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## The Best of the Virgin Islands

**F**ormer stamping grounds of some of history's most famous seafarers, the Virgin Islands are now invaded by thousands of visitors who arrive daily by cruise ship and plane from Miami and Puerto Rico. These green, hilly islands, some governed by the United States and some by Great Britain, number about 100 in all. Most are tiny and virtually uninhabited, except for a few birds or an adventurous boating party stopping off for a little snorkeling or swimming. For the ultimate tropical getaway, it's possible to rent an entire island for yourself.

Most Virgin Islands natives are descendants of African slaves who worked the sugarcane plantations. In recent years, the local population has swelled with an influx of "down islanders"—people from other Caribbean islands. Many Puerto Ricans have also come here (it's only 30 min. by air); they are joined by a wide cross section of mainland Americans, including well-heeled yachties and young expats who've become addicted to the limin' lifestyle. The old ways of the islands are all but gone in bustling St. Thomas and St. Croix, but they may still be found in St. John and some pockets of the British Virgins, especially on laid-back Virgin Gorda. Below, you'll find the highlights of this quintessential vacation paradise.

### 1 The Best Beaches

Many Caribbean islands only have rocky beaches or beaches made of black volcanic sand (which heats up fast in the noonday sun), but those in the Virgin Islands are known for their fine white sand. Best of all, every beach in the Virgin Islands is free (except for Magens Bay in St. Thomas) and open to the public, although in some cases you'll have to walk across the grounds of a resort (or arrive by private boat) to reach them.

- **Magens Bay Beach** (St. Thomas): This half-mile loop of pebble-free sand, boasting remarkably calm waters, is by far the most popular and picturesque beach in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Two peninsulas protect the shore from erosion and strong waves, making Magens an ideal spot for

swimming. Expect a lively crowd in the high season. See p. 101.

- **Sapphire Beach** (St. Thomas): This is one of the finest beaches on St. Thomas, and a favorite with windsurfers. Come here for some of St. Thomas's best shore snorkeling and diving (off Pettyklip Point). And don't worry about equipment—watersports concessions abound here. Take a moment to enjoy the panoramic view of St. John and other islands. See p. 103.
- **Trunk Bay** (St. John): This beach, which is protected by the U.S. National Park Service, is a favorite with cruise-ship passengers. It's famous for its underwater snorkeling trail and is consistently ranked in

magazine polls as one of the top 10 Caribbean beaches. See p. 142.

- **Caneel Bay** (St. John): Site of a famous resort, Caneel Bay is a string of seven beaches stretching around Durlow Point to Hawksnest Caneel. Rosewood Hotels, which operates Caneel Bay Resort, admits day guests. See p. 142.
- **Sandy Point** (St. Croix): The biggest beach in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Sandy Point lies in the southwestern part of St. Croix, directly to the west of Alexander Hamilton Airport. Its

waters are shallow and calm. Because the beach is a protected reserve and a nesting spot for endangered sea turtles, it's only open to the public on weekends from 9am to 5pm. See p. 182.

- **Cane Garden Bay** (Tortola): Cane Garden Bay is the most popular beach in the British Virgin Islands, and a close rival to Magens Bay on St. Thomas (see above) for scenic beauty. Its translucent waters and sugar-white sands are reason enough to visit Tortola. Happily, it's the closest beach to Road Town, the capital. See p. 226.

## 2 The Best Snorkeling Spots

The islands of St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas are among the finest places to snorkel in the Caribbean. Because of their historic shipwreck sites, the B.V.I. contains some of the best diving in the Caribbean, but their snorkeling spots can't quite compare to those in the U.S.V.I. Here are some of the best spots:

- **Coki Point Beach** (St. Thomas): On the north shore of St. Thomas, Coki Point offers superb year-round snorkeling. Especially enticing are the coral ledges near Coral World's underwater tower. See p. 102.
- **Leinster Bay** (St. John): Easily accessible Leinster Bay, on the northern shore of St. John, offers calm, clear, uncrowded waters teeming with sea life. See p. 143.
- **Haulover Bay** (St. John): A favorite with locals, this small bay is rougher than Leinster and is often deserted. The snorkeling, however, is dramatic, with ledges, walls, nooks, and sandy areas set close together. See p. 144.
- **Trunk Bay** (St. John): The self-guided, 675-foot-long snorkeling

trail here has large underwater signs that identify species of coral and other marine life. Above water, the beach's freshwater showers, changing rooms, equipment rentals, and lifeguards make snorkeling downright convenient. See p. 142.

