

## The British Virgin Islands

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**T**he British Virgin Islands embrace 40-odd islands, some no more than just rocks or spits of land in the sea. Only three of the islands are of any significant size: Virgin Gorda (Fat Virgin), Tortola (Dove of Peace), and Jost Van Dyke. These craggy volcanic islands are just 15 minutes by air from St. Thomas; there is also regularly scheduled ferry service between St. Thomas and Tortola.

With its small bays and hidden coves, once havens for pirates, the British Virgin Islands are among the world's loveliest cruising areas. The islands attract those who like to sail, although landlubbers will delight in the beaches. Despite predictions that mass tourism will invade, the islands are still an escapist's paradise. Norman Island is said to have been the prototype for Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Treasure Island*. On Deadman Bay, Blackbeard reputedly marooned 15 pirates and a bottle of rum, giving rise to the well-known ditty.

Even though they lie right near each other and are part of the same archipelago, the British Virgin Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands are as different as Julia Roberts and Dame Judi Dench. U.S. islands like St. Thomas are deep into mega-resort tourism, but in the B.V.I., the pace is much slower and laid-back, and the people seem more welcoming and friendlier. Even the capital, Tortola, seems to exist in a bit of a time capsule.

Most of the resorts on Virgin Gorda are so isolated from each other that you'll feel your hotel has the island to itself. For those who want to be truly remote, there is a scattering of minor hotels on a handful of the smaller islands. Peter Island has the poshest lodgings, and there are modest inns on Jost Van Dyke and Anegada. Some places are so small that you basically get to know all the locals after about a week. With no casinos, no nightlife, no splashy entertainment, and often no TV, what does one do at night? Jost Van Dyke has only 150 souls but six bars. Question answered.

## 1 Essentials

### VISITOR INFORMATION

Before you go, contact the **British Virgin Islands Tourist Board**, 1270 Broadway, Suite 705, New York, NY 10017 (☎ **212/696-0400**). Other branches of the **British Virgin Islands Information Office** are located at 3450 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1202, Los Angeles, CA 90010 (☎ **213/736-8931**), and at 3400 Peachtree Rd. NE, Suite 1735, Lenox Towers, Atlanta, GA 30326 (☎ **404/467-4741**). In the United Kingdom, contact the **B.V.I. Information Office**, 15 Upper Grosvenor St., London W1K 7PS (☎ **020/355-9585**).

The tourist board's official website is [www.bvitouristboard.com](http://www.bvitouristboard.com).

### GETTING THERE

Your gateway to the B.V.I. will most likely be either Tortola or Virgin Gorda. Supplies and services on the other islands are extremely limited.

**BY PLANE** There are no direct flights from North America to Tortola or the other British Virgin Islands, but you can make easy connections from St. Thomas, St. Croix, or San Juan in Puerto Rico. Beef Island, the site of the major airport serving the British Virgin Islands, is connected to Tortola by the Queen Elizabeth Bridge.

**American Eagle** (☎ **800/433-7300** in the U.S.; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)) has four daily flights from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Beef Island. San Juan is serviced by dozens of daily nonstop flights from cities in North America, including Boston, Toronto, New York, Chicago, Miami, and Raleigh-Durham. You can fly **American Airlines** (☎ **800/433-7300**; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)) to St. Thomas, then hop on an American Eagle flight to Tortola. **Air Sunshine** (☎ **800/327-8900** or 284/495-8900; [www.air sunshine.com](http://www.air sunshine.com)) flies from San Juan or St. Thomas to Beef Island and on to Virgin Gorda.

Another choice, if you're on one of Tortola's neighboring islands, is the less reliable **LIAT** (☎ **888/844-5428** within the Caribbean, or 868/624-4727; [www.liatairline.com](http://www.liatairline.com)). This Caribbean carrier makes short hops to Tortola from St. Kitts, Antigua, St. Martin, St. Thomas, and San Juan in small planes not known for their careful scheduling.

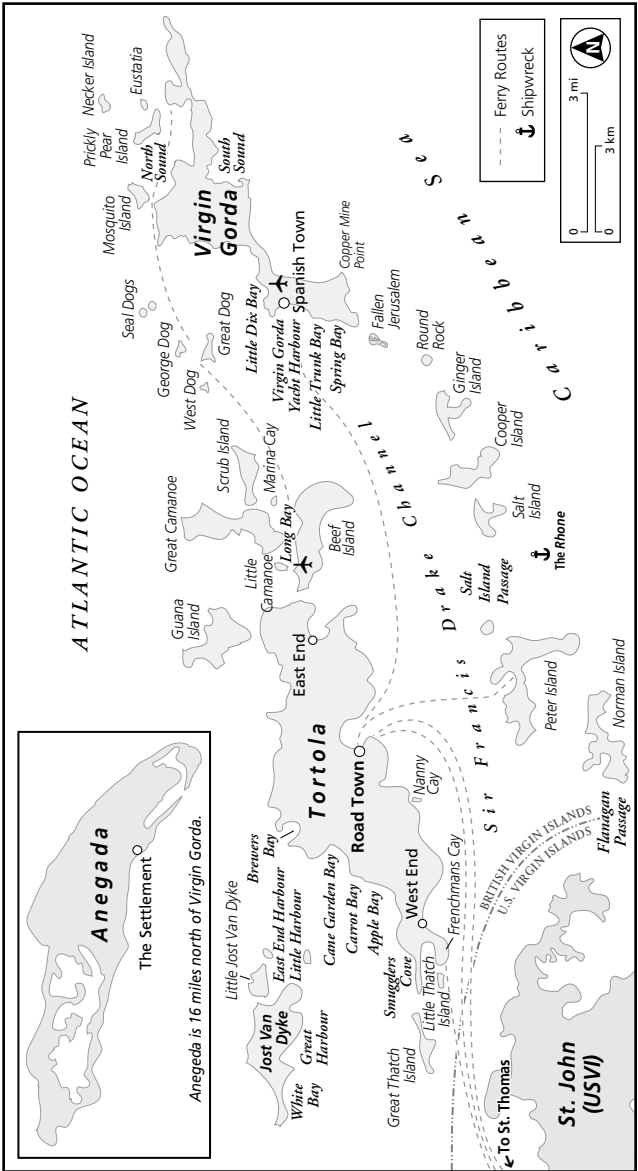
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### *Tips* Currency Note

The British Virgin Islands use the U.S. dollar as their form of currency. British pounds are not accepted.

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# The British Virgin Islands



Flying time to Tortola from San Juan is 30 minutes; from St. Thomas, 15 minutes; and from the most distant of the LIAT hubs (Antigua), 60 minutes. There's also a small airport on Virgin Gorda; see "Essentials," in section 3, "Virgin Gorda," for details.

**BY FERRY** You can travel from Charlotte Amalie (St. Thomas) by public ferry to West End and Road Town on Tortola, a 45-minute voyage. Boats making this run include **Native Son** (☎ 284/495-4617), **Smith's Ferry Service** (☎ 284/495-4495), and **Inter-Island Boat Services** (☎ 284/495-4166). The latter specializes in a somewhat obscure routing—that is, from St. John to the West End on Tortola. One-way and round-trip fares range from \$20 to \$40.

## GETTING AROUND

**BY BOAT** On Tortola, **Smith's Ferry** (☎ 284/495-4495) and **Speedy's Fantasy** (☎ 284/495-5240) operate ferry links to the Virgin Gorda Yacht Club (the trip lasts 30 min.). The **North Sound Express** (☎ 284/495-2138), near the airport on Beef Island, has daily connections to the Bitter End Yacht Club on Virgin Gorda. **Peter Island Boat** (☎ 284/495-2000) also shuttles passengers between Road Town on Tortola and Peter Island at least seven times a day. The ferry cost for both round-trip and one-way is \$15.

**BY CAR, BUS, OR TAXI** There are car-rental agencies on Virgin Gorda and Tortola; taxis also operate on these islands, as well as on some of the smaller ones. Bus service is available on Tortola and Virgin Gorda only.

### **FAST FACTS: The British Virgin Islands**

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**Banks** Banks are generally open Monday to Thursday 9am to 3pm, Friday 9am to 5pm. Most banks have ATMs.

**Business Hours** Most offices are open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Government offices are open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm. Shops are generally open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and Saturday 9am to 1pm.

**Emergencies** If you have a medical emergency, call **Peebles Hospital**, Porter Road, Road Town (☎ 284/494-3497), which has X-ray and laboratory facilities. Your hotel can also put you in touch with the local medical staff. For police and fire emergencies, call ☎ 999.

**Internet Access** Internet access is limited in the B.V.I. If your hotel or resort doesn't provide service, there are some options, mostly in Tortola and Virgin Gorda (see the Fast Facts boxes for these islands).

**Liquor Laws** The legal minimum age for purchasing liquor or drinking alcohol in bars or restaurants is 21. Alcoholic beverages can be sold any day of the week, including Sunday. You can have an open container on the beach, but be careful not to litter or you might be fined.

**Lost Property** Go to the local police station. Sometimes they'll broadcast a notice on the local radio station.

**Mail** Postal rates in the British Virgin Islands are 35¢ for a postcard (airmail) to the United States or Canada, 55¢ for a first-class airmail letter (½ oz.) to the United States or Canada.

**Maps** The best map of the B.V.I. is published by Vigilante and is sold at most bookstores in Road Town on Tortola.

**Newspapers & Magazines** The B.V.I. has no daily newspaper, but the *Island Sun*, published Wednesday and Friday, is a good source of information on local entertainment, as is the *BVI Beacon*, published on Thursday. *Standpoint* is another helpful publication that comes out on Monday and Saturday.

**Police** The main police headquarters is on Waterfront Drive near the ferry docks on Sir Olva Georges Plaza (☎ 284/494-3822) in Tortola. There are also police stations on Virgin Gorda (☎ 284/495-9828) and on Jost Van Dyke (☎ 284/495-9345).

**Safety** Crime barely occurs on many of the remote islands of the B.V.I. chain. The most crime, usually minor robberies, occurs in Tortola, with less theft reported on Virgin Gorda. The usual precautions that a careful person would follow anywhere are advised, of course.

**Taxes** There is no sales tax. A government tax of 7% is imposed on all hotel rooms. A \$20 departure tax is collected from everyone leaving by air, \$5 for those departing by ferry, and \$7 for those departing by cruise ship.

**Telephone** You can call the British Virgins from the U.S. by dialing 1, the area code 284, and the number. From all public phones and from some hotels, you can access MCI by dialing ☎ 800/888-8000. You can reach Sprint at ☎ 800/877-4646 and AT&T at ☎ 800/225-5288.

**Tippling & Service Charges** Most hotels add on a 5% to 15% service charge; ask if it's included when you're initially quoted a price. A 10% service charge is often (but not always) added to restaurant bills; you can leave another 5% if you thought the service was unusually good. You usually don't need to tip taxi drivers, since most own their own cabs, but you can tip 10% if they've been unusually helpful.

**Tourist Office** The headquarters of the B.V.I. Tourist Board is in the center of Road Town, close to the ferry dock, south of Wickhams Cay I (☎ 284/494-3134).

## 2 Tortola ★★

Road Town, on Tortola's southern shore, is the capital of the British Virgin Islands and the site of the Government House and other administrative buildings. Wickhams Cay, a 28-hectare (70-acre) town center project, has brought in a large yacht-chartering business and has transformed the sleepy village into more of a bustling center.

The southern coast of this 62-sq.-km (24-sq.-mile) island, including Road Town, is characterized by rugged mountain peaks. On the northern coast are white-sand beaches, banana and mango trees, and clusters of palms.

### ESSENTIALS

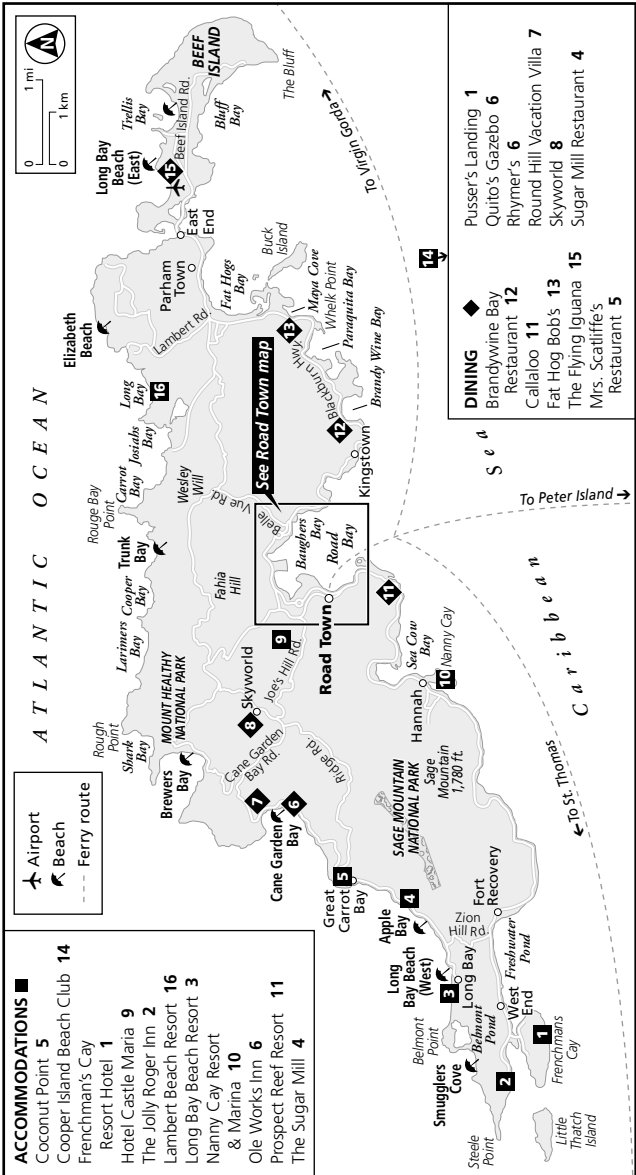
#### GETTING THERE

Close to Tortola's eastern end is **Beef Island**, the site of the main airport for all the British Virgin Islands. This tiny island is connected to Tortola by the one-lane Queen Elizabeth Bridge.

