 Church St; admission US\$3; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) includes several structures. The most impressive is **Fort Christiansvaern** (Christian's Defenses), a four-point citadel occupying the deep-yellow buildings on the town's east side, and the best-preserved Danish fort in the West Indies. Built between 1738 and 1749 out of Danish bricks (brought over as ships' ballast), the fort protected citizens from the onslaught of pirates, hurricanes and slave revolts, but its guns were never fired in an armed conflict. After 1878, the fort served as a prison and courthouse for the island. Cannons on the ramparts, an echoey claustrophobic dungeon and latrines with top-notch sea views await visitors who tour the site.

Other buildings nearby include the **Scale House**, where the Danish weighed hogsheads of sugar for export (the building now houses a visitors center). The **Custom's House**, recognizable by its sweeping 16-step stairway, served as the Danes' customs house for more than a century. Nearby, the three-story neoclassical **Danish West India and Guinea Company Warehouse**

served as company headquarters; slaves were auctioned in its central courtyard. Next door, the 1753 **Steeple Building** served as Church of Lord God of the Sabaoth, the island's first house of worship.

### PROTESTANT CAY

This small triangular cay, located less than 200yd from Kings Wharf (a three-minute ferry ride, round trip US\$3), is a sweet little oasis. It's the site of a mellow resort whose wide, sandy beach and bar-restaurant are open to the public. The **Beach Shack** (☎ 773-7060; www.cruzanwatersports.com; ☎ 9am-5pm) rents kayaks (US\$15 per two hours) and snorkel gear (per day US\$10). Some swimmers rave you can see just as much underwater life here as at Buck Island.

### Activities

Christiansted is chock-full of operators that book diving trips (see p380) and Buck Island tours (see p381).

For a wind-in-your-hair sailing experience, **World Ocean School** (☎ 626-7877; www.worldoceanschool.org; 2½hr tours adult/child US\$45/30; ☎ 4:30pm Jan-May) provides daily trips aboard the sharp-looking, historic schooner *Roseway*. Added bonus: sailing with these folks supports their nonprofit group that teaches local students sailing and leadership skills. Departures are from Gallows Bay.

Hikers will love the guided ecowalks available. They depart from sites around the island; call or check the websites for schedules. Fees vary.

**St Croix Hiking Association** (www.stcroixhiking.org)

**St Croix Environmental Association** (☎ 773-1989; www.stxenvironmental.org) Offers bird-watching and snorkeling trips, too.

**Ay-Ay Eco-Hikes** (☎ 277-0410, 772-4079; eco@viaccess.net) Customized hikes.

### Tours

Several operators offer four-hour island tours (about US\$45 per person) by van that go to the botanic garden (p384), rum factory (p383), Whim Plantation (p383), Frederiksted and Salt River. They depart from King St near Government House, and must be reserved in advance.

**Eagle Safari Tours** (☎ 778-3313; ☎ Mon-Sat)

**Rudy's Taxi Tours** (☎ 773-6803; ☎ Mon-Sat)

**Sweeney's Safari Tour** (☎ 773-6700, 800-524-2026;

☎ Mon-Fri)

### Festivals & Events

**St Patrick's Day** Cruzans go all out with a parade in Christiansted on March 17.

**St Croix Half-Ironman Triathlon** (☎ 773-4470; www.stcroixtriathlon.com) Participants strive for Ironman qualification in early May.

**Danish West Indies Emancipation Day** Cruzans celebrate on July 3 with a holiday from work, beach parties, family gatherings and plenty of fireworks over Christiansted's harbor.

**Cruzan Christmas Fiesta** (☎ 773-0495) From early December to early January, it's a month of pageants, parades and calypso competitions, putting a West Indies spin on the Christmas holidays.

### Sleeping

Tax is an additional 18%, and some places tack on an energy surcharge (about US\$4). Prices listed below are winter high-season rates.

**King Christian Hotel** (☎ 773-6330, 800-524-2012; www.kingchristian.com; 59 Kings Wharf; r US\$110-145; ☎ ☎ ☎) You can't miss this three-story, sand-colored building that looks like a Danish warehouse (which it was 200 years ago) right next to the National Park Service sites. The 39 rooms are typical midrange, flowery-bedspread types. They're fine, though you'll get a bigger bang for your buck at Hotel on the Cay. Offers wi-fi.

**ourpick Hotel on the Cay** (☎ 773-2035, 800-524-2035; www.hotelonthecay.com; r from US\$133; ☎ ☎ ☎)

A truly cool place to stay, this hotel sits just offshore on its own little island called Protestant Cay (left), accessible by a three-minute ferry ride (free for guests). It's great value for the spacious rooms with full kitchenettes, cooking utensils and bright furnishings. The pièce de résistance: private balconies for taking in cool breezes, hearing waves lap the shore and watching pelicans dive-bomb for fish.

**Pink Fancy** (☎ 773-8460, 800-524-2045; www.pinkfancy.com; 27 Prince St; r incl breakfast US\$140-185; ☎ ☎ ☎)

Sprawling through a historic 1780 Danish town house, this 13-room B&B was opened by a Ziegfeld Follies showgirl years ago. It retains a flamboyant, whimsical charm, its exterior painted sky blue with pink shutters, and its rooms outfitted with walnut floors, antiques and kitchenettes. It's on a quiet street away from the harbor, and wins serious praise from its repeat patrons. Offers wi-fi.