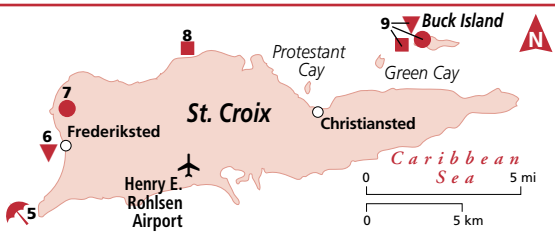
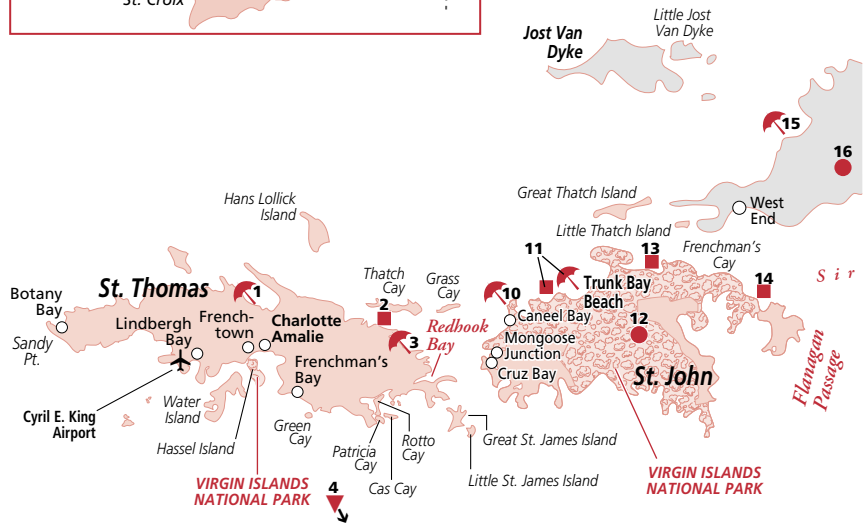
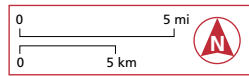
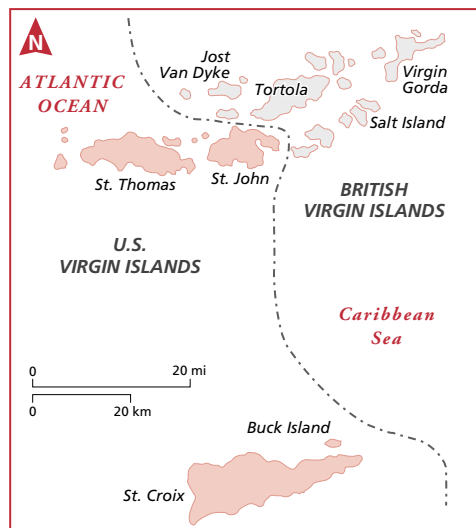
- **Cane Bay** (St. Croix): One of the island's best diving and snorkeling sites is off this breezy, north-shore beach. On a good day, you can swim out 450 feet to see the Cane Bay Wall, which drops dramatically off to the deep waters below. Multicolored fish, plus elkhorn and brain coral, flourish here. See p. 183.
- **Buck Island** (off St. Croix): This tiny island, whose land and offshore waters are classified as a national monument, lies 2 miles off the north coast of St. Croix. More than 250 recorded species of fish swim through its reef system. A variety of sponges, corals, and crustaceans also inhabit the area. See p. 181.

## 3 The Best Dive Sites

- **Cow and Calf Rocks** (St. Thomas): This site, off the southeast end of St.

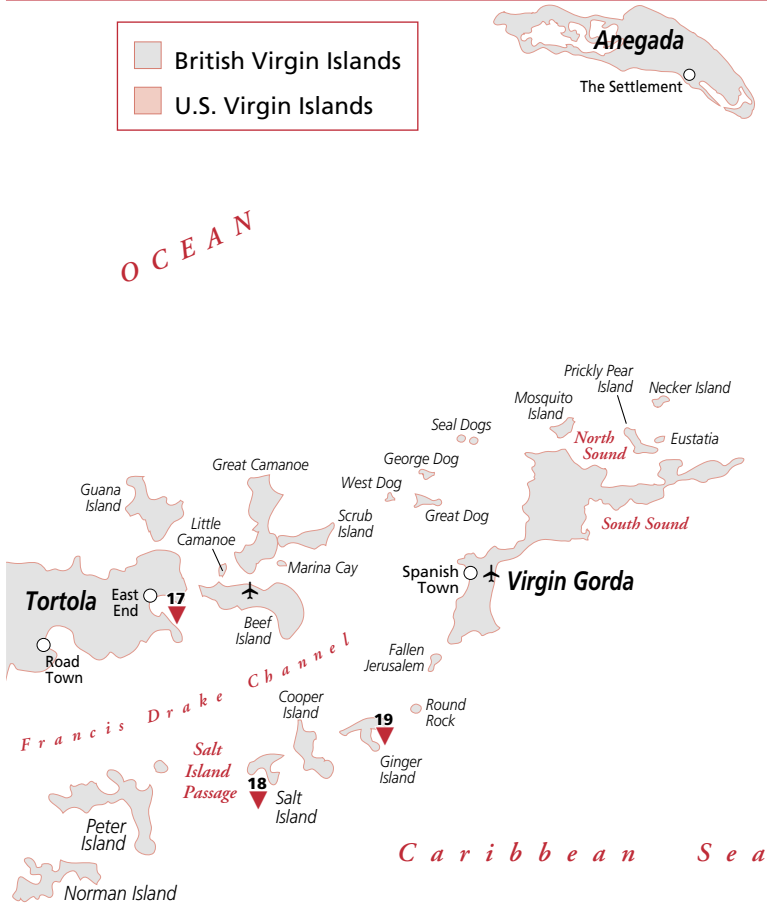
Thomas (about a 45-min. boat ride from Charlotte Amalie), is the island's

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## THE BEST BEACHS

- Cane Garden Bay 15
- Caneel Bay 10
- Magens Bay Beach 1
- Sandy Point 5
- Sapphire Beach 3
- Trunk Bay 11



#### THE BEST SNORKELING ■ SPOTS

- Buck Island **9**
- Cane Bay **8**
- Coki Point Beach **2**
- Haulover Bay **14**
- Leinster Bay **13**
- Trunk Bay **11**

#### THE BEST DIVE SITES ▼

- Alice in Wonderland **19**
- Buck Island **9**
- Chikuzen **17**
- Cow and Calf Rocks **4**
- Frederiksted Pier **6**
- The Wreck of the HMS *Rhone* **18**

#### THE BEST NATURE WALKS ●

- The Annaberg Historic Trail **12**
- Buck Island Walk **9**
- The "Rain Forest" Hike **7**
- Sage Mountain National Park **16**

best diving spot. It's also a good bet for snorkeling. You'll discover a network of coral tunnels filled with caves, reefs, and ancient boulders encrusted with coral. See p. 104.