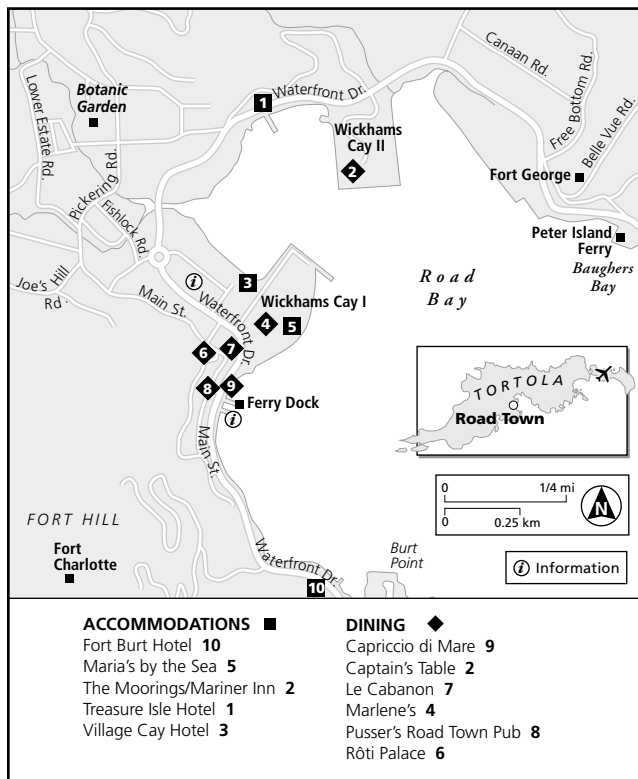
Taxis meet every arriving flight. Government regulations prohibit anyone from renting a car at the airport—visitors must take a taxi to their hotels. The fare from the Beef Island airport to Road Town is \$18 for one to three passengers.

#### GETTING AROUND

**BY TAXI** The best driver we've found on Tortola is O'Dean "Mr. Quick" Chalwell. What he doesn't know about his island isn't worth knowing. Call **Quick's Taxi Service** at ☎ 284/496-7127. For other options in Road Town, dial ☎ 284/494-2322; on Beef Island, ☎ 284/495-1982. Your hotel can also call a taxi for you.



## Road Town



**BY BUS** It's better to use taxis unless your budget is limited. If wish to travel by bus, try **Scato's Bus Service** (☎ 284/494-2365), which operates from the north end of the island to the west end, picking up passengers who hail it down. The bus runs Monday through Friday from 7:30am to dusk; it's most crowded in the morning when the school kids are picked up. Fares are \$1 to \$3.

**BY CAR** A handful of local companies and U.S.-based chains rent cars. **Itgo** (☎ 284/494-5150) is at 1 Wickhams Cay, Road Town; **Avis** (☎ 800/331-1212 in the U.S., or 284/494-2193 on Tortola; www.avis.com) maintains offices opposite police headquarters in Road Town; and **Hertz** (☎ 800/654-3131 in the U.S., or 284/495-4405 on Tortola; www.hertz.com) has offices outside Road Town, on



the island's West End, near the ferry landing dock. Rental companies will usually deliver your car to your hotel. All three companies require a valid driver's license and a temporary B.V.I. driver's license, which the car-rental agency can sell to you for \$10; it's valid for 3 months. Because of the volume of tourism to Tortola, you should reserve a car in advance, especially in winter.

**Remember:** Drive on the left. Roads are pretty well paved, but they're often narrow, windy, and poorly lit, and they have few, if any, lines, so driving at night can be tricky. It's a good idea to rent a taxi to take you to that difficult-to-find beach, restaurant, or bar.

### ***FAST FACTS: Tortola***

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**American Express** The local representative is **Travel Plan, Ltd.**, located at Waterfront Drive (☎ 284/494-2347), in Road Town.

**Banks** Local bank branches include the **Bank of Nova Scotia** (Scotia Bank), Wickhams Cay (☎ 284/494-2526), and **First Caribbean National Bank**, Wickhams Cay (☎ 284/494-2171), both in Road Town. There's also a branch of **First Bank** on Wickhams Cay in Road Town (☎ 284/494-2662). Each has its own ATM.

**Bookstores** The best bookstore is the **National Educational Services Bookstore**, Wickhams Cay, in Road Town (☎ 284/494-3921).

**Cameras & Film** The best place for supplies and film developing is **Bolo's Brothers**, Wickhams Cay, in Road Town (☎ 284/494-2867).

**Dentists** For dental emergencies, contact **Dental Surgery** (☎ 284/494-3474), which is in Road Town behind the police station, off Waterfront Drive.

**Doctors** Go to **Peebles Hospital**, Road Town, Porter Road (☎ 284/494-3497).

**Drugstores** The best pharmacy is **Medicure Pharmacy**, Hodge Building near Road Town Roundabout, Road Town (☎ 284/494-6189).

**Emergencies** Call ☎ 911.

**Hospitals** In Road Town, you can go to **Peebles Hospital**, Porter Road (☎ 284/494-3497), which has X-ray and laboratory facilities.

**Information** The **B.V.I. Tourist Board Office** (☎ 284/494-3134) is in the center of Road Town near the ferry dock, south of Wickhams Cay I. Here you'll find information about hotels, restaurants, tours, and more. Pick up *The Welcome Tourist Guide*, which has a map of the island.

**Internet Access** If there's no Web access at your hotel, here are two places to go for Internet access on Tortola: **Data Pro**, Road Town (☎ 284/494-6633); and **Copyright Systems**, Palmgrove House, behind First Caribbean International Bank (☎ 284/494-5030).

**Laundry** One of the best places is **Freeman's Laundry & Dry Cleaning**, Purcell Estate, Road Town (☎ 284/494-2285).

**Police** The main police headquarters is on Waterfront Drive near the ferry dock on Sir Olva Georges Plaza (☎ 284/494-2945).

## WHERE TO STAY

Many of the island's hotels are small, informal, family-run guesthouses offering the basic amenities. Other lodgings are more elaborate, boasting a full range of resort-related facilities. None of them, however, are as big, splashy, and all-encompassing as the mega-resorts in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and many of the island's repeat visitors like that just fine. Remember all of Tortola's beaches are on the northern shore, so guests staying elsewhere (at Road Town, for example) will have to drive or take a taxi to reach them.

**Note:** All rates given within this chapter are subject to a 10% service charge and a 7% government tax. Rates are usually discounted significantly in summer. The term "MAP" stands for "Modified American Plan"; this means that the hotel provides breakfast and dinner (or lunch if you prefer) for an extra charge.

## IN ROAD TOWN

If you want to be near the center of all the activity (such as there is), opt for a hotel in or around Road Town. You might also want to combine a night or two in Road Town with a few other nights in a more secluded part of the island.

### Expensive

**The Moorings/Mariner Inn** ★ Right in Road Town, close to restaurants, shops, and bars, the Caribbean's most complete yachting resort is outfitted with at least 180 sailing yachts, some worth \$2

million or more. This is an excellent place to rent your own yacht. Situated on a 3 hectare (8-acre) property, the inn was obviously designed with the yachting crowd in mind, offering not only support facilities and services but also shoreside accommodations. This lively spot is the place to go if you want to sample town life rather than tropical seclusion. The rooms are spacious; all suites have kitchenettes, and most of them open onto the water. Obviously, the boaties get more attention here than the landlubbers do. The nearest beach is Cane Garden Bay, about 15 minutes away by car; you'll either have to drive there in a rental car or take a taxi.

Wickhams Cay II (P.O. Box 216), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 800/535-7289 in the U.S., or 284/494-2332. Fax 284/494-1638. 40 units. Winter \$170 double, \$230 suite; off season \$95 double, \$125 suite. Extra person \$15. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor pool; tennis court; watersports equipment rental (including yacht rental); limited room service. *In room:* A/C, kitchenette, fridge, hair dryer.

**Treasure Isle Hotel** ★ This centrally located resort is at the edge of the capital on 6 hectares (15 acres) of hillside overlooking a marina (not on the beach). The core of this attractive hotel is a splashy and colorful open-air bar boasting lovely views. The motel-like, midsize rooms are on two levels along the hillside terraces; a third level is occupied by more elegantly decorated suites at the crest of a hill. Details like local art, tile floors, stucco walls, floral upholstery, and rattan make for an inviting atmosphere in the rooms. Bathrooms are small; only one has a tub; the rest have showers. Adjoining the lounge and pool is an open-air dining room overlooking the harbor. The cuisine is well-respected. The hotel offers a barbecue Saturday nights and full a la carte menu at dinner.

Pasea Estate (P.O. Box 68), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/494-2501. Fax 284/494-2507. www.treasureislehotel.net. 43 units. Winter \$170 double, \$253 suite; off season \$104–\$143 double, \$137–\$209 suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) \$41 per person extra. Extra person \$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; watersports equipment rental; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport (in some), kitchenette (in suites), beverage maker (in suites).

## Moderate

**Fort Burt Hotel** The staff at this inn devote much of their energy to the property's popular pub and restaurant, which is run by the New England Culinary Institute, but they also rent some very pleasant rooms. The hotel was built in 1960 on the ruins of a 17th-century Dutch fort, and is covered with flowering vines. The rooms are set at a higher elevation than any others in Road Town, offering

excellent views from private terraces to the waterfront below. Simple, sun-flooded, and cozy, rooms have a colonial charm and a feeling of relaxed warmth. The suite rentals are a bit expensive, but the regular doubles are spacious enough and have recently been refurbished. There's a pool on the grounds, and guests can walk to Garden Bay Beach or Smuggler's Cove Beach in just 3 minutes.

Fort Burt (P.O. Box 3380), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/494-2587. Fax 284/494-2002. 18 units. Year-round \$135–\$165 double; \$155–\$185 suite with kitchen; \$225–\$370 suite with private pool but no kitchen. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**Maria's by the Sea** In the heart of Road Town, this hotel has a Caribbean charm, boasting little balconies that open onto the sound of lapping waves in the harbor. At night, you can enjoy the harbor lights from your balcony perch. The staff is friendly and helpful. Bedrooms, though fairly minimalist, depend for their allure on the sea breezes that seem to blow constantly. All units include a kitchenette, a balcony, and a small bathroom. It's a 10- to 15-minute drive to the nearest beach. Maria, the owner and manager, serves excellent Caribbean cuisine. From her famous conch chowder to her home-baked rolls, dining here in the evening is a delight.

Road Town (P.O. Box 206), Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/494-2595. Fax 284/494-2420. [www.islandsonline.com/mariasbythesea](http://www.islandsonline.com/mariasbythesea). 40 units. Winter \$130–\$170 double; off season \$110–\$150 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; watersports equipment rental; car-rental desk. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette.

**Village Cay Hotel** ★ Set in the heart of Road Town, this is the most centrally located full-service lodging in the British Virgin Islands. Yachties are often drawn here. The most expensive rooms (called "A" rooms) overlook a marina filled with yachts from around the world; if you're seeking a beachfront location you'll have to look elsewhere. All the rooms are medium-size to spacious and have been recently refurbished, and some have balconies and patios. "A" rooms are better furnished than "B" units, which are smaller but are a good value if you're on a budget. Anything you need is within a 5-minute walk, including ferry service to other islands, secretarial services for business clients, or taxi service to anywhere on Tortola. Sailing and motoring cruises can be booked directly through the hotel.