**Hotel Caravelle** (☎ 773-0687, 800-524-0410; www.hotelcaravelle.com; 44A Queen Cross St; r US\$145-175; ☎ ☎ ☎)

Located on the waterfront, this 43-room

## DIVING ST CROIX

If you are a scuba enthusiast worth your sea salt, you'll be spending lots of time underwater in St Croix. It's a diver's mecca thanks to two unique features: one, it's surrounded by a massive barrier reef, so turtles, rays and other sea creatures are prevalent; and, two, a spectacular wall runs along the island's north shore, dropping at a 60-degree slope to a depth of more than 12,000ft. It gives a true look into 'the deep,' and there's nothing quite like it anywhere in the world.

The best dives on the north shore are at Cane Bay Drop-Off, North Star Wall and Salt River Canyon. The top west island dives are at the Butler Bay ship wrecks and Frederiksted Pier. While almost all dive operators offer boat dives, many of the most exciting dives, such as Cane Bay, involve beach entries with short swims to the reef.

The operators listed here go to the various sites and charge about US\$65 for one-tank dives and about US\$90 for two tanks (including equipment).

**Anchor Dive Center** (☎ 778-1522, 800-532-3483; www.anchordivestcroix.com; Columbus Cove) Specializes in dives in Salt River Canyon (where the shop is located).

**Cane Bay Dive Shop** (☎ 773-9913, 800-338-3843; www.canebayscuba.com) A friendly five-star PADI facility, across the highway from the beach and the Cane Bay Drop-Off, and with shops in both Christiansted and Frederiksted.

**Dive Experience** (☎ 773-3307, 800-235-9047; www.divexp.com; 1111 Strand St) This woman-owned shop has a strong environmental commitment and offers 'green' diving courses. The shop is in Christiansted.

**Scuba West** (☎ 772-3701, 800-352-0107; www.divescubawest.com; 12 Strand St) Specializes in west island dives, including awesome night dives on Frederiksted Pier (located across from the shop).

**St Croix Ultimate Bluewater Adventures** (☎ 773-5994, 887-567-1367; www.stcroixscuba.com; 14 Caravelle Arcade) Another ultra-professional company that dives all over the island; the shop is in Christiansted but the company will transport guests to Frederiksted.

property is similar in spirit to, though a bit fancier than, the King Christian Hotel. The more expensive rooms have harbor views. You can also get a harbor view by heading out to the pool and sundeck.

## Eating & Drinking

Note that the lower-priced places accept cash only.

**ourpick Avocado Pit** (☎ 773-9843; 59 Kings Wharf; mains US\$4-9; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Young staff pour strong coffee and fruity smoothies at this wee café overlooking the fort and harbor. The granola-and-yogurt wins raves for breakfast, while the wraps (spicy tuna, tofu or avocado) make a delicious lunch or Buck Island picnic fare.

**Lalita** (☎ 719-4417; 54 King St; mains US\$6-10; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Health-food nuts and vegans: this is your place, serving everything from organic muesli to seaweed salad to hummus plates. Lalita's bulletin board is a good resource for yoga and other healing art classes; there's also wi-fi if you want to check your email.

**Singh's Fast Food** (☎ 773-7357; 238 King St; mains US\$6-12; ☺ lunch & dinner) When the roti craving strikes – and it will – Singh's will satiate with its multiple meat and tofu varieties. The

steamy, four-table joint also serves shrimp, conch, goat, turkey and tofu stews – all while island music ricochets off the pastel walls.

**Luncheria** (☎ 773-4247; 6 Company St; mains US\$7-10; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This fun Mexican cantina will quench your desire for margaritas and burritos, whether you order them to go or to eat in at the laid-back, shaded courtyard.

**Kim's Restaurant** (☎ 773-3377; 45 King St; mains US\$9-12; ☺ lunch & dinner) Come here for dynamite West Indian cooking and friendly conversation with cook and manager 'Big Kim.' The ambience is simple with peach-and-white tablecloths and a courtyard; the menu is written on a dry-erase board. Try the curried chicken or Creole-style conch, both served with rice and salad.

**Fort Christian Brew Pub** (☎ 713-9820; Kings Wharf at King's Alley; sandwiches US\$8-13, dinner mains US\$17-23; ☺ lunch & dinner) Right on the boardwalk overlooking yachts bobbing in the sea, this open-air pub is primo for sampling the VI Brewing Company's small-batch suds. The New Orleans-style menu features jambalaya and spicy shrimp *étouffée* (a delicious tomato-based stew).

**Tutto Bene** (☎ 773-5229; 2006 Eastern Suburb; mains US\$17-30; ☺ dinner) There's no West Indian ambience and no ocean view, but that's not the



point at Tutto Bene. It stands apart by cooking traditional Italian food that will rock your world. Generous portions of fish, chicken and meat mains and creative pasta dishes are served in a sophisticated yet casual room. It's located 0.5 miles east of town.

## NORTH SHORE

Dramatic slopes, Chris Columbus' landing pad and hot dive sites await along the north shore.

About 4 miles west of Christiansted on Rte 80, the **Salt River Bay National Historic Park** is the only documented place where Christopher Columbus washed ashore on US soil. Don't expect bells and whistles; the site remains undeveloped beach. The 700 acres surrounding the Salt River estuary is an ecological reserve. The best way to see its mangroves and egrets is by kayak with **Caribbean Adventure Tours** (☎ 778-1522, 800-532-3483; www.stcroixkayak.com; 2½-hr-tour US\$45), located at the Salt River Marina on the bay's west side.