- **Frederiksted Pier** (St. Croix): Those in the know have designated this pier, located in an old ramshackle town at the west end of St. Croix, the most interesting pier dive in the Caribbean. The original pier was virtually destroyed by Hurricane Hugo in 1989, but a new one opened in 1993. Plunge into a world of exotic creatures, including sponges, banded shrimp, plume worms, and sea horses. See p. 183.
- **Buck Island** (off St. Croix): This is one of the major diving meccas in the Caribbean, with an underwater visibility of some 100 feet. There are labyrinths and grottoes for more experienced divers, plus massive gardens of fiery coral inhabited by black sea urchins, barracudas, stingrays, and other creatures. See p. 182.
- **The Wreck of the HMS *Rhone*** (off Salt Island): The *Rhone* wreck is the premier dive site not only in the

Virgin Islands, but also in the entire Caribbean. This royal mail steamer, which went down in 1867, was featured in the murky film *The Deep*. See p. 228.

- **Chikuzen** (off Tortola): Although it's not the *Rhone* (see above), this 82m (270-ft.) steel-hulled refrigerator ship, which sank off the island's east end in 1981, is one of the British Virgin Islands' most fascinating dive sites. The hull—still intact under about 24m (80 ft.) of water—is now home to a vast array of tropical fish, including yellowtail, barracuda, black-tip sharks, octopus, and drum fish. See p. 228.
- **Alice in Wonderland** (Ginger Island): This brilliant coral wall, off the shore of a tiny island, slopes from 12m (40-ft.) to a sandy bottom at 30m (100 ft.). Divers often refer to the site as “a fantasy” because of its monstrous overhangs, vibrant colors, gigantic mushroom-shaped corals, and wide variety of sea creatures—everything from conch and garden eels to long-nose butterfly fish. See p. 228.

## 4 The Best Boating Outfitters

Boating is big in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and it's even bigger in the British Virgins, which are said to have the best cruising in the Caribbean.

- **American Yacht Harbor** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/775-6454): This is one of the best bareboat and full-crew charter companies on St. Thomas. It's located on Red Hook Marina, which is home to numerous boating companies, including both fishing and sailing charters. Whatever craft you're looking for, you're bound to find it here. See p. 103.
- **Vacation Vistas and Motor Yachts** (St. John; ☎ 340/776-6462): This is your best bet for half- or full-day excursions off St. John. Many boaters head for a day cruise to the famous Baths, on Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands. To cut costs, you can go on a regularly scheduled tour; if you have a large group, you can charter your own craft. See p. 144.
- **The Moorings** (Tortola; ☎ 800/535-7289): This is the finest charter service in the Virgin Islands. It has done more than any other outfitter to make the British Virgin Islands the destination

of choice among the world's yachters. Its fleet of yachts and boats is staggering—everything from bareboat rentals

to fully crewed vessels with a skipper, crew, and cook. See p. 227.

## 5 The Best Golf Courses

St. Croix is the golfing hub of the Virgin Islands; don't bother bringing your clubs to St. John or the British Virgin Islands.

- **Mahogany Run** (St. Thomas; ☎ 800/253-7103): This 18-hole, par-70 course, one of the most scenic in the Caribbean, has breathtaking views of the British Virgin Islands. It's famous for its "Devil's Triangle," a tricky trio of holes (13, 14, and 15). See p. 105.
- **Carambola Golf Course** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/778-5638): This par-72 course

at Davis Bay, known for decades as Fountain Valley, is one of the most challenging in the Caribbean. The well-maintained holes are characterized by dangerous water hazards and ravines. See p. 183.

- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/773-2100, ext. 738): This 18-hole, 5,685-yard course has some spectacular vistas, especially from the signature 3rd hole, where the seascape stretches from Christiansted to Buck Island. See p. 184.

## 6 The Best Tennis Facilities

There are limited options for tennis in the B.V.I. Tennis buffs who want to make

the game an integral part of their holiday will find better equipped facilities in the U.S.V.I.

### The Best of the Virgin Islands Online

General information—it's not very opinionated—is available from the U.S.V.I. Department of Tourism at [www.usvitourism.vi](http://www.usvitourism.vi), the B.V.I. Tourist Board at [www.bvitouristboard.com](http://www.bvitouristboard.com), and B.V.I. Online Travel Guide at [www.b-v-i.com](http://www.b-v-i.com). Other general visitor's guides include [www.usvi-info.com](http://www.usvi-info.com) and [www.britishvirginislands.com](http://www.britishvirginislands.com). Here are some other sites to help you plan your trip:

- **The Virtual V.I. Guide to St. Thomas** ([www.st-thomas.com](http://www.st-thomas.com)) is a comprehensive website about accommodations, wedding planning, shopping, powerboat rentals, day-boat excursions, and more for St. Thomas.
- **St. John Beach Guide** ([www.stjohnbeachguide.com](http://www.stjohnbeachguide.com)) features some interesting articles as well as an online bookstore and links to island resources.
- **GoToStCroix.com** ([www.gotostcroix.com](http://www.gotostcroix.com)) is the only website written by locals for arriving visitors. There is a similar site for St. John ([www.gotostjohn.com](http://www.gotostjohn.com)).
- **Dive BVI** ([www.divebvi.com](http://www.divebvi.com)) is the website for a Virgin Gorda dive shop, and offers solid information about the best scuba-diving sites around the B.V.I.
- **Bareboats BVI** ([www.bareboatsbvi.com](http://www.bareboatsbvi.com)) is a helpful site if you're interested in chartering a yacht.