Wickhams Cay I, Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/494-2771. Fax 284/494-2773. [www.villagecay.com](http://www.villagecay.com). 21 units. Winter \$125–\$190 double, \$225–\$350 suite; off season \$100–\$150 double, \$185–\$285 suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; coin-op laundry; boat trips. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

## AROUND THE REST OF THE ISLAND

### Very Expensive

**Long Bay Beach Resort & Villas** ★ A favorite of travelers since the 1960s, this resort is on a 2km-long (1¼-mile) sandy beach on the north shore, about 10 minutes from West End. It's the only full-service resort on the island, a low-rise complex set in a 21-hectare (52-acre) estate. Complaints about overbuilding and problems with maintenance have marred its once-stellar reputation, but there is still much to enjoy. Accommodations include hillside rooms and studios, plus two- and three-bedroom villas complete with a kitchen, a living area, and a large deck with a gas grill. The smallest and most basic units have simple furnishings, while the deluxe beachfront rooms and cabanas have either balconies or patios that overlook the ocean. All units have ocean views, one four-poster king-size or two queen-size beds, and large bathrooms with tiled showers.

The **Beach Café** is in the ruins of an old sugar mill. The alfresco **Garden Restaurant** offers dinner by reservation only, serving a variety of local and international dishes in a more elegant setting. The cuisine, especially the fresh fish, is among the finest at any hotel on the island, and the wine list is extensive.

P.O. Box 433, Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 800/345-0356 in the U.S. and Canada, or 284/495-4252. Fax 284/495-4677. www.longbay.com. 152 units. Winter \$316–\$470 double, \$420–\$605 suite, \$875 2-bedroom villa; off-season \$225–\$255 double, \$300–\$355 suite, \$490 2-bedroom villa. MAP (breakfast and dinner) \$48 per person extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; outdoor pool; 2 tennis courts; health club; spa; sauna; watersports equipment rental; car-rental desk; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; horseback riding; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen (in villas), wet bar, beverage maker, hair dryer, safe.

**The Sugar Mill** ★ In a lush tropical garden on the site of a 300-year-old sugar mill on the north side of Tortola, this secluded cottage colony sweeps down the hillside to its own beach, with flowers and fruits brightening the grounds. The accommodations are contemporary and well designed, ranging from suites and cottages to studios, all with kitchenettes. The latest addition, the Plantation House suites, evokes traditional Caribbean architecture with fine stonework, breezy porches, and lacy gingerbread detailing. All rooms have twin or king-size beds, private terraces with views, and well-maintained private bathrooms with showers. Four of the units are suitable for families of four. Just steps from the beach, two-bedroom air-conditioned suites have tropical decor and sea views.

Lunch is served down by the beach at Islands, which features Caribbean specialties such as jerk ribs and stuffed crab, plus burgers and salads. Dinner is offered at the **Sugar Mill Restaurant** (p. 178).

Apple Bay (P.O. Box 425), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 800/462-8834 in the U.S., or 284/495-4355. Fax 284/495-4696. www.sugarmillhotel.com. 23 units. Winter \$325 double, \$340 triple, \$355 quad, \$665 2-bedroom villa; off season \$240–\$260 double, \$255–\$275 triple, \$270–\$290 quad, \$520–\$560 2-bedroom villa. MAP available for \$65 per person. AE, MC, V. Closed Aug–Sept. From Road Town, drive west 11km (6¾ miles), turn right (north) over Zion Hill, and turn right at the T-junction opposite Sebastians; Sugar Mill is .8km (½ mile) down the road. Children 11 and under not accepted in winter. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor pool; car rental; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; 1 room for those w/limited mobility; scuba diving; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, TV (in villa and master suite), dataport, kitchenette (in some), fridge, hair dryer, iron.

## Expensive

**Frenchman's Cay Resort Hotel** ⚡ This intimate resort is tucked away at the windward side of Frenchman's Cay, a little island connected by bridge to Tortola. The 5-hectare (12-acre) estate enjoys year-round breezes and views of Sir Francis Drake Channel and the outer Virgins. The individual one- and two-bedroom villas (actually a cluster of condos) are well furnished, each with a shady terrace, full kitchen, dining room, and sitting room. Each two-bedroom villa has two full bathrooms—a vacation in and of itself for families looking to escape the morning bathroom line. Pastel colors and tropical styling make for an inviting aesthetic, and each unit has good linen and a tub/shower combination. A small beach with rocks offshore is best for snorkeling. The Clubhouse Restaurant and lounge bar are in the main pavilion, offering a good Continental and Caribbean menu.

West End (P.O. Box 1054), Tortola, B.V.I. (U.S. address: Box 11156, St. Thomas, VI 00801). ☎ 800/235-4077 in the U.S., 800/463-0199 in Canada, or 284/495-4844. Fax 284/495-4056. www.frenchmans.com. 9 units. Winter \$200–\$285 1-bedroom villa, \$230–\$325 2-bedroom villa; off season \$145–\$230 1-bedroom villa, \$165–\$260 2-bedroom villa. MAP (breakfast and dinner) \$50 per person extra. AE, DISC, MC, V. Closed Sept. From Tortola, cross the bridge to Frenchman's Cay, turn left, and follow the road to the eastern tip of the cay. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tennis court; car rental; babysitting; horseback riding; island tours; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling; windsurfing. *In room:* Dataport, kitchen, beverage maker.

**Lambert Beach Resort** ⚡ *(Finds)* On the remote northeastern section of the island, this is the place for escapists who want isolation. Perched in an amphitheater sloping to the water, the resort opens onto a .8km (½-mile) beach of white sand set against a backdrop of palm trees. To reach the resort, you'll need to rent a car or take a taxi; it's about a 15-minute car ride from Road Town. Once here, you'll find some of the B.V.I.'s best white-sand cove beaches, along with a

large swimming pool. Playground facilities for children make this a family favorite.

The cottage cluster is designed in the Mediterranean style, with accommodations spread across eight one-floor structures under red tile roofing. The preferred rooms open onto the beach, while the others front tropical gardens. Bedrooms are spacious and feature sand-hued walls, stained wood, ceramic tiled floors, and tropical motifs. Each comes with a private bathroom with tub or shower. The cottages are a combination of suites with a living room, veranda, and bedrooms. The food here is Caribbean cuisine with Italian, French, and international overtones. Dishes, boasting market-fresh ingredients, are well-made.

Lambert Bay, East End, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/495-2877. Fax 284/495-2876. www.lambertbeachresort.com. 40 units. Winter \$160–\$245 double, \$410 condo; off season \$115–\$195 double, \$350 condo. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tennis court; watersports equipment; limited room service; reef fishing. *In room:* A/C, minibar.

**Prospect Reef Resort** ★ This is the largest resort in the British Virgin Islands. It rises above a small, private harbor in a sprawling series of two-story concrete buildings scattered over 18 hectares (44 acres) of steeply sloping, landscaped terrain. The panoramic view of Sir Francis Drake Channel from the bedrooms is one of the best anywhere, though there's no beach to speak of.

Each of the resort's buildings contains up to 10 individual accommodations. Initially designed as condominiums, units include studios, town houses, and villas, in addition to guest rooms. All have private balconies or patios; larger units, which are perfect for families, have kitchenettes, living and dining areas, and separate bedrooms or sleeping lofts. Eighty percent of the rooms are air-conditioned; ceiling fans and the trade winds cool the rest of the rooms. Bathrooms are well maintained, and come with showers.

The food at the hotel's **Callaloo** restaurant (p. 177), a combination of Continental specialties and island favorites, was praised by *Gourmet* magazine.

Drake's Hwy. (P.O. Box 104), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 800/356-8937 in the U.S., 800/463-3608 in Canada, or 284/494-3311. Fax 284/494-5595. www.prospectreef.com. 137 units. Winter \$155–\$315 double, \$480 2-bedroom villa for 4; off season \$109–\$250 double, \$320 2-bedroom villa for 4. Ask about packages. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; 2 outdoor pools; 5 tennis courts; fitness center; spa; Jacuzzi; car rental; limited room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; 1 room for those w/limited mobility; dive shop; kayaks; sailing; scuba diving; shuttle to beaches; snorkeling; sport-fishing. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette (in villas), beverage maker, iron, safe.

## Moderate

**Coconut Point** ★ *Finds* Opening onto Carrot Bay, these vacation apartments are light and breezy, with real Caribbean style. All of the comfortable one- or two-bedroom units have a king- or queen-size bed, ceiling fans (a few units also offer air-conditioning), and over-size porches with dining tables. For guests who'd like to barbecue their own meals, some accommodations offer an outdoor grill fueled by gas. The Orchid unit, with its whirlpool, is perfect for honeymooners. The Hibiscus, Bougainvillea, and Frangipani units come with two bedrooms each, making them suitable for families. The property is a 3-minute walk from a small beach.

Carrot Bay (P.O. Box 441), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/495-4892. Fax 284/495-4466. [www.go-bvi.com/coconut\\_point](http://www.go-bvi.com/coconut_point). 5 units. Winter \$1,100–\$1,750 per week; off season \$700–\$1,400 per week. MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; babysitting. *In room:* A/C in some units, TV, kitchen, coffeemaker.

**Cooper Island Beach Club** ★ *Finds* This ultimate escapist's retreat is far from luxurious, but is the perfect place for those who want to experience simplicity. This one-of-a-kind hotel lies on a hilly island on the southern tier of the Sir Francis Drake Channel, about 8km (5 miles) south of Tortola. Snorkelers come here to plunge into the waters at the southern end of Manchioneel Bay, and charter boaters often stop off to eat at the casual beachfront restaurant, which serves marvelous grilled fish and makes a mean conch Creole. Outside of the occasional visits, the island slumbers in the past, with no roads and no electricity.

The midsize units come with a bedroom, a living room, and a kitchen, plus a balcony and a bathroom with a shower that is almost outdoors. Lighting and ceiling fans are powered by 12-volt DC, and there is one 110-volt outlet in each room which can be used to recharge batteries for razors. A freshwater supply is stored in a cistern under each room, and a solar hot water heater is used. All toilets are flushed with seawater. The on-site Sail Caribbean Divers offers snorkeling, kayaks, dinghy rentals, and full scuba services.

Machioneel Bay, Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 800/542-4624 or 413/863-3162. [www.cooper-island.com/hoteld.html](http://www.cooper-island.com/hoteld.html). 12 units. Year-round \$100–\$180 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; watersports equipment rental and dive shop. *In room:* Kitchenettes, no phone.

**Nanny Cay Resort & Marina** ★ Few other resorts cater as aggressively to yacht owners as Nanny Cay, a sprawling, somewhat disorganized resort where great wealth (in the form of hyper-expensive



yachts) lies cheek by jowl with more modest fishing craft. This place competes with Village Cay for the boat owner or sailor; we think Village Cay is superior. Accommodations are in a two-story motel-style building, where windows overlook open-air hallways. Each unit contains a kitchen and comfortable (albeit bland) furniture. The heart and soul of the resort is the 180-slip marina, headquarters to at least three yacht-chartering companies and permanent home to many fishing and pleasure boats. The resort sprawls over 10 hectares (25 acres) of steamy flatlands, adjacent to a saltwater inlet that's favored because of the protection it offers to boats during storms and hurricanes. Don't expect the spit-and-polish of a resort catering to the conventional resort trade. This place is artfully and deliberately raffish, which seems to be the way folks here want to keep it.

Road Town (P.O. Box 281), Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 800/74-CHARMS in the U.S., or 284/494-4895. Fax 284/494-0555. [www.nannycay.com](http://www.nannycay.com). 38 studios. Winter \$160–\$195 double, \$245 suite, \$185–\$220 triple; off season \$100–\$145 double, \$195 suite, \$125–\$170 triple. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tennis court; watersports equipment rental; laundry service; sailing trips. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, hair dryer, coffeemaker.

### **Inexpensive**

**Hotel Castle Maria** This inn sits on a hill overlooking Road Town Harbour, just a few minutes' walk from the center of Road Town. The lush, tropical garden out front is one of the most beautiful in the British Virgin Islands. An orchard produces avocados, mangoes, and bananas, which guests can enjoy. Rooms are basic, but offer reasonable comfort, with balconies, patios, and kitchenettes. The hotel is a 10- to 15-minute taxi ride away from the nearest sands.

Road Town (P.O. Box 206), Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/494-2553. Fax 284/494-2111. [www.islandsonline.com/hotelcastlemaria](http://www.islandsonline.com/hotelcastlemaria). 33 units. Winter \$90–\$95 double, \$115–\$130 triple, \$130–\$140 quad; off season \$85–\$90 double, \$105–\$115 triple, \$120–\$130 quad. MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool; car-rental desk; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette in some units, fridge, coffeemaker.

**The Jolly Roger Inn** This small harborfront hotel is located at Soper's Hole, only 91m (300 ft.) from the dock for the ferry to St. Thomas and St. John. The accommodations are clean and very simple. The small rooms are comfortably and pleasantly decorated with color-coordinated draperies and bedspreads, but only two have a private bathroom. There's no air-conditioning, but the rooms are breezy. The atmosphere is fun, casual, and definitely laid-back. The beach at Smuggler's Cove is a 20- to 30-minute walk over the hill.