Sand seekers hit palm-fringed **Hibiscus Beach**, with good snorkeling and amenities, less than 2 miles west of Christiansted off Rte 75. **Cane Bay**, a long, thin strand along Rte 80 about 9 miles west of Christiansted, is also deservedly venerated. Cane Bay provides easy access to some of the island's best dives, and it's also the gateway into the rainforest's steep hills. The beach has several small hotels, restaurants, bars and the Cane Bay Dive Shop (opposite).

## Sleeping

The lodgings here are more casual than glamorous. The Cane Bay properties have onsite restaurants.

**our pick Inn at Salt River** (☎ 772-1684; www.arawakbaysaltriver.co.vi; 62 Salt River Rd; r incl breakfast US\$140; 🚗 🚿) The pick of the local litter, this peachy B&B opened in 2007 and has 14 bright rooms, each with different color schemes and decor. For those without a vehicle, it's isolated from the beaches and eateries, but the owners make amends by providing daily transportation to Christiansted and Cane Bay. Offers wi-fi.

**Waves at Cane Bay** (☎ 778-1805, 800-545-0603; www.canebaystcroix.com; North Shore Rd; r US\$140-155; 🚗 🚿) This small, tidy hotel has decent rooms (the owners continue a long, slow remodeling process). But it's really all about location: you can snorkel or dive right off the rocks out front.

**Cane Bay Reef Club** (☎ 778-2966, 800-253-8534; www.canebay.com; 114 North Shore Rd; r US\$150-250; 🚗 🚿) This is good value because each of the nine rooms is like its own little villa overlooking the beach. The decor is dated but all suites include kitchens and private patios virtually hanging over the sea.

## Eating & Drinking

**Off the Wall** (☎ 778-4771; mains US\$8-14; 🍷 lunch & dinner) After a day of diving at Cane Bay, climb out of the ocean and head to the beach's east end, where this open-air pub serves burgers, nachos and quesadillas to a happy crowd of drinkers.

**Lobster Reef Café** (☎ 719-9044; mains US\$8-16; 🍷 lunch & dinner) For a pirate-meets-Gilligan's Island ambience, saunter over to Lobster Reef, where the namesake crustacean comes in fritter, salad, sandwich, bisque and grilled form. The café is 0.5 miles east of Cane Bay Beach.

## BUCK ISLAND REEF NATIONAL MONUMENT

For such small land mass – 1 mile long by 0.5 miles wide – Buck Island draws big crowds. It's not so much what's on top but what's underneath that fascinates: an 18,800-acre fish-frenzied coral reef system surrounding the island. The sea gardens and a marked underwater trail create first-rate **snorkeling** and shallow diving. Endangered hawksbill, leatherback and green sea turtles come ashore on the island's protected beaches. If you want to keep dry, a **hiking trail** circles the island's west end and leads to an impressive observation point.

Another reason to visit Buck Island is simply the trip itself. Visitors glide here aboard tour boats from Christiansted, 5 miles to the west. Most depart from Kings Wharf. Expect to pay US\$50/85 (half/full day) per person, including snorkeling gear, with the following companies:

**Big Beard's Adventures** (☎ 773-4482; www.bigbeards.com; Queen Cross St by Kings Wharf) Trips are aboard catamaran sailboats.

**Caribbean Sea Adventures** (☎ 773-2628; www.caribbeanseaadventures.com; 59 Kings Wharf) Half-day trip is aboard a glass-bottom power boat; full-day trip is on a catamaran.

**Teroro II** (☎ 773-3161) A trimaran sailboat whose captain will entertain you completely; trips leave from Green Cay Marina, east of Christiansted.

## POINT UDALL & AROUND

Point Udall is the easternmost geographic point in the US territory. As you face into a 25-knot trade wind, the vista from the promontory high above the surf-strewn beaches is enough to make you hear symphonies. Others simply like the challenge of hiking the steep trails down the hillside to the isolated beaches on the south side of the point.

Some of St Croix's splashiest resorts take up the beachfront en route to Point Udall. **Divi Carina Bay Beach Resort** (☎ 773-9700, 877-773-9700; www.divicarina.com; 25 Estate Turner Hole, Grapetree Bay; r from US\$245; ♿ ♻️ 🗑️), on the southeast shore, draws visitors and locals alike. The former come to stay at the 180 mod, wicker-furnished rooms. The latter come to win big at the island's only **casino** (☎ 773-1529).

## FREDERIKSTED

'Quiet' doesn't do Frederiksted justice. St Croix's second-banana town is utterly motionless, a patch of forsaken colonial buildings snoring beside a painted teal-blue sea. Once upon a time, cruise ships docked regularly at Frederiksted Pier, but high crime rates drove them away. Now they're starting to drift back (led by Disney, of all companies).

Other than the occasional boatload of visitors, it'll be you and that lizard sunning on the rock who will have this gritty outpost to yourselves. **Fort Frederik Beach** is the public strand just north of the old fort. When the prevailing

trade winds blow, the beach remains as sheltered as a millpond; you can swim off it for excellent snorkeling around the pier. A couple of local dive shops (see p380) will facilitate your adventures.

With its out-of-the-mainstream, laissez-faire ambience, Frederiksted is the center for gay life on St Croix.