- **Wyndham Sugar Bay Beach Club** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/777-7100): Some tennis buffs have deserted the Buccaneer on St. Croix (see below) in favor of this resort at Estate Smith Bay. Sugar Bay Plantation offers the U.S. Virgin Islands' first stadium tennis court, as well as six Laykold courts, which are lit at night. See p. 105.
- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/773-2100, ext. 736): This is where

Ted Kennedy plays when he's on St. Croix. The facilities at this resort have been touted as the best in the Virgin Islands, and have played host to several professional tournaments, including the Virgin Islands Tennis Championships in July. There are eight all-weather Laykold courts, two of which are lit at night. Nonguests can play here for a fee. See p. 184.

## 7 The Best Nature Walks

- **The Annaberg Historic Trail** (St. John): This paved walk is only .5km (¼ mile) long, but it's a highlight of the 10,000-acre U.S. Virgin Islands National Park. The trail traverses the ruins of what was once the most important sugar cane plantation on the island. Slaves' quarters, a windmill tower, and ballast-brick buildings are remnants of a long-vanished era. Stunning views look toward Tortola, Great Thatch Island, and Jost Van Dyke on the opposite side of Sir Francis Drake Passage. See p. 146.
- **The "Rain Forest" Hike** (St. Croix): At the northwestern end of St. Croix lies the 15-acre "rain forest," which is thick with magnificent plant life. The little-traveled four-wheel-drive roads through the area make great hiking paths. See p. 184.
- **The Buck Island Walk** (off St. Croix): A circumnavigation of this island, which is accessible by boat, takes about 2 hours and is rated moderate. Because the island is ringed with white-sand beaches, you can always take a break for a refreshing swim. There's also a trail that points inland. See p. 184.
- **The Sage Mountain National Park Hike** (Tortola): This 3- to 4-hour hike is one of the most dramatic in the British Virgins. It goes from Brewer's Bay to the top of Mount Sage, the highest peak in the Virgin Islands, at 542m (1,780 ft.). Along the way, you'll see intriguing ruins of old homes in addition to the beautiful flora and fauna of the park's primeval forest. See p. 227.

## 8 The Most Intriguing Historic Sights

- **Fort Christian** (St. Thomas): This fort, which stands in the heart of Charlotte Amalie, was built in 1672 after the arrival of the first Danish colonists. The oldest building on the island, it has been vastly altered over the years and has housed a jail, a courthouse, a town hall, a church, and, most recently, a historical museum. Head to the roof for a stellar view. See p. 72.
- **Crown House** (St. Thomas): This 18th-century, stone-built mansion served as the home of two former governors. Among the many antiques here are memorabilia that belonged to Governor-General Peter von Scholten, who occupied the premises in 1827. A French chandelier in the mansion is said to have come from Versailles. See p. 109.

- **Annaberg Historic Trail** (St. John): The ruins of the Annaberg Sugar Plantation are the greatest reminder of St. John's plantation era. The remains of the building have been spruced up rather than restored, and the surrounding land is now filled with lush vegetation. Visitors can explore the former slave quarters. See p. 146.
- **Fort Christiansvaern** (St. Croix): This fort is one of the best preserved of its type in the West Indies, with a facade that hasn't changed much since the 1820s. It was constructed

from ballast bricks imported from Denmark, the island's colonial guardian. The first fort on the spot was built between 1732 and 1749, and part of that structure remains. See p. 185.

- **Fort Frederik** (St. Croix): This fort, completed in 1760, is said to have been the first to salute the flag of the newly formed United States. It was also here, in 1848, that Governor-General Peter von Scholten read a proclamation freeing the island's slaves. A small museum sits on the site today. See p. 187.

## 9 The Best Resorts

- **Frenchman's Reef & Marriott Morning Star Beach Resort** (St. Thomas; ☎ 800/524-2000 or 340/776-8500): The sprawling, luxe resort of Frenchman's Reef practically put St. Thomas on the tourist map. Now, it's linked to its even better sibling next door, Marriott Morning Star Beach Resort, to make up one mega-resort. Guests at both properties share the same amenities, facilities, and restaurants. The resort stands on one of the best beaches on the island. See p. 85.
- **The Ritz-Carlton** (St. Thomas; ☎ 800/241-3333 or 340/775-3333): There is no grander place to stay in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Fronted by white-sand beaches, this is the resort for those who want to escape to the Caribbean not like Robinson Crusoe, but as Bill Gates might if he showed up on a yacht. It's got everything you can think of—and more. See p. 86.
- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 800/255-3881 or 340/773-2100): Newer and glitzier competitors have sprouted up, but this large, luxurious, family-owned resort is still a class act. It lies on the island's best beaches, and has the best sports program, the best

entertainment, and the best food of any hotel. See p. 159.

- **Caneel Bay** (St. John; ☎ 340/776-6111): There is no resort in the islands with a greater pedigree than this place. Laurance S. Rockefeller created Caneel Bay as the Caribbean's first ecoresort back in the days when no one knew what that word meant. Even though the resort isn't posh, it's an understated classic, an outpost of refinement without ostentation. In other words, Walter Cronkite would be happier here than Madonna. See p. 128.
- **Westin Resort St. John** (St. John; ☎ 800/808-5020 or 340/693-8000): The glitz and glitter missing at Caneel Bay can be found here. Architecturally dramatic and visually appealing, this resort sprawls across 34 landscaped acres, opening onto a 1,200-foot white-sand beach. It boasts a huge array of activities, including lots of watersports. See p. 130.
- **Biras Creek Estate** (Virgin Gorda; ☎ 800/223-1108 or 284/494-3555): A private and romantic retreat, this resort resembles a hillside fortress. It's an escapist's hideaway, on a 61-hectare (150-acre) estate with its own marina.