West End, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/495-4559. Fax 284/495-4184. www.jollyrogerbvi.com. 5 units, 2 with private bathroom. Winter \$67–\$77 double without bathroom, \$86 double with bathroom, \$78–\$88 triple without bathroom, \$97 triple with bathroom; off season \$50–\$60 double without bathroom, \$60 double with bathroom, \$70–\$80 triple without bathroom, \$80 triple with bathroom. AE, MC, V. Closed early Aug–Oct 1. **Amenities:** Restaurant; watersports equipment rental. *In room:* A/C in some, no phone.

**Ole Works Inn** ★ *(Finds)* This hotel occupies the historic premises of a 300-year-old sugar refinery. It is a far less expensive alternative to the island's other Sugar Mill, although it doesn't have the cuisine or the facilities of the more famed property. Still, it puts you right on the beach. It's inland from Cane Garden Bay, across the road from a beautiful white-sand beach, and has the best musical venue on Tortola—a rustic indoor/outdoor bar called Quito's Gazebo. The rooms are cramped but cozy, outfitted with angular furniture and pastel colors; many have water views, and some are built as hillside units. The bathrooms are all a bit too small. The most romantic unit is the honeymoon suite in the beautiful tower. On the premises is a boutique-style art gallery showing watercolors by local artists and selling souvenirs. There are seven restaurants on the beach. The in-house bar is a magnet for fans of modern calypso music, because it's supervised by the hotel owner Quito (Enriquito) Rymer, who's the most famous recording star ever on Tortola. Quito himself performs Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Cane Garden Bay (P.O. Box 560), Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/495-4837. Fax 284/495-9618. www.quitorymer.com. 18 units. Winter \$95–\$145 double, \$165–\$200 suite; off season \$70–\$120 double, \$140–\$175 suite. Extra person \$35. Children age 11 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, coffeemaker.

## WHERE TO DINE

Most guests dine at their hotels, but if you want to venture out, try one the suggestions below. **Note:** Many of the less expensive restaurants on the island serve rotis, Indian-style turnovers stuffed with such treats as potatoes and peas or curried chicken.

## IN ROAD TOWN

Road Town offers the largest concentration of cheap and authentic Caribbean eateries in the B.V.I.

### Expensive

**Le Cabanon FRENCH** How about a touch of Gaul in the tropics? Islanders and visitors gather at this restaurant and bar to enjoy good

French food and an outdoor patio. Delicious appetizers include Mediterranean fish soup with *rouille*, herring and potato salad, and Camembert flambé with Calvados. Much of the menu is classically inclined, including dishes such as snapper meunière. Especially tasty options include the almond curried Madras chicken, the Chilean sea bass with wasabi sauce, and the yellowfin tuna in a soy and basil sauce. For dessert, finish off with a crème brûlée or the chocolate mousse accurately billed as “heavenly” on the menu.

Waterfront Dr. ☎ **284/494-8660**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$19–\$33. MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm and 7–10pm; Sat 5–10pm.

## Moderate

**Captain’s Table** CONTINENTAL Amid a cluster of palm trees on the marina, the Captain’s Table offers outdoor dining in an inviting atmosphere. For appetizers, you can enjoy selections from gazpacho to escargot. One of the best items is honey-dipped chicken, which is lightly coated with flour and deep-fried to a golden brown, then served with french fries on the side. For a lighter meal, you may want to try the Cajun chicken over a Caesar salad. For more substantial appetites, the menu offers dolphin (not Flipper, but a species of fish), sautéed or grilled, grilled salmon, and lobster. For something unusual, try filet of Jamaican jerk duck.

Wickhams Cay II, Road Town. ☎ **284/494-3885**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$16–\$30. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–3pm and 5–10pm; Sat–Sun 5–9pm.

## Inexpensive

**Capriccio di Mare** ★ ITALIAN Created in a moment of whimsy by the owners of the more upscale Brandywine Bay Restaurant (p. 176), this local favorite is small, casual, and laid-back. It’s the most authentic-looking Italian cafe in the Virgin Islands. At breakfast time, many locals stop in for an Italian pastry along with a cup of cappuccino, or a full breakfast. If it’s evening, you might try the mango Bellini, a variation of the champagne-based cocktail served at Harry’s Bar in Venice. Begin with such appetizers as *piedini* (flour tortillas with various toppings), then move on to a selection from the fresh pastas with succulent sauces, the best pizzas on the island, or the well-stuffed sandwiches. If you arrive on the right night, you might be treated to stuffed Cornish hen with scalloped potatoes. The fresh salads are delicious; we favor the *insalata mista* with large, leafy greens and slices of fresh Parmesan.

Waterfront Dr., Road Town. ☎ **284/494-5369**. Main courses \$9–\$16. MC, V. Mon–Sat 8am–9:30pm.

**Marlene's CARIBBEAN** This centrally located restaurant provides takeout as well as indoor dining. Try the Caribbean pâtés—conch, swordfish, chicken, or beef wrapped in pastry dough, then baked or fried. Other examples of local fare include rotis and curries. You can also order baked chicken, steak, or seafood, including lobster and other shellfish. The desserts are made from scratch.

Wickhams Cay I, Road Town. ☎ 284/494-4634. Breakfast \$2.50–\$5; pâtés \$1.50–\$2.50; main courses \$7–\$12. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–10pm.

**Pusser's Road Town Pub CARIBBEAN/ENGLISH PUB** On the waterfront across from the ferry dock, the original Pusser's serves Caribbean fare, English pub grub, and good pizzas. This place is not as fancy as Pusser's Landing in the West End (p. 179), nor is the food as good, but it's a lot more convenient and has faster service. The complete lunch and dinner menu includes savory English pies (*Gourmet* magazine asked for the recipe for the chicken-and-asparagus pie), and deli-style sandwiches. John Courage ale is on draft, but the drink to order here is the famous Pusser's Rum, the same blend of five West Indian rums that the Royal Navy has served to its men for more than 300 years. Thursday is nickel beer night.

Waterfront Dr. and Main St., Road Town. ☎ 284/494-3897. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$6–\$20. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight.

**Rôti Palace CARIBBEAN** The best rotis in the British Virgin Islands are served here, on the old main street of the island's capital—they're as good as those in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. This is primarily a lunch stop, although it's a good choice for an affordable dinner or a standard breakfast. Choices (other than the famed rotis) include a wide selection of tasty vegetable, local conch, lobster, beef, and chicken dishes, many of which are spicy. Sea snails are a specialty; they're mixed with onions, garlic, and celery, spiced with curry, and served in a butter sauce. Ginger beer, juices, and wines serve as accompaniments to your meal.

Main St., Road Town. ☎ 284/494-4196. Main courses \$8–\$16. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 7am–9:30pm.

## AROUND THE REST OF THE ISLAND

### Expensive

**Brandywine Bay Restaurant** ★★ ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL

On a cobblestone garden terrace along the south shore, overlooking Sir Francis Drake Channel, this is one of Tortola's most elegant and romantic restaurants. Davide Pugliese, the chef, and his wife, Cele, have earned a reputation for their outstanding Florentine fare. The

skillful cooking produces dishes that range from classic to inspired. Davide changes his menu daily, based on the availability of fresh produce. The best dishes include beef carpaccio, roast duck, homemade pasta, his own special calves'-liver dish (the recipe is a secret), and homemade mozzarella with fresh basil and tomatoes. Appropriate dress is required.

Brandywine Estate, Sir Francis Drake Hwy. ☎ **284/495-2301**. Reservations required. Main courses \$25–\$30. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6:30–9:30pm. Closed Aug–Oct. Drive 5km (3 miles) east of Road Town (toward the airport) on South Shore Rd.

**Callaloo** ★ INTERNATIONAL One of the best hotel restaurants on Tortola, this place is romantic at night, especially if it's a balmy evening and the tropical breezes are blowing. It's the kind of cliché Caribbean setting that always works, and the food is quite good, too. The menu is hardly imaginative, but the chefs do well with their limited repertoire. Begin with the coconut prawns or steamed mussels, and don't pass on the house salad, which has a zesty papaya dressing. The best dishes are fresh lobster when available (not as good as the Maine variety, though), pan-fried duck breast with a citrus-flavored spinach sauce, and fresh fish such as tuna, swordfish, or mahimahi. One heavenly special dish is Virgin Gorda swordfish with a tropical fruit salsa and red-pepper essence. For dessert, make it the coconut bread pudding or the Key lime pie. Downstairs is the less expensive **Scuttlebutt Pub**, open for lunch and dinner daily.

In Prospect Reef Resort, Drake's Hwy., Road Town. ☎ **284/494-3311**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$13–\$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–3pm; Thurs–Sun 6–10pm.

**Mrs. Scatliffe's Restaurant** ★ *(Finds)* WEST INDIAN This Tortola mama offers home-cooked meals on the deck of her island home. Some of the vegetables come right from her garden, although others might be from a can. You'll enjoy excellent authentic West Indian dishes: perhaps spicy conch soup followed by curried goat, "old wife" fish (triggerfish, in this case filleted, boiled, and served with onion sauce), or chicken in a coconut shell. Service, usually from an inexperienced teenager, is not exactly efficient.

You may be exposed to Mrs. Scatliffe's gentle preaching of her Christian faith. A Bible reading and a heartfelt rendition of a gospel song sometimes accompany a soft custard dessert.

Carrot Bay. ☎ **284/495-4556**. Reservations required by 5pm. Fixed-price meal \$28–\$35. No credit cards. One seating daily begins 7–8pm.

**Round Hill Vacation Villa** ★ (Finds) CARIBBEAN One of your most memorable meals in Tortola is likely to be eaten with Joycelyn and Allan Rhymer, who will dazzle you with a home-cooked five-course dinner. You'll get good food, made with fresh ingredients, and a warm welcome from the Rhymers. (Mr. Rhymer may even regale you with stories about Jimmy Carter and other luminaries he's met during his hospitality career.) The villa opens onto a panoramic vista over Cane Garden Bay Beach. This is one of the best vantage points for enjoying the sinking sun, so you may want to arrive early to enjoy the view of the sunset.

The menu changes every night based on market availability. Sample dishes include Cornish game hen in a fruit-flavored tropical sauce, poached mahimahi in a delectable garlic-laced lemon-butter sauce, and tender and perfectly roasted prime rib.

You must call for a reservation as early as possible, since this is a small and special place. If you're interested, there is a one-bedroom apartment here that goes for \$750 a week in winter, reduced to \$450 a week off season. The apartment offers a handsomely furnished bedroom with a queen-size bed, along with a sizeable eat-in kitchen and a living room with a TV.

P.O. Box 602, West End, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 284/495-9353. Fax 284/495-4281. [www.islandsonline.com/roundhill](http://www.islandsonline.com/roundhill). Reservations required. Fixed-price 5-course dinner \$40 per person. No credit cards. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Sat at 7pm.

**Skyworld** ★★ INTERNATIONAL Skyworld, one of the best restaurants on the island, continues to be all the rage. On one of Tortola's loftiest peaks, at a breezy 400m (1,312 ft.), it offers views of both the U.S. Virgin Islands and the British Virgin Islands. The restaurant is divided into two sections—a main dining room and a bar. Both sections offer the same menu.

The fresh fish chowder is an island favorite, as are other, oft-changing soups, including one with peaches and coconuts, and another of champagne, coconut, and melons. The fresh fish of the day is your best bet. Recently we enjoyed the oven-baked yellowfin tuna with a tantalizing pistachio-and-sesame-seed crust. Try the island's best Key lime pie or the heavenly cheesecake for dessert.

Ridge Rd., Road Town. ☎ 284/494-3567. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$24–\$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–2:30pm and 5–11pm. Closed Christmas Day.

**Sugar Mill Restaurant** ★ CALIFORNIA/CARIBBEAN This transformed 3-century-old sugar mill is a romantic spot for dining. Colorful works by Haitian painters hang on the stone walls, and copper basins have been planted with flowers. Before going to the

dining room, once part of the old boiling house, visit the open-air bar on a deck that overlooks the sea. Your hosts, the Morgans, know a lot about food and wine. Some of their recipes have been printed in *Gourmet*. One of their most popular creations, published in *Bon Appétit*, is curried banana soup. You might begin with the roasted pepper salad or the especially tasty wild mushroom soup. For a main course, we recommend such dishes as the pan-roasted duck breast served with Asian coleslaw and soba noodles, or the grilled fresh fish with a pineapple pepper salsa. This place also offers accommodations (p. 169).

Apple Bay. ☎ **284/495-4355**. Reservations required. Main courses \$22–\$35. AE, MC, V. Daily 7–8:30pm. Closed Aug–Sept. From Road Town, drive west 11km (6¾ miles), turn right (north) over Zion Hill, and turn right at the T-junction opposite Sebastians; Sugar Mill is .8km (½ mile) down the road.