## Sleeping

**Frederiksted Hotel** (☎ 772-0500, 800-595-9519; www.frederikstedhotel.dk; 442 Strand St; r US\$100-135; ♿ ♻️ 🗑️) This Danish-owned, bright-blue hotel sits right smack downtown. Four floors are built around a courtyard and small pool, and many rooms have patios overlooking the pier. The 36 units each have tiled floors and standard hotel-style furnishings, plus a refrigerator.

**Sand Castle on the Beach** (☎ 772-1205, 800-524-2018; www.sandcastleonthebeach.com; 127 Estate Smithfield; r/ste incl breakfast from US\$149/259; ♿ ♻️ 🗑️) Right on the beach about a mile south of Frederiksted, this establishment with 21 rooms is one of the few gay- and lesbian-oriented hotels in the USVIs. The motel-like rooms come with kitchenettes; most have sea views. There is also a video library and gas grills for cookouts, or you can have lunch or dinner at the oceanside restaurant aptly named the Beach Side Café.

## Eating

**Turtles** (☎ 772-3676; 37 Strand St; sandwiches US\$7-9.50; ♻️ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Chow your killer

### THE CRUX OF ST CROIX

Olaasee Davis is an ecologist at the University of the Virgin Islands and a tour leader with **St Croix Hiking Association** (www.stcroixhiking.org). He's a lifelong Virgin Islander, and a resident of St Croix for more than 40 years.

#### What's the biggest environmental issue facing St Croix today?

Everything comes into the island, but it doesn't go back out. Abandoned cars are one of our biggest problems. They're left in the forest or bushes. We try to recycle them. Either we crush and ship the cars back to the US to be melted, or we make artificial reefs with them [after removing any harmful elements].

#### What makes St Croix different from other islands?

Our history and culture. We have historical structures all over the island, more probably than any other Caribbean island except Cuba. We have the buildings at Christiansted and Frederiksted, and more than 100 windmills. That's a lot for an 84-sq-mile area.

#### What's your favorite place to hike?

The north bay, at Annaly and Will Bay [by Hams Bluff] near Maroon Ridge. 'Maroons' were slaves who ran away from the plantations. They came here because the topography – the mountains and forest – made it difficult to for anyone to find them. It's no-man's-land. Some jumped off and killed themselves so as not to be recaptured. The virgin forest remains. It's an extremely historical and spiritual place.

sandwiches on homemade bread, or sip a fine cuppa coffee, at beachfront tables under sea-grape trees.

**Sunset Grill** (☎ 772-5855; sandwiches US\$7-13, dinner mains US\$17-33; ☎ lunch & dinner) Ahh, swing in beachfront hammocks while awaiting your fish and island dishes. Located 2 miles north of Frederiksted on Rte 63.

**Blue Moon** (☎ 772-2222; 17 Strand St; mains US\$18-29; ☎ lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat, brunch Sun) Considered one of the best restaurants on the island, Blue Moon dishes up Caribbean, vegetarian and Cajun cuisine in a restored colonial warehouse. There's live jazz Wednesday and Friday nights.

**Le St Tropez** (☎ 772-3000; 227 King St; mains US\$18-32; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) This *très* authentic French bistro overflows with Mediterranean spirit and sophistication. Only 15 tables fill the intimate courtyard-terrace, which drips with the sound of Louis Armstrong and the scents of *coq au vin*. Good wines accompany it all.

## AROUND FREDERIKSTED

Many of the island's top sights surround Frederiksted. They cluster north of town in the rainforest, and south along Centerline Rd.

### Rainforest Area

In the island's wet, mountainous northwest pocket, a thick forest of tall mahogany, silk cotton and white cedar trees grow. Technically, as only about 40in of rain fall here per year, the **Caledonia Rainforest** is not a true 'rainforest.' No matter – it looks the part, with clouds, dripping trees and earthy aromas. Mahogany Rd (Rte 76) cuts through the spooky woods; it's twisty and pot-holed, so be careful.

Tucked into a steep hillside, about 20 minutes' drive from Frederiksted, is the unusual outdoor woodworking studio **St Croix Leap** (☎ 772-0421; Rte 76 Brooks Hill; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat). Here, master sculptor 'Cheech' leads a band of apprentice woodworkers in transforming chunks of fallen mahogany.

The wild **Montpellier Domino Club** (☎ 772-9914) lies even deeper in the forest on Mahogany Rd. It's an open-air West Indian restaurant with live entertainment. But the big attraction is the famous beer-guzzling pigs: tourists line up to pay US\$1 to watch pigs gnaw open cans of nonalcoholic brewskis and swill the contents. It's certainly not kosher (the animals live in confined pens), but you've never seen anything like it. The porkers used to drink the

real thing until offspring were born suffering the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal.

**Paul & Jill's Equestrian Stables** (☎ 772-2880; www.paulandjills.com), 1.5 miles north of Frederiksted on Rte 63, offers trail rides that lead through hidden plantation ruins and the rainforest to hilltop vistas.

Hiking to **Hams Bluff** on the island's tip-top northwest corner unfurls views of sea-pounded cliffs; it's best to come with a guide (see p379).

Two ecologically minded lodgings have set up in the area. **Mt Victory Campground** (☎ 772-1651, 866-772-1651; www.mtvictorycamp.com; Rte 58; campsites/equipped tents/cottages US\$30/85/95) is on a small working farm. The three perma-tents and two cottages are similar screened-in dwellings, each with a kitchen with cold-water sink, a propane stove and cooking utensils. There's no electricity, and guests share the solar-heated bathhouse. **Northside Valley** (☎ 772-0558, 877-772-0558; www.northsidevalley.com; 2 Estate Northside; villas per week US\$800-1500) is a step up, offering five concrete-and-tile villas with private bathrooms and bamboo sheets, all washed using 'green' cleaning supplies. There is a one-week minimum stay. It's on the beach near Butler Bay.