There are no phones and no TVs, but you can find the latest edition of the *Wall Street Journal*. See p. 237.

- **Bitter End Yacht Club** (Virgin Gorda; ☎ 800/872-2392 or 284/494-2746): This is the best sailing and diving resort in all of the Virgin Islands, opening onto one of the most unspoiled and secluded deep-water harbors in the Caribbean. You'll live and dine here in style; you can even stay aboard a 9m (30-ft.) yacht. See p. 237.
- **Long Bay Beach Resort & Villas** (Tortola; ☎ 800/345-0356 or 284/495-4252): The finest resort in the capital of the B.V.I., this complex

borders a 1.6km-long (1-mile) sandy beach. It's the only full-service resort in Tortola, and its deluxe beachfront rooms and cabanas are quite nice. See p. 213.

- **Peter Island Resort** (Peter Island; ☎ 800/346-4451 or 284/495-2000): This posh resort lies on its own 728-hectare (1,800-acre) tropical island. It opens onto Deadman's Beach, which, in spite of its name, is consistently voted one of the most romantic beaches in the world by various travel magazine reader polls. This is a true retreat—a hedonistic resort that's a monument to the good life. See p. 254.

## 10 The Most Romantic Resorts

Many hotels in the Virgin Islands will help you plan your wedding, doing everything from arranging the flowers and the photographer to applying for the marriage license (see “Getting Married in the Virgin Islands” in chapter 2 for more details). But even if you don't actually tie the knot here, the Virgin Islands offer some of the world's most romantic destinations for honeymooning couples (or those who just want to pretend they're honeymooning).

- **Elysian Beach Resort** (St. Thomas; ☎ 800/438-6499 or 340/775-1000): For a great value, ask about the “Honeymoon Getaway” package, which includes a deluxe room or a one-bedroom suite, champagne on arrival, and free use of the tennis courts, health club, and pool. See p. 87.
- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 800/255-3881 or 340/773-2100): This resort boasts the most extensive facilities on St. Croix, including an 18-hole golf course, eight championship tennis courts, a spa and health club, a 2-mile jogging trail, and three beaches. The 1653 sugar mill on the grounds is the

most popular wedding spot on the island. We recommend staying in one of the beachside rooms, which have fieldstone terraces that take you right down to the water. See p. 159.

- **Biras Creek Estate** (Virgin Gorda; ☎ 800/223-1108 or 310/440-4225): This private and elegant hotel is located on a secluded 61-hectare (150-acre) promontory, accessible only by launch. Sign-posted nature trails cut through the lush tropical gardens. See p. 237.
- **Little Dix Bay Hotel** (Virgin Gorda; ☎ 888/767-3966 or 284/495-5555): The understated elegance of this luxury resort is popular with older couples and honeymooners alike—in fact, the powerfully amorous atmosphere sometimes makes single guests feel like wallflowers. Spread out over 202 hectares (500 acres) on a secluded bay, this resort offers beautiful beaches and sporting activities galore, plus plenty of privacy, if that's what you're after. See p. 238.

## 11 The Best Family Resorts

- **Bolongo Bay Beach Club** (St. Thomas; ☎ 800/524-4746 or 340/775-1800): The resort staff here offers a huge roster of family activities. In the off season, children under 12 stay for free in their parent's room, and eat for free from a kids' menu. See p. 87.
- **Westin Resort St. John** (St. John; ☎ 800/808-5020 or 340/693-8000): This contemporary mega-resort, set on 34 acres of landscaped grounds, offers the best children's programs on the island. Babysitting can be arranged, and children get reduced rates on everything. See p. 130.
- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 800/255-3881 or 340/712-2100): This hotel, located on a 300-acre former sugar estate, is a longtime family favorite. It has on-site facilities for just about every sport you can think of, including tennis, golf, swimming, jogging, sailing, scuba diving, and snorkeling. Children's programs include a half-day sail to Buck Island Reef and nature walks through tropical foliage, where kids can taste local fruit in the wild. See p. 159.
- **Chenay Bay Beach Resort** (St. Croix; ☎ 800/548-4457 or 340/773-2918): Families staying in these West Indian-style cottages can keep their 3- to 12-year-olds busy with various organized activities, from swimming and snorkeling to nature walks and story hours. The friendly owners of this barefoot-casual hotel used their own offspring as test cases to design their children's program, which runs during the summer and over holiday periods. See p. 162.
- **Bitter End Yacht Club** (Virgin Gorda; ☎ 800/872-2392 or 284/494-2746): Most children's programs at this lively resort are geared toward those ages 6 and over, and involve all the typical watersports: sailing, windsurfing, snorkeling, swimming, and more. Ask about packages for families. See p. 237.

## 12 The Best Small Hotels & Bed & Breakfasts

- **Villa Blanca** (St. Thomas; ☎ 800/231-0034 or 340/776-0749): Small, intimate, and charming, this inn stands on 3 acres on a hill overlooking Charlotte Amalie. A homelike atmosphere prevails, and there's a freshwater pool. The one con: You'll have to drive to the beach. See p. 85.
- **Villa Santana** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/776-1311): At this country villa, originally built for a Mexican general, all rooms are suites. In honor of its previous occupant, the decor is Mexican. There's a pool, a sun deck, and a garden. See p. 80.
- **Garden by the Sea Bed & Breakfast** (St. John; ☎ 340/779-4731): Overlooking the ocean, this is a small but choice B&B on the least populated of the major U.S. Virgins. With easy access to north shore beaches, it offers beautifully furnished bedrooms with elephant bamboo canopy beds and Japanese fountains. You get style and affordable prices—not bad. See p. 132.
- **Breakfast Club** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/773-7383): The best-value B&B on St. Croix is a 1950s compound of efficiency apartments, in addition to a stone house from the 1930s. Each unit comes with a kitchenette. A sense of home prevails, with guests gathering around a hot tub on a raised deck. The breakfast is better than what you might find at most hotels. See p. 166.