### **Moderate**

**Fat Hog Bob's** CARIBBEAN/BARBECUE Behind a protective reef at Maya Cove, you can enjoy the best ribs in the B.V.I., at least the equal of some of those served in Georgia and the Carolinas. This place has the look of an American sports bar, except for the covered porch that is sprawled 30m (100 ft.) over the water. You can order from a selection of appetizers such as salt fish cakes and soups (including West Indian pumpkin). The famed barbecued Danish baby back ribs, served at both lunch and dinner, are marinated in Guinness and then perfectly grilled with the chef's secret sauce. They're so tender that the meat literally falls off the bone. If you don't want ribs, there are fat sandwiches at lunch; main courses at night include great catches from Anegada, not only lobster but also game fish, and steaks (including a juicy porterhouse) that will delight the Texan in you. For dessert, the pumpkin cheesecake is an unexpected delight.

Maya Cove, East End. ☎ **284/495-1010**. [www.fathogbobs.com](http://www.fathogbobs.com). Reservations recommended. Main courses \$11–\$19 lunch, \$20–\$45 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm (later if business warrants it).

**Pusser's Landing** CARIBBEAN This Pusser's location, opening onto the water in West End, is better located than the original Pusser's Road Town Pub, which is on the waterfront across from the ferry dock. In this nautical setting, you can enjoy fresh grilled fish of the day cooked to order. Begin with a hearty soup, perhaps pumpkin or freshly-made seafood chowder. Many of the main courses have real island flavor, the most justifiably popular being the jerk chicken Jamaican-style and the grilled chicken breast with fresh pineapple

salsa. A classic is the curried shrimp over rice. Mud pie remains the choice dessert here, but the Key lime pie and mango soufflé beckon as well. Happy hour is daily from 5 to 7pm.

Frenchman's Cay, West End. ☎ 284/495-4554. Reservations required. Main courses \$15–\$45. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

**Quito's Gazebo** ⚡ *(Finds)* CARIBBEAN/INTERNATIONAL  
This restaurant, owned by Quito Rymer, the island's most acclaimed musician, is the most popular of those along the shore of Cane Bay. Quito performs after dinner several nights a week. The restaurant, which is designed like an enlarged gazebo, is set directly on the sands of the beach. Frothy rum-based drinks are the order of the day here (ask for the piña colada or the Bushwacker, made with four different kinds of rum). The food has a true island flavor and a lot of zest. Lunch includes sandwiches, salads, and platters. Evening meals are more elaborate, and might feature dishes such as conch or pumpkin fritters, mahimahi with a wine-butter sauce, a conch dinner with (Callwood) rum sauce, chicken roti, and steamed local mutton served with a sauce of island tomatoes and pepper. On Wednesday night, for only \$15, you can enjoy barbecue ribs, chicken, roti, corn on the cob, and johnnycakes.

Cane Garden Bay. ☎ 284/495-4837. www.quitorymer.com. Main courses \$18–\$40; lunch platters, sandwiches, and salads \$6–\$12. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–6pm; Sat 7am–4pm; bar Tues–Sun 11am–midnight.

## BEACHES

Beaches are rarely crowded on Tortola unless a cruise ship is in port. To get to the sands, rent a car or a jeep, or take a taxi (and don't forget to arrange a time to be picked up).

Tortola's finest beach is **Cane Garden Bay** ⚡, on Cane Garden Bay Road, directly west of Road Town. You'll have to navigate some roller-coaster hills to get there, but these fine white sands, with sheltering palm trees, are among the most popular in the B.V.I., and the lovely bay is many Yachties' favorite. Outfitters here rent Hobie Cats, kayaks, and sailboards. Windsurfing is possible as well. There are some seven places to eat along the beach, plus a handful of bars. Be prepared for crowds in the high season.

Surfers like **Apple Bay**, west of Cane Garden Bay along North Shore Road. The beach isn't big, but that doesn't diminish activity when the surf's up. Conditions are best in January and February. After enjoying the white sands, you can have a drink at the Bomba's Surf-side Shack, a classic dive of a beach bar at the water's edge (p. 185).



**Smugglers Cove** ⚓, known for its tranquillity and for the beauty of its sands, is at the extreme western end of Tortola, opposite the offshore island of Great Thatch, and just north of St. John. It's a lovely crescent of white sand with calm turquoise waters. A favorite with locals, Smugglers Cove is also popular with snorkelers, who explore a world of sea fans, sponges, parrot fish, and elkhorn and brain corals. Beginning snorkelers in particular appreciate the fact that the reef is close to shore. The beach, sometimes called "Lower Belmont Bay," is at the end of bumpy Belmont Road. Once you get here, even if you're a little worse for wear, you'll think the crystal-clear water and the beautiful palm trees are worth the effort.

East of Cane Garden Bay, **Brewers Bay**, accessible via the long, steep Brewers Bay Road, is ideal for snorkelers and surfers. This clean, white-sand beach is a great place to enjoy walks in the early morning or at sunset. Or just sip a rum punch from the beach bar and watch the world go by. There is a campground here if you want to spend the night.

The 2km-long (1¼-mile) white-sand beach at **Long Bay West**, reached along Long Bay Road, is one of the most beautiful in the B.V.I. Joggers run along the water's edge, and spectacular sunsets make this spot perfect for romantic strolls. The Long Bay Beach Resort stands on the northeast side of the beach; many visitors like to book a table at the resort's restaurant overlooking the water.

If you'd like to escape from the crowds at Cane Garden Bay and Brewers Bay, head east along Ridge Road until you come to **Josiah's Bay Beach** on the north coast. This beach lies in the foreground of Buta Mountain. On most occasions we have found it either empty or with only a handful of bathers. The area is ideal for a picnic. If you visit in winter, beware: On many days there's a strong undertow, and there are no lifeguards.

At the very east end of the island, **Long Bay East**, reached along Beef Island Road, is a great spot for swimming. Cross Queen Elizabeth Bridge to reach this 2km-long (1¼-mile) beach with great views and white sands.

## EXPLORING THE ISLAND

**Travel Plan Tours**, Romasco Place, Harbour House (P.O. Box 437), Road Town (☎ 284/494-2872), offers a 3½-hour tour that touches on the natural highlights of Tortola (a minimum of four participants is required). The cost is \$35 per person, with a supplement of \$10 per person if you want to extend the tour with hill climbing in the rainforest. The company also offers 2½-hour **snorkeling tours** for

\$61 per person (with snacks included). A full-day **sailing tour** aboard a catamaran that goes from Tortola to either Peter Island or Norman Island costs \$86 per person; a full-day tour, which goes as far afield as the Baths at Virgin Gorda and includes lunch, costs \$120 per person. And if **deep-sea fishing** appeals to you, you can go for a half-day excursion, with equipment, for four fishermen and up to two “nonfishing observers” for \$783, or for a full-day excursion for \$1,083.

A **taxi tour** of the island costs \$45 for two passengers for 2 hours, or \$60 for 3 hours. To call a taxi in Road Town, dial ☎ **284/494-2322**; on Beef Island, ☎ **284/495-1982**.

### **The Wreck of the *Rhone* & Other Dive Sites**

The site in the British Virgin Islands that lures divers over from St. Thomas is **the wreck of the HMS *Rhone*** (★), which sank in 1867 near the western point of Salt Island. *Skin Diver* magazine called it “the world’s most fantastic shipwreck dive.” The wreck teems with marine life and coral formations, and was featured in the 1977 movie *The Deep*.

Although it’s no *Rhone*, ***Chikuzen*** is another intriguing site off Tortola. It’s an 81m (266-ft.) steel-hulled refrigerator ship, which sank off the island’s east end in 1981. The hull, still intact under about 24m (79 ft.) of water, is now home to a vast array of tropical fish, including yellowtail, barracuda, black-tip sharks, octopus, and drum fish.

South of Ginger Island, ***Alice in Wonderland*** is a deep-dive site with a wall that begins at around 3.6m (12 ft.) and slopes gently to 30m (98 ft.). It abounds with marine life such as lobsters, crabs, rainbow-hued fan coral, and mammoth mushroom-shaped coral. ***Spyglass Wall*** is another offshore dive site dropping to a sandy bottom and filled with seafans and large coral heads. The drop is from 3m (10 ft.) to 18m (60 ft.). Divers here should keep an eye out for tarpon, eagle rays, and stingrays.

**Blue Waters Divers**, Road Town (☎ **284/494-2847**), is a PADI outfitter that offers various dive packages, including one to the wreck of the *Rhone*. A resort course costs \$95; a PADI open-water certification is \$360.

No visit to Tortola is complete without a trip to **Sage Mountain National Park** (☞), rising to an elevation of 534m (1,751 ft.). Here, you'll find traces of a primeval rainforest, and you can enjoy a picnic while overlooking neighboring islets and cays. Covering 37 hectares (91 acres), the park protects the remnants of Tortola's original forests (those that were not burned or cleared during the island's plantation era). Go west from Road Town to reach the mountain. Before you head out, stop by the tourist office and pick up the brochure *Sage Mountain National Park*. It has a location map, directions to the forest and parking, and an outline of the main trails through the park. From the parking lot, a trail leads to the main park entrance. The two main trails are the Rainforest Trail and the Mahogany Forest Trail.

**Shadow's Ranch**, Todman's Estate (☎ 284/494-2262), offers horseback rides through the national park or down to the shores of Cane Garden Bay. Call for details daily from 9am to 4pm. The cost is from \$60 per hour.

## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

**SNORKELING** A good beach for snorkeling is **Brewers Bay** (p. 181). Snorkelers should also consider heading to the islet of **Marina Cay**, or taking an excursion to **Cooper Island**, across the Sir Francis Drake Channel. **Underwater Safaris** leads expeditions to both sites.

The best choice for a snorkeling trip is one with **High Sea Adventures** (☎ 284/495-1300), led by one of Tortola's best charter captains, Captain Roy. The excursions are designed to make any level of swimmer feel comfortable. Capt. Roy patiently spends his time in the water pointing out the fascinating underwater plants, coral, and countless species of colorful marine life. Make sure to ask him about the parrotfish "poop" (it's how coral is made). Equipment rental is included, or you can bring your own. Capt. Roy even throws in his special tropical punch on the way home. The company expanded this year to include day trips to Anegada (p. 24).

**YACHT CHARTERS** Tortola boasts the largest fleet of bareboat sailing charters in the world. The best place to get outfitted is the **Moorings**, Wickhams Cay (☎ 888/535-7289 or 888/952-8420 in the U.S. and Canada, or 284/494-2332 in the British Virgin Islands; www.moorings.com). This outfit, along with a handful of others, makes the British Virgins the cruising capital of the world. You can choose from a fleet of sailing yachts, which can accommodate up to five couples in comfort and style. Depending on your nautical

knowledge and skills, you can arrange a bareboat rental (with no crew) or a fully crewed rental with a skipper, a staff, and a cook. Boats come equipped with a portable barbecue, snorkeling gear, a dinghy, linens, and galley equipment. The Moorings has an experienced staff of mechanics, electricians, riggers, and cleaners. If you're going out on your own, you'll get a thorough briefing session on Virgin Island waters and anchorages.

If you'd like sailing lessons, consider **Steve Colgate's Offshore Sailing School** (☎ 800/221-4326), which offer courses in seamanship year-round.

## SHOPPING

Most of Tortola's shops are on Road Town's Main Street. Unfortunately, the British Virgins have no duty-free shopping. British goods are imported without duty, though, and you can find some good buys among these items, especially in English china. In general, store hours are Monday to Saturday from 9am to 4pm.

You might start your shopping expedition at **Crafts Alive**, an open-air market lying in the center of Road Town and impossible to miss. It consists of a series of old-fashioned West Indian-style buildings that are stocked with local crafts and locally made goods, ranging from Caribbean dolls to straw hats, and from crocheted doilies to pottery to the inevitable B.V.I. T-shirts.

**Sunny Caribbee Herb and Spice Company**, Main Street, Road Town (☎ 284/494-2178), in an old West Indian building, was the first hotel on Tortola. It's now a shop specializing in Caribbean spices, seasonings, teas, condiments, and handicrafts. With an aroma of spices permeating the air, this factory is an attraction in itself. You can buy two famous specialties here: the West Indian hangover cure, and the Arawak love potion. A Caribbean cosmetics collection, *Sunsations*, includes herbal bath gels, island perfume, and sunscreens. There's a daily sampling of island products—perhaps tea, coffee, sauces, or dips.

**Caribbean Fine Arts Ltd.**, Main Street, Road Town (☎ 284/494-4240), sells original watercolors and oils, limited-edition serigraphs and sepia photographs, and pottery and primitives.

**Samarkand**, Main Street, Road Town (☎ 284/494-6415), is an unusually good bet for jewelry and other items. Look for an intriguing selection of bracelets, pins, pendants in both silver and gold, and pierced earrings. Caribbean motifs such as palms and sea birds often appear in the designs of the jewelry.

Bargain hunters gravitate to **Sea Urchin**, Mill Mall, Road Town (☎ 284/494-4108), for print shirts and shorts, T-shirts, bathing suits, and sandals.