### Centerline Road

Several sights lie south of Frederiksted on Centerline Rd (aka Rte 70).

#### ESTATE WHIM PLANTATION MUSEUM

Only a few of Whim Plantation's original 150 acres survive as this **museum** (☎ 772-0598; adult/child US\$5/4; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat), but the grounds thoroughly evoke the colonial days when sugarcane ruled St Croix. Guided tours (adult/child US\$10/4) leave every 30 minutes, or wander by the crumbling stone windmill and chimney on your own. Don't forget to ask for the Landmarks Society's map to other ruins around the island.

#### CRUZAN RUM DISTILLERY

To find out how does the islands' popular elixir gets made, stop by for a **distillery tour** (☎ 692-2280; www.cruzanrum.com; 3 Estate Diamond; adult/child US\$4/1; ☎ 9:30-11:30am & 1-4pm Mon-Fri). The journey through gingerbread-smelling (from molasses and yeast), oak-barrel-stacked warehouses takes 20 minutes, after which you get to sip the good stuff. The factory is about 2 miles east of Whim Plantation.

**ST GEORGE VILLAGE BOTANICAL GARDEN**

Continuing east on Centerline Rd, you'll get to these **gardens** (☎ 692-2874; adult/child US\$8/1; ☎ 9am-5pm). The 16-acre park built over a colonial sugar plantation does for the flora and fauna what Whim Plantation does for the grandeur of plantation days. More than 1500 native and exotic species grow on the grounds. Orchid-lovers, in particular, are in for a treat.

## DIRECTORY

### ACCOMMODATIONS

Staying in the USVIs can be downright expensive. However, hotels are at the mercy of the tourism traffic so, if you travel in the low or shoulder seasons, rates can drop as much as 40%. Many properties have three-night minimum stay requirements in the high season, December 15 through April 30. An 8% hotel tax plus a 10% service charge typically are added to bills.

If you're planning on staying a while, you might want to look into renting a condo or villa. Besides **Craigslist** (<http://caribbean.craigslist.org>) and the **VI Daily News** ([www.virginislanddailynews.com](http://www.virginislanddailynews.com)), which both have listings throughout the USVIs, **McLaughlin Anderson Villas** (☎ 774-2790, 800-537-6246; [www.mclaughlineanderson.com](http://www.mclaughlineanderson.com)) rents on all the islands. For St Thomas—and St John—specific rentals, see p367 and p373, respectively.

### ACTIVITIES

#### Diving & Snorkeling

Diving and snorkeling in the USVIs are superb, with warm water temperatures and

incredible visibility. St Thomas (p369) and St John (p373) feature near-shore fringing reefs. St Croix sits atop its own narrow bank and divers can explore sheer walls encrusted with corals. Snorkelers can step in the water almost anywhere and find plenty of tropical fish, sea turtles, even nurse sharks. See p380 for more on St Croix diving.

#### Fishing

The USVIs host several deep-sea fishing tournaments. Marlin is a spring/summer fish, sailfish and wahoo run in fall, and dorado show up in winter. Charters run out of American Yacht Harbor in Red Hook, St Thomas.

#### Hiking

The most popular stomping grounds are in Virgin Islands National Park on St John (see p372). St Croix has guided ecohikes (p379).

#### Sailing

Several companies sail the USVIs' turquoise seas, though it's not as big a deal here as in the British Virgin Islands. Still, day sails are popular from Red Hook (p370) on St Thomas, and to Buck Island (p381) from St Croix.

These companies offer multiday yacht charters from St Thomas:

**CYOA Yacht Charters** (☎ 777-9690, 800-944-2962; [www.cyoacharters.com](http://www.cyoacharters.com); Frenchtown Marina) Bareboat, ie do-it-yourself sailing.

**Island Yacht Charters** (☎ 775-6666, 800-524-2019; [www.yic.vi](http://www.yic.vi); American Yacht Harbor) Provides bareboat and crewed boats.

**Virgin Islands Charterboat League** (☎ 774-3944, 800-524-2061; [www.vicl.org](http://www.vicl.org)) Offers crewed boats.

### PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** The *VI Daily News* and *St Croix Avis* are the daily papers. *St Thomas/St John This Week* ([www.stthomasthisweek.com](http://www.stthomasthisweek.com)) and *St Croix This Week* ([www.stcroixthisweek.com](http://www.stcroixthisweek.com)) are invaluable resources providing local maps, entertainment listings, taxi rates and cruise-ship schedules. They're free and available at most businesses.
- **Radio & TV** The USVIs have two TV stations (channel 8 and 12) and several radio stations. WSTA-AM 1340 airs island music and talk.
- **Electricity** 110 volts; North American-style plugs have two (flat) or three (two flat, one round) pins.
- **Weights & Measures** Imperial system. Distances are in feet and miles; gasoline is measured in gallons.
- **Drugs** Pharmacies require prescriptions for common drugs such as antibiotics.

## Surfing & Windsurfing

In general, winter is the best surfing season, when swells roll in from the northeast and set up point breaks of 6ft and higher at places such as Hull Bay (p367). It's best to bring your own board, though you can rent equipment at Hull Bay and at Vessup Beach (p369).