- **Carringtons Inn** (St. Croix; ☎ 877/658-0508 or 340/713-0508): This was once the grand home of a wealthy island family. It has since been converted into one of the most appealing

B&Bs in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Personalized attention and comfortable surroundings are hallmarks. Some of the individually decorated bedrooms boast king-size canopy beds. See p. 170.

### 13 The Best Places to Get Away from It All

Although there are tranquil retreats on St. Croix, and even on St. Thomas, you'll find most of the remote oases on St. John and in the British Virgin Islands.

- **St. John:** This is one of the most secluded islands in the Caribbean. More than two-thirds of the land has been preserved as a national park. That means that unlike St. Thomas and St. Croix, St. John's landscape looks much like it did in the 1950s: white-sand beaches and verdant tropical forests. Day-trippers from St. Thomas come over in the morning and usually depart before 5pm. After that, St. John becomes a crowd-free paradise. **Caribbean Villas & Resorts** (☎ 800/338-0987) offers some of the best values for those who'd like to rent their own private villa. See chapter 4.
- **Sandcastle Hotel** (Jost Van Dyke; ☎ 284/495-9888): This little island, reached by ferry from Tortola, is the ultimate escapist's dream. The island offers good hiking trails, uncrowded sandy beaches, and the ruins of an old military fort. People come to the Sandcastle in search of isolation and relaxation, and that's exactly what they get. See p. 246.
- **Anegada Reef Hotel** (Anegada; ☎ 284/495-8002): This hotel is located some 20 miles north of Virgin Gorda's North Sound, on a flat mass

of coral and limestone. It's one of the most remote spots in the entire Virgin Islands chain. You may never meet any of the 250 local residents, although you'll occasionally see snorkelers, fishermen, and scuba divers. We recommend this unpolished hotel for devotees of deserted beaches and laid-back getaways. It's the kind of place where if the bartender isn't around, you make your own cocktails and write down what you had. See p. 252.

- **Guana Island Club** (Guana Island; ☎ 800/544-8262 or 284/494-2354): This secluded, hilltop hideaway is the only development on a private, 344-hectare (850-acre) island off the coast of Tortola. The island is known for its six vacant, virgin beaches; rare species of plant and animal life (look for the roseate flamingo); and excellent nature trails. See p. 254.
- **Peter Island Resort** (Peter Island; ☎ 800/346-4451 or 284/495-2000): This exquisite resort inn sits on a 728-hectare (1,800-acre) private island, which comes complete with five pristine beaches, hiking trails, and gorgeous offshore reefs. Guests also enjoy first-rate watersports facilities, elegant candlelight dining, and secluded beachfront accommodations. See p. 254.

### 14 The Best Restaurants

- **Tavern on the Waterfront** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/776-4328): Every celebrity who visits the U.S.V.I. seems

to turn up here. Opening onto harbor views at Charlotte Amalie, this restaurant serves some of the island's finest

French and Caribbean cuisine. Imaginative dishes include such treats as espresso-and-cinnamon-encrusted pork medallions with a passion fruit demi-glaze. See p. 90.

- **Hervé Restaurant & Wine Bar** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/777-9703): This establishment, next to the landmark Hotel 1829, has captured loads of attention, and was recently featured in *Gourmet* magazine. The panoramic view is great, but it's the cuisine that is the draw: A truly sublime American/Caribbean/Continental repertoire. Nothing beats the black sesame-crusted tuna with a ginger and raspberry sauce. See p. 90.
- **Virgilio's** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/776-4920): This cheerful, elegant spot boasts the best Italian food on the island. Virgilio's lovingly prepares all your favorite Italian classics (try the *osso buco* or chicken parmigiana), in addition to more than 20 different homemade pasta dishes, and a few surprises, like *cioppino* (a kettle of savory seafood stew). Savvy diners always save room for one of the flambé desserts. See p. 92.
- **Asolare** (St. John; ☎ 340/779-4747): The most beautiful and elegant restaurant on St. John also features some of the island's best food. Chef Robert Smith produces a fusion of French and Asian cuisine that relies on the island's freshest seafood and produce. Try the prawn and coconut milk soup, or the spicy tuna tartare wrapped in noodles. The staff is the hippest and most attractive on the island. See p. 135.
- **Le Château de Bordeaux** (St. John; ☎ 340/776-6611): Both the view and the exquisite combination of Continental and Caribbean cuisine are winners. Wild game, and rack of lamb perfumed with rosemary and surrounded by a honey-Dijon nut crust, appear often on the ever-changing menu. The West Indian seafood chowder is a perfect blend of fish and spices. See p. 136.
- **The Terrace** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/773-2100): Housed in the Buccaneer, the most prestigious resort on St. Croix, this is the best hotel restaurant on the island. The first-class cuisine is prepared with quality ingredients. Wait until you try the grilled lobster cakes. See p. 172.
- **Kendricks** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/773-9199): The married owners at Kendricks bring a light Continental touch to richly-flavored dishes. You might begin with baked Brie smothered in perfectly seasoned wild mushrooms, then move on to coconut shrimp in a chive-studded, peppery aioli. Some of this culinary couple's recipes have been featured in *Bon Appetit* magazine. See p. 174.
- **Skyworld** (Tortola; ☎ 284/494-3567): With a 360-degree view of Tortola and its sister isles, sunsets that turn the whole sky a fiery red, and one or two *Pascha Coladas* (made with passion-fruit juice, rum, and cream of coconut), who cares about dinner? This restaurant does. The eclectic cuisine is heavy on fresh fish. Don't miss the refreshing Key lime pie, the best on the island. See p. 223.