**Pusser's Company Store**, Main Street and Waterfront Road, Road Town (☎ 284/494-2467), has gourmet food items including meats, spices, fish, and a nice selection of wines. Pusser's Rum is one of the best-selling items here.

**Arawak**, on the dock at Nanny Cay (☎ 284/494-5240), is known for its household furnishings, such as placemats and candleholders, but also sells sporty clothing for adults and kids, along with a selection of gifts and souvenirs.

**Flamboyance**, Waterfront Drive (☎ 284/494-4099), is the best place to shop for perfume and upscale cosmetics.

If you've rented a villa or condo, or even if your accommodations have a kitchenette, consider a visit to **Ample Hamper**, Villa Cay Marina, Wickham's Cay I, Road Town (☎ 284/494-2494). This outlet stocks some of the best packaged food and bottled wines on the island. It also offers fresh fruit and a tasty selection of cheeses.

Philatelists from all over flock to the **British Virgin Islands Post office**, Main Street, Road Town (☎ 284/494-3701, ext. 4996), for its exquisite, unusual stamps in beautiful designs. Though the stamps carry U.S. monetary designations, they can only be used in the B.V.I.

## TORTOLA AFTER DARK

Ask around to find out which hotel might have entertainment on any given evening. Steel bands and fungi or scratch bands (African Caribbean musicians who improvise on locally available instruments) appear regularly, and nonresidents are usually welcome. Pick up a copy of *Limin' Times*, an entertainment magazine that lists what's happening locally; it's usually available at hotels.

**Bomba's Surfside Shack**, Cappoon's Bay (☎ 284/495-4148) is the island's oldest, most memorable hangout, on the beach near the West End. It attracts an uninhibited crowd. It's covered with Day-Glo graffiti, and odds and ends of plywood, driftwood, and old tires. Despite its makeshift appearance, the shack has the sound system to create a really great party. Every month (dates vary), Bomba's stages a full-moon party, with free house tea spiked with hallucinogenic mushrooms. (The tea is free because it's illegal to sell it.) This place is also wild on Wednesday and Sunday nights, when there's live music and an \$8 all-you-can-eat barbecue. It's open daily from 10am to midnight (or later, depending on business).

The bar at the **Moorings/Mariner Inn**, Wickhams Cay (☎ 888/535-7289 or 888/952-8420 in the U.S. and Canada, or 284/494-2332 in the British Virgin Islands), is the preferred watering hole for upscale yacht owners. Interestingly, drink prices are low. Open to a view of its own marina, and bathed in a dim and flattering light, this place has a relaxed atmosphere. Another popular choice is the **Spyglass Bar**, in the Treasure Isle Hotel, Road Town (☎ 284/494-2501), where a sunken bar on a terrace overlooks the pool and faraway marina facilities of this popular hotel.

Other places worth a stop on a bar-hopping jaunt include the **Jolly Roger**, West End (☎ 284/495-4559), where you can hear local or sometimes American bands playing everything from reggae to blues. In the same area, visit **Stanley's Welcome Bar**, Cane Garden Bay (☎ 284/495-9424), where a rowdy frat-boy crowd gathers to drink, talk, and drink some more. Finally, check out **Sebastians**, Apple Bay (☎ 284/495-4212), especially on Sunday, when you can dance to live music under the stars, at least in winter.

**Rhymer's**, on the popular stretch of beach at Cane Garden Bay (☎ 284/495-4639), serves up cold beer or tropical rum concoctions, along with a casual menu of ribs, conch chowder, and more. The beach bar and restaurant is open daily 8am to 9pm.

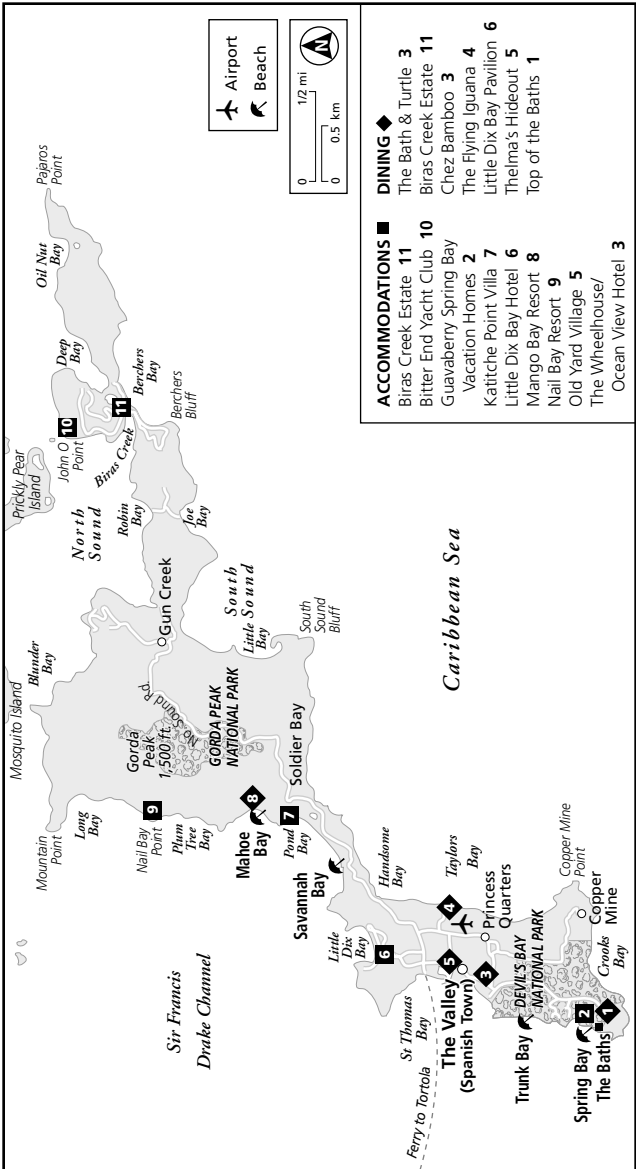
The joint is jumping at the **Road House**, West End (☎ 284/494-1667), on Friday to Sunday nights. This place is usually packed with locals and a smattering of visitors who come to listen to a DJ or to live salsa and reggae.

### 3 Virgin Gorda

The second-largest island in the British cluster, Virgin Gorda is 16km (10 miles) long and 3.2km (2 miles) wide, with a population of some 1,400 people. It's 19km (12 miles) east of Tortola and 41km (26 miles) east of St. Thomas.

In 1493, on his second voyage to the New World, Columbus named the island Virgin Gorda, or "Fat Virgin," because the mountain on it looked (in his opinion) like a protruding stomach.

Virgin Gorda was a fairly desolate agricultural community until Laurance Rockefeller established the resort of Little Dix in the early 1960s. He envisioned a "wilderness beach," where privacy and solitude reigned. Other major hotels followed in the wake of Little Dix, but privacy and solitude still reign supreme.



## ESSENTIALS

### GETTING THERE

**BY PLANE** You can get to Virgin Gorda by air via St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. **Air St. Thomas** (☎ 800/522-3084 or 340/776-2722) flies to Virgin Gorda Monday to Saturday from St. Thomas. A one-way trip (40 min.) costs \$83.

**BY BOAT** **Speedy's Fantasy** (☎ 284/495-5240) operates a ferry service between Road Town, on Tortola, and Virgin Gorda. Monday through Saturday, four ferries a day leave from Road Town; three ferries make the trip on Sunday. The cost is \$15 one-way or \$20 round-trip. There is also service from St. Thomas to Virgin Gorda three times a week (on Tues, Thurs, and Sat), costing \$35 one-way or \$60 round-trip.

You'll also find that the more luxurious resorts have their own boats to take you from the airport on Beef Island to Virgin Gorda.

### GETTING AROUND

**BY BUS** Independently operated open-sided **safari buses** run along the main road. Holding up to 14 passengers, these buses charge upwards from \$3 to \$4 per person to transport a passenger, say, from the Valley to the Baths.

**BY CAR** If you'd like to rent a car, try one of the local firms, including **Mahogany Rentals**, The Valley, Spanish Town (☎ 284/495-5469), across from the yacht harbor. This company has the least expensive rentals on the island, beginning at around \$55 daily for a Suzuki Sidekick. Road conditions on Virgin Gorda range from good to extremely poor. **Remember:** Drive on the left.

An aerial view of the island shows what looks like three bulky masses connected by two very narrow isthmuses. The most northeasterly of these three masses (which contains two of the most interesting hotels) is not even accessible by road at all, requiring ferryboat transit from the more accessible parts of the island.

One possibility for exploring Virgin Gorda by car is to drive from the southwest to the northeast along the island's rocky and meandering spine. This route will take you to the **Baths** (in the extreme southeast), **Spanish Harbour** (near the middle), and eventually, after skirting the mountainous edges of **Gorda Peak**, to the most northwesterly tip of the island's road system, near **North Sound**. Here, a mini-armada of infrequently scheduled ferryboats departs and arrives from Biras Creek and the Bitter End Yacht Club.



## ***FAST FACTS: Virgin Gorda***

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**American Express** The local American Express representative is **Travel Plan**, Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour (☎ 284/494-5586).

**Banks** **First Caribbean Bank** (☎ 284/495-5217) is located in Spanish Town at the Virgin Gorda Shopping Centre. It has the only ATM on the island.

**Cameras & Film** Try **Kysk Tropix**, Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour (☎ 284/495-5636), open daily 9:30am to 6pm.

**Dentists & Doctors** Contact **Medicure Health Center** at Spanish Town (☎ 284/495-5479).

**Drugstore** Go to **Island Drug Centre** at Spanish Town (☎ 284/495-5449).

**Internet Access** Go to the **Chandlery**, Yacht Harbour Marina (☎ 284/495-5628), where the cost is \$5 for the first 10 minutes, 50¢ per minute thereafter. You can also pay a flat fee of \$20 per hour.

**Laundry** **Stevens Laundry & Dry Cleaning**, near the Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour (☎ 284/495-5525), is open daily 8am to noon and 1 to 9pm.

**Police** There is a station in the Valley at Spanish Town (☎ 284/495-7584).

**Tourist Information** The tourist office is in Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbor, Spanish Town (☎ 284/495-5182).

## **WHERE TO STAY**

The best agency for a villa rental is **Virgin Gorda Villa Rentals Ltd.**, P.O. Box 63, Leverick Bay, Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. (☎ 284/495-7421; [www.virgingordabvi.com](http://www.virgingordabvi.com)). They manage villas throughout the island, most of which are quite expensive. A 5-night minimum stay is required in the off season, and a 7-night minimum is requested in winter. The cheapest weekly rentals in winter are around \$833 per week, dropping to \$714 per week during off season.

Remember that all accommodations rates given within this chapter are subject to a 12% service charge and a 7% government tax.

**VERY EXPENSIVE**

**Biras Creek Estate** ★★ Stay at this sophisticated, relaxing hide-away if you want to retreat from the world. This private, romantic resort is the classiest place on the island—Bitter End is more family-oriented, and Little Dix Bay more of a conventional resort. It stands at the northern end of Virgin Gorda like a hilltop fortress, opening onto the ocean. On a 60-hectare (148-acre) estate with its own marina, it occupies a narrow neck of land flanked by the sea on three sides. All the attractive, tropically decorated units have well-furnished bedrooms and private patios. Some have king-size beds, plus spacious bathrooms with inviting garden showers. There are no TVs in the rooms, but you do get such luxuries as oceanview verandas. Guests get their own bikes for their stay, and there are lots of hiking trails near the property. The hotel restaurant and open-air bar are quietly elegant, and there's always a table with a view. The food has won high praise, and the wine list is excellent. A barbecued lunch is often served on the beach.

North Sound (P.O. Box 54), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ☎ 800/223-1108 in the U.S., or 284/494-3555. Fax 284/494-3557. www.biras.com. 31 units. Winter \$810–\$1,100 double, \$1,710 suite for 4; off season \$585–\$885 double, \$1,185 suite for 4. Rates include all meals. Ask about packages. AE, MC, V. Take the private motor launch from the Beef Island airport, \$160 per person round-trip. No children under age 8. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor pool; 2 lit tennis courts; fitness center; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; bikes; free beach trips; Hobie Cats; kayaks; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; taxi service to launch. *In room:* A/C, dataport, fridge, beverage maker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Bitter End Yacht Club** ★★ This place is the liveliest of the B.V.I. resorts, and is better equipped than the more exclusive Biras Creek. It's the best sailing and diving complex in the British chain, opening onto one of the most unspoiled, secluded deep-water harbors in the Caribbean. Guests have unlimited use of the resort's million-dollar fleet and a complimentary introductory course at the Nick Trotter Sailing and Windsurfing School. The Bitter End offers an informal yet elegant experience in either a hillside chalet or a well-appointed beachfront or hillside villa overlooking the sound. Most units have varnished hardwood floors, sliding-glass doors, and wicker furnishings. All villas have two twins, two queen-size, or a king-size bed, plus a large dressing area and a shower with sea views.