The skimboarding community is starting to grow. Check St Thomas-based **Skim Caribbean** ([www.skimprimary.com](http://www.skimprimary.com)) for hot spots.

## BOOKS

Two recent books are *Musings of an Island Girl* by Henrita Barber, which collects essays she wrote as a *VI Daily News* columnist; and *Adrift on a Sea of Blue Light* by Peter Muilenburg, offering graceful tales of life at sea by a long-time St John boat captain.

Birders should check out *A Guide to the Birds of Puerto Rico & the Virgin Islands*, by Herbert Rafaela. Shell collectors should pick up *A Field Guide to Shells: Atlantic and Gulf Coasts and the West Indies* by R Tucker Abbott and Percy A Morris.

## BUSINESS HOURS

General USVIs business hours are listed here. Many places close on Sunday.

**Banks** ☎ 9am to 3pm Monday to Thursday, to 5pm Friday

**Bars & pubs** ☎ noon to midnight

**Government offices** ☎ 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday

**Post offices** ☎ 7:30am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday, 8:30am to noon Saturday

**Restaurants** ☎ breakfast 7am to 11am, brunch 10am-2pm, lunch 11am to 2pm, dinner 5pm to 9pm

**Shops** 9am to 5pm Monday to Saturday

## CHILDREN

The USVIs are a welcoming destination for children, with opportunities for swimming, hiking and sea creature touching at Coral World (p368). Many resorts have children's programs and babysitting services.

**Caribbean Nanny Care** (☎ 473-7500; [www.caribbeannannyservices.com](http://www.caribbeannannyservices.com)) offers babysitting services by trained, professional nannies. They will come to your hotel or take the kids off your hands for about US\$30 per hour (minimum four hours). The group also rents out gear such as car seats, strollers and baby monitors.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

St Thomas and St Croix both have reputations for crime, mostly robbery and petty theft. If

you lock up your belongings and avoid walking alone at night, you should be fine.

Pesky mosquitoes bite throughout the islands, so slather on insect repellent.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

With the exception of those listed here, there are no foreign embassies or consulates in the US Virgin Islands.

**Denmark** (☎ 776-0656; Scandinavian Center, Haven-sight Mall, Bldg 3; Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas)

**Sweden** (☎ 774-6845; 1340 Taarneberg; Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Larger events are listed here; see Festivals & Events sections for individual islands in this chapter for more.

**International Rolex Cup Regatta** (☎ 775-6320; [www.rolexcupregatta.com](http://www.rolexcupregatta.com)) World-class racing boats gather at St Thomas for this three-day event in late March or early April.

**St Thomas Carnival** (☎ 776-3112) Stemming from West African masquerading traditions, the St Thomas Carnival in late April is the second-largest carnival in the Caribbean after the one at Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.

**St John Carnival** (☎ 776-6450) A smaller version of the St Thomas Carnival, held in early July.

**Cruzan Christmas Fiesta** (☎ 773-0495) Puts a West Indies spin on the winter holidays (early December to early January), with pageants, parades and calypso competitions.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Gays and lesbians have been some of the islands' most prominent entrepreneurs and politicians for decades. Sadly, however, the climate of 'don't ask, don't tell' still permeates. Of the three islands, St Croix is the most 'gay friendly,' with Frederiksted the center of gay life, but overall there aren't many structured outlets for meeting. One exception is Sand Castle on the Beach (p382), in Frederiksted.

## HOLIDAYS

Islanders celebrate US public holidays along with local holidays. Banks, schools and government offices are closed, and transportation, museums and other services are on shorter schedules.

**New Year's Day** January 1

**Three Kings Day** (Feast of the Epiphany) January 6

**Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday** Third Monday in January

**Presidents' Day** Third Monday in February

**Holy Thursday & Good Friday** Before Easter

**Easter & Easter Monday** Late March or early April

**Memorial Day** Last Monday in May

**Emancipation Day** July 3 – island slaves were freed on this date in 1873

**Independence Day** (Fourth of July) July 4

**Supplication Day** In July (date varies)

**Labor Day** First Monday in September

**Columbus Day** Second Monday in October

**Liberty Day** November 1

**Veterans' Day** November 11

**Thanksgiving Day** Fourth Thursday in November

**Christmas Day & Boxing Day** December 25 and 26

## INTERNET ACCESS

The US Virgin Islands' main towns have internet cafés, which you'll find listed under the chapter's Information sections. Rates are about US\$3 to US\$5 per half hour. A fair number of hotels also offer free wi-fi access for guests.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Entrée** ([www.entreevi.com](http://www.entreevi.com)) Restaurant reviews throughout the USVIs.

**Gotostcroix.com** ([www.gotostcroix.com](http://www.gotostcroix.com)) Useful trip-planning resource.

**St Croix This Week** ([www.stcroixthisweek.com](http://www.stcroixthisweek.com)) Online version of the free magazine.

**United States Virgin Islands** ([www.usvitourism.vi](http://www.usvitourism.vi)) USVIs Department of Tourism's official website.

**Virgin Islands This Week** ([www.virginislandsthisweek.com](http://www.virginislandsthisweek.com)) Online version of the ubiquitous weekly *St Thomas/St John This Week* magazine.

**Virgin Islands Travel** ([www.usviguide.com](http://www.usviguide.com)) Accommodations, activity and transportation information separated by island.

## MAPS

Many businesses offer free fold-out maps of the various islands and their main towns. The widely available free tourist magazines *St Thomas/St John This Week* and *St Croix This Week* also have maps inside.