## 15 The Best Dishes in the Virgin Islands

- **Juicy Burgers at the Green House** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/774-7998): Sometimes at lunch, only a hamburger will do. Drop in to this eatery along the waterfront in Charlotte Amalie for the island's biggest and juiciest burgers. See p. 92.
- **Conch Chowder at Molly Malone's** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/775-1270): Island chefs pride themselves on their

- conch chowder, but Molly has got the other cooks beat. Savory, spicy, perfectly flavored conch chowder is served nightly. See p. 99.
- **Callaloo Soup at Miss Lucy's** (St. John; ☎ 340/693-5244): Callaloo is a spinachlike vegetable native to the West Indies, and local chefs know how to make one of the island's most satisfying soups from this vegetable. Self-taught Miss Lucy seems to impart a magic touch to her soup kettle. We always go for a second bowl. See p. 140.
  - **Creative Salads at Robert's American Grille** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/775-1000): The homemade salads here are the freshest on the island. A delightful treat is the Elysian salad, made with mesclun tossed with roasted walnuts, Bermuda onions, chopped tomatoes, and a house-made dried-cranberry-and-poppy-seed dressing. See p. 98.
  - **Sushi at Beni Iguana's Sushi Bar** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/777-8744): A rarity in the U.S. Virgin Islands, delectable sushi appears on the menu in the Grand Hotel Court in Charlotte Amalie. Try the big roll stuffed with spicy crabmeat, salmon, and other delights. See p. 90.
  - **Garlic Chicken at Vie's Snack Shack** (St. John; ☎ 340/693-5033): Some residents of St. Thomas cross the bay just to sample some of Vie's fabled garlic chicken. We don't know exactly what she does with the bird, but it's such a savory concoction that the dish becomes addictive. See p. 142.
  - **Succulent Pastas at Zozo's Ristorante** (St. John; ☎ 340/693-9200): You can enjoy an array of appetizing pastas at one of the finest Italian restaurants in the Virgins. It doesn't get much better than the lobster ravioli with wild mushrooms and toasted pine nuts. See p. 138.
  - **Seafood Chowder at Le Château de Bordeaux** (St. John; ☎ 340/776-6611): Even if you're from New England, you'll savor the West Indian seafood chowder here. The chef uses the freshest fish and just the right spices. See p. 136.
  - **Margaritas at Morgan's Mango** (St. John; ☎ 340/693-8141): Thursday is officially "Margarita Night," but on any night the bartenders will whip up your favorite margarita. Only Jimmy Buffett knows how to do it better. See p. 140.
  - **Tantalizing Curries at Savant** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/713-8666): The spicy dishes of Thailand and Mexico are served at this Christiansted eatery. We always go here for the Thai curries, which are as good as some of those served in the mother country. The red coconut curry sauce is among the finest we've ever sampled. See p. 176.
  - **Lobster Pasta at the Bombay Club** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/773-1838): We've never been able to work our way through the menu here, because we always like to fill up on the fresh lobster pasta, which is cooked to perfection and well-seasoned with delectable hunks of fresh lobster. See p. 174.
  - **Mahimahi at Round Hill Vacation Villa** (Tortola; ☎ 284/495-9353): Joycelyn and Allan Rhymer perform wonders with one of our favorite fishes, mahimahi, serving it with a savory garlic-butter sauce. See p. 223.
  - **Home-Cooked West Indian Meals at Mrs. Scatliffe's Restaurant** (Tortola; ☎ 284/495-4556): Mrs. Scatliffe's Restaurant is the domain of everyone's favorite B.V.I. grandmother. She'll feed you the most authentic West Indian cuisine in the B.V.I., including spicy conch soup, curried goat, a white fish called "old wife," and more. See p. 272.
  - **Fresh Pumpkin Soup at Skyworld** (Tortola; ☎ 284/494-3567): In the

islands, pumpkin appears on the menu frequently, unlike in the States, where it is most often made into pies at Thanksgiving. Pumpkin soup, an island favorite, is tastier here than anywhere else, and makes you appreciate the much-neglected squash more than ever. See p. 223.

- **The Spareribs at Fat Hog Bob's** (Tortola; ☎ 284/495-1010): Even if you're from the South, you'll salivate over the ribs served at Fat Hog Bob's. Like all barbecue chefs, the cooks here keep their sauce a secret—and is it ever tasty. See p. 224.
- **Mud Pie at Pusser's Landing** (Tortola; ☎ 284/495-4554): Mud pie may appear on many menus, but it's a classic at Pusser's, home of "the rum people." It's so rich that no one ever asks for a second helping. Don't like mud pie? Dig into the mango soufflé. See p. 224.
- **Conch Fritters at Top of the Baths** (Virgin Gorda; ☎ 284/495-5497): From The Bahamas to Key West,

hundreds of chefs proclaim that they make the best conch fritters. We'd like to nominate the cooks at this little eatery for their spicy, delectable fritters, which are a meal unto themselves. See p. 244.