For something novel, you can stay aboard one of the 9m (30-ft.) yachts, yours to sail, complete with dockage and daily maid service, meals in the Yacht Club dining room, and overnight provisions. Each yacht has a shower and can accommodate four comfortably.

First-rate meals are available in the Clubhouse Steak and Seafood Grille, the English Carvery, and the Pub, and a steel drum or reggae band often provides entertainment.

John O Point, North Sound (P.O. Box 46), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. © 800/872-2392 in the U.S. for reservations, or 284/494-2746. Fax 284/494-4756. www.beyc.com. 85 units, 4 yachts. Winter (double occupancy) \$630–\$760 beachfront villa, suite, yacht, or hillside villa; off season (double occupancy) \$465–\$490 all units. Rates include all meals. AE, MC, V. Take the private ferry from the Beef Island airport, \$25 per person one-way. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; pub; outdoor pool; fitness center; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; boat trips to nearby cays; Boston whalers; scuba diving; snorkeling; sport-fishing; Sunfish sailing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV (available upon request), fridge, beverage maker.

**Katitche Point Greathouse** ★★ ★ *Finds* Designed by British architect Michael Helm, this luxurious, spacious “greathouse” serves the needs of the most discerning travelers. Affording total privacy, it can only be rented as a complete villa for up to 13 people, with more than 185 sq. m (2,000 sq. ft.) of living space. Sometimes 6 couples or one family or even two families share the villa like a first-class commune. This luxury vacation spot comprises a pool, four suites, and one master bedroom, all lying just above the panoramic sweep of Mahoe Bay and its beach. The main structure of the villa is shaped like a pyramid, rising three floors. Each bedroom comes with its own bathroom with shower plus a private veranda opening onto sweeping views. All four suites are identical in size and furnishings, while the master bedroom is decorated differently. All the beds are made of handcrafted teak, and are furnished with a king-size, anti-allergic mattress. A steel ladder leads to the tallest point of the villa, a “Crow’s Nest” at the top of the pyramid on the third level.

Plum Bay Rd., The Valley, Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. © 284/495-5672. Fax 284/495-5674. www.katitchepoint.com. 5 units. Winter 4 suites \$10,925 weekly, 4 villas and master suite \$14,950 weekly; off season 4 villas \$12,400 weekly, 4 villas and master suite \$17,500 weekly. Additional supplement for those who wish to also rent the master bedroom. MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool; watersports equipment; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

**Little Dix Bay Hotel** ★★ ★ *Kids* This palace of low-key luxury is scattered along a .8km (½-mile) crescent-shaped, white-sand beach and private bay, on a 200-hectare (494-acre) preserve. Many guests find this resort too pricey and stuffy; we ourselves prefer the more casual elegance of Biras Creek Estate and the Bitter End Yacht Club, though Little Dix Bay does have an undeniably lovely setting, fine service, and a quiet elegance.

All rooms are surrounded by forest, and boast private terraces with views of the sea or gardens. Trade winds come through louvers and screens, and units have ceiling fans and air-conditioning. Some units are two-story rondavels (like Tiki huts) raised on stilts to form their own breezeways. Accommodations are roomy, airy, and decorated with tropical flair; each has a smart private bathroom with shower stall. All guest rooms have been renovated. The new furnishings and fabrics evoke Southeast Asia—beautiful wicker or reed furniture, bamboo beds, Balinese boxes and baskets, and ceramic objets d'art. The hotel has added two villas on an isolated stretch of white beach, each with dazzling white interiors and alfresco dining pavilions.

1km (2/5 mile) north of Spanish Town (P.O. Box 70), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ☎ **888/767-3966** in the U.S., or 284/495-5555. Fax 284/495-5661. [www.littledixbay.com](http://www.littledixbay.com). 100 units. Winter \$625–\$825 double, \$1,800 suite; off season \$325–\$595 double, from \$900 suite. MAP (breakfast and dinner) \$90 per person extra. Extra person \$75. AE, DC, MC, V. Take the private ferry from the Beef Island airport, \$75 per person round-trip. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 2 bars; 7 tennis courts; fitness center; sauna; children's programs; limited room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; deep-sea fishing; island tours; jeep rental; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; Sunfish sailboats; water-skiing. *In room:* A/C, fridge, iron, safe.

## EXPENSIVE

**Nail Bay Resort** ★ Near Gorda Peak National Park, and a short walk from a trio of usually-deserted beaches, this resort enjoys an idyllic position. You can enjoy some of the best sunset views of Sir Francis Drake Channel and the Dog Islands from this 59-hectare (146-acre) site. All the units are comfortable and tastefully furnished, and each has a bathroom containing a shower stall. Accommodations options are wide ranging, from deluxe bedrooms to suites to apartments to villas. The villa community has a core of a dozen units in two structures on a hillside, with sitting areas amid old sugar mill ruins. The most modest units are hotel-style bedrooms in the main building. The best accommodations are the four estate villas—Sunset Watch, Mystic Water, Island Spice, and Island Dream.

At night, Nail Bay evokes a luxury property in Asia, its landscaping highlighted by meandering stone walkways. One devotee told us that when she found the resort, it had the “terra-ultima exclusivity of Mustique, without that island’s elitism.”

Nail Bay (P.O. Box 69), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ☎ **800/871-3551** in the U.S., 800/487-1839 in Canada, or 284/494-8000. Fax 284/495-5875. [www.nailbay.com](http://www.nailbay.com). Winter \$125–\$250 double; off season \$99–\$175 double. AE, DISC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; swim-up bar; outdoor pool; lit tennis court; Jacuzzi; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling; water skiing; wind-surfing. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen, beverage maker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Old Yard Village** ★★ Under the name of Olde Yard Inn, this was the coziest and most intimate B&B in the B.V.I. But the Olde Yard Inn is no longer. Owner Carol Kaufman has entered the 21st century with some of the most up-to-date accommodations on the island—a choice of luxury studios, one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments, and two-bedroom town houses ranging from small to spacious. (All accommodations are non-smoking). Every bedroom comes with a private bathroom with tub or shower. The top-floor units have the most expansive ocean views. Wide, breezy porches on each unit are another allure. Surrounded by foliage, the complex faces the ocean. The nearest and best beach is at Savannah Bay, a 1.6km (1-mile) drive away. On-site is **La Brasserie**, serving Continental meals, and a commissary where you can buy groceries.

The Valley, Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ☎ 284/495-5544. Fax 284/495-5986. www.oldeyardvillage.com. 26 units. Winter (minimum 3 nights): \$266 studio, \$295 1-bedroom, \$328–\$358 2-bedroom, \$410 3-bedroom; off season (2 night minimum stay): \$210 studio, \$240 1-bedroom, \$270–\$300 2-bedroom, \$350 3-bedroom. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; 2 tennis courts; fitness center; in-room massage; babysitting; coin-operated laundry; 1 room for those w/limited mobility room; playground; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## MODERATE

**Guavaberry Spring Bay Vacation Homes** ★ Staying in one of these hexagonal, white-roofed redwood houses, all of which are built on stilts, is like living in a tree house. Screened and louvered walls let in sea breezes. Each unique home, available for daily or weekly rental, has one or two bedrooms; all have full kitchens, dining areas, and private bathrooms with showers. Each also has an elevated sun deck overlooking Sir Francis Drake Passage. Within a few minutes of the cottage colony is the beach at Spring Bay, and the Baths, with its excellent sandy beach, is also nearby. The Yacht Harbour Shopping Centre is 2km (1¼ miles) away.

Spring Bay (P.O. Box 20), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ☎ 284/495-5227. Fax 284/495-5283. www.guavaberryspringbay.com. 18 units. Winter \$195 1-bedroom house, \$265 2-bedroom house; off season \$130 1-bedroom house, \$185 2-bedroom house. Extra person \$17–\$22. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Babysitting; fishing; sailing; scuba diving; snorkeling; boats; jeep rental; shop. *In room:* Kitchen, fridge, beverage maker, no phone.

**Mango Bay Resort** ★ *Value* This well-designed compound of eight white-sided villas is on lushly landscaped grounds overlooking the scattered islets of Drake's Channel, on the island's western shore. You get good value for your money here. The accommodations are

the most adaptable on the island—doors can be locked or unlocked to divide each villa into as many as four independent units. Costs vary with the proximity of your unit to the nearby beach. Interiors are stylish yet simple, often dominated by the same turquoise as the seascape in front of you. Daily maid service is included. You can cook in, or dine on-site at **Giorgio's Table** (see "Where to Dine," below), which is quite good and serves three meals a day.

Mahoe Bay (P.O. Box 1062), Virgin Gorda, B.V.I. ☎ 800/223-6510 in the U.S., 800/424-5500 in Canada, or 284/495-5672. Fax 284/495-5674. www.mangobayresort.com. 15 units. Winter \$132–\$187 studio, \$275 1-bedroom unit, \$363 2-bedroom unit, \$275 beachfront suite, \$700 2-bedroom beachfront villa; off season \$109–\$143 studio, \$197 1-bedroom unit, \$259 2-bedroom unit, \$197 beachfront suite, \$510 2-bedroom beachfront villa. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; nonsmoking rooms; kayaks; sailing; snorkeling. *In room:* A/C, kitchen.

## INEXPENSIVE

**The Wheelhouse/Ocean View Hotel** This cinder-block building is definitely no-frills, although it is conveniently located near a shopping center and the Virgin Gorda Marina, and only a 15-minute walk from the beach. The rooms are clean and simply furnished, often done in pastels with two single beds or a double bed. All are equipped with a small bathroom. Children are welcome, and babysitting can be arranged. The rooms are on the second floor, with a long porch front and back, and downstairs is an inexpensive restaurant. There's also a garden in back.

Spanish Town, across from the marina. ☎ 284/495-5230. 12 units. Winter \$85 double; off season \$70 double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV.

## WHERE TO DINE

### EXPENSIVE

**Biras Creek Estate** ★★ INTERNATIONAL With even better cuisine than that of Little Dix Bay Pavilion (see below), this hilltop restaurant is our longtime favorite, and for good reason. The resort hires the island's finest chefs, who turn out superb cuisine based on quality ingredients. The menu changes every night, but the panoramic view of North Sound doesn't. A recent sampling of the appetizers turned up five-spice duck salad for starters, followed by such main courses as pan-seared salmon wrapped in Parma ham in a lentil-cream sauce. The chef makes grilled lobster daily. Desserts are prepared fresh, and are likely to range from a chilled green-apple parfait to a choice of sorbets served with a chilled cantaloupe soup. In Biras Creek, North Sound. ☎ 284/494-3555. Reservations required. Fixed-price dinner \$65. AE, MC, V. Seatings daily 7–8:30pm.

**Little Dix Bay Pavilion** ★ INTERNATIONAL The most romantic of the dining spots on Virgin Gorda, this pavilion is our preferred choice at this deluxe resort, which also operates Sugar Mill Restaurant. Guests (most middle-aged and well-heeled) sit under a large thatched roof as trade winds breeze in through open doors. The chefs change the menu daily. Although many of the ingredients are shipped in frozen, especially meats, there is much that is fresh and good. The seafood keeps us returning again and again. Most dishes are at the lower end of the price range.

In the Little Dix Bay Hotel, 1 km ( $\frac{2}{3}$  mile) north of Spanish Town. ☎ 284/495-5555. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$25–\$45. AE, MC, V. Daily 9–10am, 12:30–2:30pm, and 6–9pm.

## MODERATE

**Chez Bamboo** ★ *(Finds)* CAJUN/CREOLE This is the closest approximation to a New Orleans supper club in Virgin Gorda. Located within a 5-minute walk north of the yacht club, the building features a big veranda. Inside, there's a wraparound mural showing a jazz band playing within a forest of bamboo; bamboo artifacts continue the theme. Owner Rose Giacinto and chef Joyce Rodriguez concoct superb dishes, including conch gumbo and Nassau grouper *en papillote*. Desserts such as apple *crostini* and crême brûlée are among the very best on the island. Live music, usually blues or jazz, is presented every Friday night on the terrace.

Next to the Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour, Spanish Town. ☎ 284/495-5752. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$20–\$40. AE, MC, V. Daily 3–10pm.

**The Flying Iguana** MEDITERRANEAN/FRENCH/WEST INDIAN The owner of this place, Puck (aka Orlington Baptiste), studied his craft in Kansas City, with the Hilton Group, before setting up this amiable restaurant overlooking the airport's landing strip and the sea. Potted hibiscus and lots of effigies of iguanas, stuffed and carved, ornament a room that's a celebration of West Indian mystique. The house drink is the Iguana Sunset, a concoction whose ingredients change according to the whim of the bartender. Whatever the recipe, it usually produces a lightheaded effect that goes well with the cuisine. The finest examples include fresh fish and all kinds of shellfish, often served in combination. You'll also find steak, chicken, and lamb, seasoned in a way that evokes both the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. Happy hour is from 4 to 6pm daily.