## MEDICAL SERVICES

You can receive medical care at facilities in Charlotte Amalie (p364), Cruz Bay (p371) and Christiansted (p378).

## MONEY

The US dollar is used throughout the USVIs. You'll find FirstBank, Scotiabank and Banco Popular in the main towns, with ATMs hooked into worldwide networks (Plus, Cirrus, Exchange etc).

## POST

The USVIs use the same postal system and mail rates as the United States. It costs US\$0.42 to mail a 1oz letter within the country, US\$0.72 to mail it to Canada or Mexico and US\$0.94 for other international destinations.

## TELEPHONE

The USVIs' country code is ☎ 340, but you just dial the seven-digit local number on the islands. To call from North America, dial ☎ 1-340 + the local number. From elsewhere, dial your country's international dialing code + ☎ 340 + the local number. We've included only the seven-digit local number in USVIs listings in this chapter.

Pay phones are easy to find in commercial areas. Local calls cost US\$0.35.

AT&T and Sprint provide the islands' cellular service. Phones that work in the US will work on the islands, often with no extra fee, but check with your provider. As in the US, it's very difficult to find SIM cards.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

The **USVI Department of Tourism** (☎ 800-372-8784; [www.usvitourism.vi](http://www.usvitourism.vi)) posts loads of information on its website. It will also send you hard-copy materials. Or stop in at the visitors center on St Croix or St John.

**St Croix** (☎ 773-1460; 🕒 10am-5pm) In Christiansted's historic Scale House.

**St John** (☎ 776-6450; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) In Cruz Bay, next to the post office.

## TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

The Americans With Disabilities Act holds sway in the USVIs, so accessibility is decent. **Dial-A-Ride** (776-1277) helps with transportation needs on St Thomas. **Gimp on the Go** ([www.gimp.onthego.com/dest5a.htm](http://www.gimp.onthego.com/dest5a.htm)) reviews St John's accessibility. St John's Concordia Eco-Tents (p377) provide well-regarded accessible lodging.

## VISAS

Under the terms of the State Department's Visa Waiver Program, visitors from most

### EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 911
- **Police** ☎ 911
- **Fire** ☎ 911

Western countries do not need a visa to enter the USVIs if they are staying less than 90 days. If you are staying longer, or if your home country does not qualify under the Visa Waiver Program (check [www.unitedstatesvisas.gov](http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov)), you'll need to obtain a B-2 visa (US\$131), which you can get at any US embassy.

## WOMEN TRAVELERS

It's safe for women to travel solo in the USVIs. Just use the same degree of caution you would in a big city at home: be aware of your surroundings and don't walk alone at night in unfamiliar areas.

## WORK

US citizens can work legally in the USVIs without any red tape, but it's difficult for travelers of other nationalities to get legal work here. Foreigners need a work visa, and securing one without a sponsor (meaning an employer) is nearly impossible. Contact your embassy or consulate for more information.

# TRANSPORTATION

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Entering the US Virgin Islands

Americans do not need a passport to visit the US Virgin Islands, but all other nationalities do. When departing the USVIs, Americans will be asked to show photo identification (such as a driver's license) and proof of US citizenship (such as a birth certificate). If traveling to any other Caribbean country (besides Puerto Rico, which, like the USVIs, is a US territory), Americans must have a valid passport in order to re-enter the US.

### Air

The USVIs have two airports.

**Cyril E King Airport** (STI; ☎ 774-5100; [www.viport.com/avifacilities.html](http://www.viport.com/avifacilities.html)) St Thomas' modern facility (with two bare-bones restaurants, a shop and ATM), where most USVIs flights arrive and depart.

**Henry E Rohlsen Airport** (STX; ☎ 778-0589; [www.viport.com/avifacilities.html](http://www.viport.com/avifacilities.html)) St Croix's small facility on the island's southwest side.

Almost all flights to the USVIs from outside the Caribbean either originate in or transit

through the US (including Puerto Rico) via these airlines:

**American Airlines** (☎ 800-433-7300; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com))

Miami, New York, San Juan

**Continental Airlines** (☎ 800-523-3273; [www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com))

Houston, Newark, San Juan

**Delta Airlines** (☎ 800-221-1212; [www.delta.com](http://www.delta.com))

Atlanta, New York

**Northwest Airlines** (☎ 800-225-2525; [www.nwa.com](http://www.nwa.com))

Detroit, San Juan

**Spirit Airlines** (☎ 800-772-7117; [www.spiritair.com](http://www.spiritair.com))

Fort Lauderdale

**United Airlines** (☎ 800-241-6522; [www.united.com](http://www.united.com))

Charlotte, Chicago

**US Airways** (☎ 800-428-4322; [www.usairways.com](http://www.usairways.com))

Charlotte

The following airlines fly to/from the USVIs from within the Caribbean:

**Air Sunshine** (☎ 888-879-8900, 800-327-8900; [www.air sunshine.com](http://www.air sunshine.com))

San Juan

**Cape Air** (☎ 800-352-0714; [www.flycapeair.com](http://www.flycapeair.com))

San Juan

**Liat** (☎ 774-2313; [www.liatairline.com](http://www.liatairline.com))

Antigua

**Seaborne Airlines** (☎ 773-6442, 888-359-8687; [www.seaborneairlines.com](http://www.seaborneairlines.com))

St Thomas

## Sea

### CRUISE SHIP

St Thomas is the most popular cruise ship destination in the Caribbean, with more than 1000 arrivals each year. These ships pull in to the West Indian Company dock in Havensight on the eastern edge of St Thomas Harbor, and to Crown Bay Marina to the west.