- **The Painkiller at the Soggy Dollar Bar** (Jost Van Dyke; ☎ 284/495-9888): We can't compete with the yachtsman who drank 10 Painkillers in 1 night, leaving him feeling no pain indeed. But this delectable rum-based drink, whose recipe is a closely guarded secret, gets our vote for the best-tasting rum punch in the B.V.I. Its home is the bar at the Sandcastle. See p. 246.
- **Grilled Swordfish at the Cow Wreck Beach Bar & Grill** (Anegada; ☎ 284/495-8047): This elegant fish is grilled and flavored to perfection here. "It gets no better," proclaimed one happy diner at the table next to us, and we concur. Our dish was so fresh that the fish must have been just "harvested" from the sea. See p. 253.

## 16 The Best Shopping Buys

The U.S. Virgin Islands are the shopping mecca of the Caribbean, mostly because there's no sales tax and shoppers can take advantage of the \$1,200 duty-free allowance. St. Thomas's capital, Charlotte Amalie, is the nerve center of the shopping activity here. Look for two local publications, *This Week in St. Thomas* and *Best Buys*—either will steer you toward the goods you want.

Before you leave home, try to check out the price of comparable items you hope to buy in St. Thomas; that way, you'll know if you are really getting a bargain or not (see "Shopping" in chapter 3 for more details). With that said, your best deals will most likely be found in the following categories:

- **Arts and Crafts:** Though arts and crafts are not the high-priority items

that they are on such islands as Haiti and Jamaica, you can certainly find them in the Virgin Islands. The **Jim Tillett Art Gallery & Silk Screen Print Studio** in St. Thomas is the premier art gallery and craft studio in the U.S. Virgin Islands; see p. 116. In St. John, **Mongoose Junction**, in a woody roadside area right at Cruz Bay, offers the best assortment of locally produced arts and crafts (all tax-free for U.S. citizens). Handmade pottery, sculpture, and glass are sold here, along with locally made clothing; see p. 150. In Christiansted on St. Croix, seek out **Folk Art Traders** (p. 195). If you're looking for handicrafts exclusive to the U.S. Virgin Islands, head for **Many Hands** (p. 196), also in Christiansted.

- **Fine China and Crystal:** Sometimes (not always) you can find great deals on these wares—many shoppers report savings of 30% to 50%. We noted that Baccarat goblets sold on St. Thomas went for about a third of the price quoted in the U.S. catalog. Again, know your prices before you land on St. Thomas. The two best outlets for fine china and crystal are both in St. Thomas: the **Crystal Shoppe** and the **English Shop** (p. 118).
- **Jewelry:** Watches and gold jewelry are often heavily discounted in St. Thomas and St. Croix, especially during the off season (mid-Apr to mid-Oct), when there isn't a traffic jam of cruise ships in the harbors. The sheer volume of jewelry offered in St. Thomas is stunning—diamonds, emeralds, rubies, opals, gold, and platinum. Options include works by world-famous designers as well as one-of-a-kind pieces created by local artists. The best outlet for jewelry is in St. Thomas at **Cardow Jewelers** (p. 120).
- **Liquor:** A recent spot survey showed that prices for liquor in St. Thomas

and St. Croix were 50% to 60% less than in New York City. You're allowed to bring 5 liters of liquor back to the United States, or 6 liters if the 6th is locally produced. Local liquor nearly always means rum in the Virgin Islands, but it could also include Southern Comfort, which is bottled on the island (check the label). Because of the generous U.S. Customs allowances in the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas or St. Croix might be the best places to purchase expensive French brandy, champagne, or liqueurs. The widest selection of discount liquor for sale is found on the island of St. Thomas, at **Al Cohen's Discount Liquors** and **A.H. Riise Gift & Liquor Stores**; see p. 119.

- **Perfumes and Cosmetics:** Be on the lookout for bargains on imported perfumes and beauty products such as bath gels and makeup. How much you save depends on the product. **Tropicana Perfume Shoppe**, in St. Thomas, has the largest selection of fragrances (for both women and men) in the U.S. Virgin Islands; see p. 119.

## 17 The Best Nightlife

If you're a serious party animal, you'll want to avoid St. John and most places in the British Virgin Islands, and concentrate on St. Thomas and St. Croix. Below are the latest hot spots:

- **The Sugar Mill** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/776-3004): This is the newest and largest entertainment complex in all of the Virgin Islands. Everything is here, from the island's best sports bar to its most posh and elegant wine and champagne spot. See p. 122.
- **Turtle Rock Bar** (St. Thomas; ☎ 340/777-7100): This place, near Red Hook, is known for its burgers and bar scene. There's always something going on, whether it's karaoke or

live shows by steel bands or other local talent. Happy hour, from 4 to 6pm, means half-price cocktails. See p. 123.

- **The Buccaneer** (St. Croix; ☎ 800/255-3881 or 340/773-2100): This deluxe hotel has the best nightlife on the island. Call to see what's going on during your visit; it could be anything from a limbo show to live reggae. See p. 159.
- **Blue Moon** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/772-2222): On Thursday and Friday nights, this little dive/bistro is the hottest spot in Christiansted. The crowd here is predominantly local, with a few savvy visitors thrown into the mix. See p. 179.

- **Divi Carina Bay Casino** (St. Croix; ☎ 340/773-9700): At the Divi Carina Bay Resort, this glittering casino has introduced gambling to the U.S. Virgin Islands for the first time (if you don't count the island's buccaneering days). Built in the midst of a raging controversy over gambling, the 10-million-square-foot casino boasts 12 gaming tables and 275 slot machines. Even though it's very touristy, the casino has become a hot spot for both locals and visitors. See p. 163.
- **Bomba's Surfside Shack** (Tortola; ☎ 284/495-4148): This is one of the most famous bars in the West Indies and the most interesting hangout in the British Virgin Islands. Bomba's decor consists of junk and neon graffiti. The rum punches are always flowing, and the hippest people in town show up here, especially for the notorious all-night Full Moon Parties. See p. 232.