The Valley, at the airport. ☎ 284/495-5277. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$6–\$15 lunch, \$15–\$40 dinner. MC, V. Daily 7am–9pm (last order).

**Giorgio's Table** ★ *(Finds)* ITALIAN This is the only authentic Italian restaurant on the island, with chefs flown in for the season from Venice, Milan, and Florence. A 15-minute drive north of Spanish Town, the restaurant opens onto a covered terrace. We like to sit out here at night, gazing up at the heavens with the sounds of the surf nearby. The varnished interior evokes a yacht. The chef says he cooks Italian instead of "American Italian," and the food is good, despite its reliance on a lot of imported ingredients. Fresh local fish is generally the best bet. You can also order an array of pastas and such standard Italian staples as veal scaloppine. Pizzas and sandwiches fill you at lunch. We decided that the restaurant's owner, Giorgio, has an appropriate last name—Paradisio.

Mahoe Bay. ☎ 284/495-5684. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$15–\$20 lunch, \$30–\$40 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6:30–9pm.

## INEXPENSIVE

**The Bath & Turtle** INTERNATIONAL At the end of the waterfront shopping plaza in Spanish Town sits the most popular pub on Virgin Gorda, packed with locals during happy hour, from 4 to 6pm. There are indoor and courtyard tables. You might want to join the regulars over midmorning mango coladas or peach daiquiris. If you're hungry, you can order fried fish fingers, tamarind-ginger wings, spicy chili, pizzas, fresh pasta, barbecued chicken, steak, lobster, or daily seafood specials. There's live music every Wednesday and Friday night, at 8:30 pm, during the summer.

Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour, Spanish Town. ☎ 284/495-5239. Reservations recommended. Breakfast \$4–\$10; main courses \$10–\$15 lunch, \$10–\$32 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–11pm.

**Thelma's Hideout** ★ *(Finds)* CARIBBEAN Mrs. Thelma King, one of the grande dames of Virgin Gorda (who worked in Manhattan for many years before returning to her native B.V.I.), runs this convivial gathering place for the island's locals. It's in a concrete house with angles softened by ascending tiers of verandas. Food choices include steamed and grilled fish, fish filets, and West Indian stews containing pork, mutton, goat, or chicken. Limeade or mauby are available, but many stick to rum or beer. Live music is presented on Saturday nights in winter, and every other Saturday off season.

The Valley. ☎ 284/495-5646. Reservations required prior to 3pm for dinner. Main courses \$9–\$12 lunch, \$18–\$25 dinner. No credit cards. Daily 8–10am, 11:30am–2:30pm, and 6–9pm; bar daily 8am–9pm.



**Top of The Baths** CARIBBEAN This aptly-named green-and-white restaurant overlooks the famous Baths (see below), and has a patio with a swimming pool. Locals gather to enjoy the food they grew up on. At lunch, you can order an array of appetizers, sandwiches, and salad plates. At night, the kitchen turns out good home-style cookery, including fresh fish, lobster, chicken, steaks, and West Indian dishes. Save room for a piece of that rum cake. Steel bands perform on Sunday, and you're invited to swim in the pool before or after dining.

The Valley. © 284/495-5497. Dinner \$16–\$31; sandwiches and salads \$6.50–\$10. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

## EXPLORING THE ISLAND

The northern side of Virgin Gorda is mountainous, with Gorda Peak reaching 417m (1,370 ft.). In contrast, the southern half of the island is flat, with large boulders at every turn.

If you're over for a day trip, the best way to see the island is to call **Andy Flax** at the Fischer's Cove Beach Hotel. He runs the **Virgin Gorda Tours Association** (© 284/495-5252), which will give you a tour of the island for \$20 per person. The tour leaves twice daily, or more often based on demand. You can be picked up at the ferry dock if you give 24-hour notice.

## SURF & SAND

**HITTING THE BEACH** The best beaches are at **the Baths** (★), where giant boulders form a series of tranquil pools and grottoes flooded with seawater (nearby snorkeling is excellent, and you can rent gear on the beach). Scientists think the boulders were brought to the surface eons ago by volcanic activity. The Baths and surrounding areas are part of a proposed system of parks and protected areas in the B.V.I. The protected area encompasses 273 hectares (684 acres) of land, including sites at Little Fort, Spring Bay, the Baths, and Devil's Bay on the east coast.

**Devil's Bay National Park** can be reached by a trail from the Baths. The walk to the secluded coral-sand beach takes about 15 minutes through boulders and dry coastal vegetation. Neighboring the Baths is **Spring Bay**, one of the best of the island's beaches, with white sand, clear water, and good snorkeling. **Trunk Bay** is a wide, sandy beach reachable by boat or along a rough path from Spring Bay. **Savannah Bay** is a sandy beach north of the yacht harbor, and **Mahoe Bay**, at the Mango Bay Resort, has a gently curving beach with neon-blue water.

**DIVING** **Kilbrides Sunchaser Scuba** is at the Bitter End Resort at North Sound (☎ 800/932-4286 in the U.S., or 284/495-9638). Kilbrides offers the best diving in the British Virgin Islands, at 15 to 20 dive sites including the wreck of the ill-fated HMS *Rhone*. Prices range from \$80 to \$95 for a two-tank dive on one of the coral reefs. A one-tank dive in the afternoon costs \$65. Equipment, except wet suits, is supplied at no charge. Hours are 7:45am to 5pm daily.

**HIKING** Consider a trek up the stairs and hiking paths that criss-cross Virgin Gorda's largest stretch of undeveloped land, the **Gorda Peak National Park**. To reach the best departure point for your uphill trek, drive north of the Valley on the only road leading to North Sound for about 15 minutes of very hilly driving (using a four-wheel-drive vehicle is a very good idea). Stop at the base of the stairway leading steeply uphill. There's a sign pointing to the Gorda Peak National Park.

It will take between 25 and 40 minutes to reach the summit of Gorda Peak, the highest point on the island, where views out over many islets of the Virgin Islands archipelago await you. There's a tower at the summit, which you can climb for even better views. Admire the flora and the fauna (birds, lizards, and nonvenomous snakes) en route. Because the vegetation you'll encounter is not particularly lush, wear protection against the sun. Consider bringing a picnic—tables are scattered along the hiking trails.

## SHOPPING

There isn't much here. Your best bet is the **Virgin Gorda Craft Shop** at Yacht Harbour (☎ 284/495-5137), which has some good arts and crafts, especially straw items. Some of the more upscale hotels have boutiques, notably the Bitter End Yacht Club's **Reeftique** (☎ 284/494-2745), with its selection of sports clothing, including sundresses and logo wear. You can also purchase a hat here for protection from the sun. You might also check out **Island Silhouette in Flax Plaza** (no phone), located in Flax Plaza near Fischer's Cove Beach Hotel, which has a good selection of resort-style clothing that's been hand-painted by local artists. **Pusser's Company Store**, Leverick Bay (☎ 284/495-7369), sells rum products, sportswear, and gift and souvenir items. **Tropical Gift Collections**, the Baths (☎ 284/495-5380), is a good place to shop for local crafts. Here you'll find island spices, bags, T-shirts, wraps, jewelry, maps, and pottery on sale at good prices.

## VIRGIN GORDA AFTER DARK

There isn't a lot of action at night, unless you want to make some of your own. **The Bath & Turtle** pub, at Yacht Harbour (☎ 284/495-5239), brings in local bands for dancing in the summer on Wednesday and Friday at 8:30pm. The **Bitter End Yacht Club** (☎ 284/494-2746) has live music on Fridays. Accessible only by boat, this is the best bar on the island. With its dark wood, it evokes an English pub and serves British brews. Call to see what's happening at the time of your visit, and see p. 190 for more on the establishment.

**Andy's Chateau de Pirate**, at the Fischer's Cove Beach Hotel, The Valley (☎ 284/495-5252), is a sprawling, sparsely furnished local hangout. It has a simple stage, a very long bar, and huge ocean-front windows, which almost never close.

## 4 Peter Island ★

Half of this island, boasting a marina and docking facilities, is devoted to the yacht club. The other part is deserted. A gorgeous beach is at palm-fringed Deadman's Bay, which faces the Atlantic but is protected by a reef. All goods and services are at the one resort (see below). The island is so sparsely populated that about the only company you'll encounter will be an iguana or a feral cat whose ancestors were abandoned generations ago by shippers (the cats are said to have eliminated the island's rodents).

A complimentary, hotel-operated ferry, **Peter Island Boat** (☎ 284/495-1288), departs Tortola from the pier at Trellis Bay, near the airport. Other boats depart six or seven times a day from Baugher's Bay in Road Town, on Tortola. Passengers must notify the hotel 2 weeks before their arrival so transportation can be arranged.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

**Peter Island Resort** ★★ ★ This 720-hectare (1,778-acre) tropical island is dedicated to Peter Island Resort guests and to yacht owners who moor their crafts here. The island's tropical gardens and hillside are bordered by five gorgeous private beaches, including Deadman's Beach (often voted one of the world's most romantic beaches in travel-magazine reader polls). The resort contains 32 rooms facing Sprat Bay and Sir Francis Drake Channel (oceanview or garden rooms) and 20 larger rooms on Deadman's Bay Beach (beachfront rooms). Designed with a casual elegance, each has a balcony or terrace. The least desirable rooms are also the smallest, housed in two-story,

A-frame structures next to the harbor. Bathrooms with tub/shower combinations range from standard motel-unit types to luxurious offerings, depending on your room assignment. The Crow's Nest, a four-bedroom villa, overlooks the harbor and Deadman Bay, and features a private swimming pool. The Hawk's Nest villas are three-bedroom villas on a hillside.

Peter Island (P.O. Box 211), Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 800/346-4451 in the U.S., or 284/495-2000. Fax 284/495-2500. www.peterisland.com. 54 units. Winter \$865–\$1,015 double, \$4,000 3-bedroom villa, \$8,000 4-bedroom villa; off season \$550–\$650 double, \$2,850–\$3,200 3-bedroom villa, \$5,700–\$7,900 4-bedroom villa. Rates include all meals and transportation from the Tortola airport. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor pool; 4 tennis courts; fitness center; spa; limited room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; bikes; deep-sea fishing; sea kayaks; scuba diving; snorkeling gear; Sunfish sailboats; water-skiing; windsurfing. *In room:* A/C, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## 5 Guana Island ★

This 340-hectare (840-acre) island, a nature preserve and wildlife sanctuary, is one of the most private hideaways in the Caribbean. Consider vacationing here if you want to retreat from the world. This small island, off the coast of Tortola, offers seven virgin beaches, plus nature trails ideal for hiking. Unusual species of plant and animal life abound, and Arawak relics have been found here. You can climb 242m (794-ft.) Sugarloaf Mountain for a panoramic view. It's said that the name of the island comes from a jutting rock that resembles the head of an iguana.

The Guana Island Club will send a boat to meet arriving guests at the Beef Island airport (trip time is 10 min.).

### WHERE TO STAY & DINE

**Guana Island Club** ★★ Guana Island was bought in 1974 by Henry and Gloria Jarecki, dedicated conservationists who run the resort as a nature preserve and wildlife sanctuary. Upon your arrival on the island, a Land Rover will meet you and transport you up one of the most scenic hills in the region, in the northeast of Guana.

The cluster of white cottages was built as a private club in the 1930s. The stone cottages never hold more than 30 guests (and have only two phones), and because the dwellings are staggered along a flower-dotted ridge overlooking the Caribbean and the Atlantic, the sense of privacy is almost absolute. The entire island can be rented by groups of up to 30. Although water is scarce, each of the airy accommodations has a shower. The decor is rattan and wicker, and each unit

has a ceiling fan. Renting North Beach cottage, the most luxurious, is like renting a private home complete with a freshwater pool. The panoramic sweep from the terraces is spectacular, particularly at sunset. There are seven beaches, some of which require a boat to reach. Guests will find a convivial atmosphere at the rattan-furnished clubhouse. Casually elegant dinners are served by candlelight on the veranda, with menus that include homegrown vegetables and Continental and U.S. specialties.

P.O. Box 32, Road Town, Tortola, B.V.I. ☎ 800/544-8262 in the U.S., or 284/494-2354. Fax 284/495-2900 or 284/499-2080. (For reservations, write or call the Guana Island Club Reservations Office, 10 Timber Trail, Rye, NY 10580; ☎ 800/544-8262 in the U.S., or 914/967-6050; fax 914/967-8048.) www.guana.com. 15 units. Winter \$895 double, \$1,850 cottage; off season \$595–\$650 double, \$1,250–\$1,350 cottage. Rent the island for \$12,500–\$16,500. Rates include all meals and drinks served with meals. MC, V. Closed Sept–Oct. **Amenities:** Restaurant; self-service bar; 2 tennis courts; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; complimentary transport; fishing; kayaks; sailboats; snorkeling; nature trails; waterskiing; windsurfing. *In room:* Dataport, no phone.