See p830 for more information.

### FERRY

#### US Virgin Islands to British Virgin Islands

There are excellent ferry connections linking St Thomas and St John with Tortola, Virgin Gorda and Jost Van Dyke. *St Thomas/St John This Week* magazine prints the full timetables. You must have a valid passport to travel between the USVIs and British Virgin Islands.

Ferries travel several times daily from Charlotte Amalie (St Thomas) to Road Town (Tortola), often via West End (Tortola). Costs are similar (round trip US\$49, 60 minutes); departures are from Charlotte Amalie's Marine Terminal.

**Native Son** (☎ 774-8685; [www.nativesonbvi.com](http://www.nativesonbvi.com))

**Road Town Fast Ferry** (☎ 777-2800; [www.roadtownfastferry.com](http://www.roadtownfastferry.com))

**Smith's Ferry** (☎ 775-7292; [www.smithsferry.com](http://www.smithsferry.com))

Ferries also travel from Red Hook (St Thomas) to the British Virgin Islands. **Inter-Island** (☎ 776-6597) goes to Jost Van Dyke on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (round trip US\$50, 45 minutes); and to Virgin Gorda Thursday and Sunday (round trip US\$60, 75 minutes). Native Son runs between Red Hook and Tortola (West End) four to five times daily (round trip US\$45, 30 minutes). Inter-Island ferries also travel from Cruz Bay (St John) to West End (Tortola) three times daily (round trip US\$45, 30 minutes).

### US Virgin Islands to Puerto Rico

**Transportation Services** (☎ 776-6282) used to operate a ferry twice a month from Charlotte Amalie's waterfront to Fajardo, Puerto Rico (round trip US\$100, two hours). At press time, the service had been discontinued, but it may start up again.

### YACHT

Lots of yachts drift into the USVIs. Many pull into American Yacht Harbor in Red Hook, St Thomas. The bars and restaurants here are good places to enquire about hitching a ride as a crew member.

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

You have two choices for air travel within the USVIs:

**Case Air** (☎ 800-352-0714; www.flycapeair.com) Flies between St Thomas' and St Croix's airports.

**Seaborne Airlines** (☎ 773-6442, 888-359-8687; www.seaborneairlines.com) Flies seaplanes between the downtown harbors of Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas and Christiansted, St Croix (one way US\$85, 25 minutes). Flights depart almost every hour for the brilliant, convenient (no taxis needed!) ride. Be aware there's a baggage restriction of 30lb (16kg) and it costs US\$1 per extra pound.

### Boat

The islands have frequent and inexpensive ferry services. Schedules are printed in the free *St Thomas/St John This Week* magazine; most businesses carry copies.

### ST THOMAS TO ST CROIX

**VI Seatrans** (☎ 776-5494; www.goviseatrans.com; round trip US\$90; 90min) operates a year-round passenger ferry between St Thomas and St Croix. It sails Friday through Monday, twice each day. From St Thomas it departs from Charlotte Amalie's Marine Terminal. From St Croix

it leaves from the Gallows Bay terminal in Christiansted. Look for humpback whales during winter crossings.

### ST THOMAS TO ST JOHN

A ferry departs Red Hook for Cruz Bay (one way US\$5, 20 minutes) at 6:30am and 7:30am, then hourly from 8am to midnight daily. It departs Cruz Bay hourly from 6am to 11pm daily.

The ferry service between Charlotte Amalie and Cruz Bay (one way US\$10, 45 minutes) departs Charlotte Amalie at 9am, 11am, 1pm, 3pm, 4pm and 5:30pm daily, and Cruz Bay at 7:15am, 9:15am, 11:15am, 1:15pm, 2:15pm and 3:45pm daily. In Charlotte Amalie, catch the ferry at the waterfront, at the foot of Raadet's Gade.

**Boyson, Inc** (☎ 776-6294) runs car ferries between Red Hook and Enighed Pond beside Cruz Bay (round trip US\$50, 20 minutes), with sailings almost every hour between 6am and 7pm.

### Bus

**Vitran** (☎ 774-5678) operates air-conditioned buses over the length of St Thomas, St John and St Croix. Fares are US\$1 and buses run daily between 5:30am and 7:30pm (approximately one bus per hour).

### Car

Driving is the most convenient way to get around individual islands, but be prepared for unique driving conditions. First, driving is on the left-hand side of the road, and the steering column is on the left also. You'll see signs reminding you to 'keep your shoulder to the shoulder' and 'stay left!'. Island roads are narrow, steep, twisting and often pot-holed, and stray cows, goats and chickens constantly wander onto them.

Many of the major international car-rental companies operate in the US Virgin Islands, along with plenty of local firms. Most car-rental companies require that, if you rent a car, you must be at least 21, have a major credit card and a valid driver's license. Rental companies have desks at the St Thomas and St Croix airports.

High-season rates begin at about US\$60 per day and can run as high as US\$100, but you'll get a better price for a weekly rental. See the Getting Around section for each island in this chapter for car-rental agencies.



## Taxi

Territorial law requires that taxi drivers carry a government-set rate sheet, and those rates are published in the free *St Thomas/St John This Week* or *St Croix This Week*.

Many taxis are open-air pickup trucks with bench seats and awnings, able to carry 12 or so passengers. To hail one, stand by the side of the road and wave when the vehicle approaches.

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