

US Virgin Islands Travel Guide



Morning at Sapphire Beach on St. Thomas in US Virgin Islands

In 1917, the United States Virgin Islands were purchased by the United States from Denmark and residents of the United States Virgin Islands have US citizenship, but they enjoy voting rights and elect their own government as well as their member of congress. United States Virgin Islands comprised of three islands: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix.

St. Thomas is the capital of the United States Virgin Islands and with its superb mélange of exotic beaches, spectacular historical sights, and a variety of entertainment and dining options, it is immensely popular with the cruisers. St. Croix is the largest of the three islands and it accommodates a variety of terrain from rainforest to dry desert. The other island St. John is the most pristine of the three islands. The best time to explore the numerous natural wonders of the United States Virgin Islands is during the months of December to May. If you are worrying about how to reach United States Virgin Islands, then there is nothing to worry about as there are international airports on both St. Thomas and St. Croix, which has direct flights from some of the major cities of the US.

Getting In

This territory of the US is surrounded by the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, as a result, it makes impossible to avail road and railways to reach this remarkable place. While venturing a journey to this little country, you must be sure of what mode of transport to use. Boats and flights are the two best ways to get into this country. Both the ways are feasible and promises a wonderful experience.

Airways

It is convenient to reach the United States Virgin Islands by air from the US, Canada, and Caribbean regions, as they have the scope of boarding direct flights to United States Virgin Islands. A majority of flights are available from different parts of the US, while some other airlines connect Virgin Islands with Caribbean and Canada. Airports of St. Croix and St. Thomas, receive a host of international flights like, Air Sunshine (Vieques), American Airlines American Eagle (San Juan), Cape Air, Continental Airlines, Coastal Air (Nevis), Delta Air Lines (Atlanta), First Choice Airways, LIAT (St. Maarten, Anguilla, St. Kitts, St. Maarten), Northwest Airlines, Spirit Airlines, Sun Country Airlines, United Airlines, US Airways, Vieques Air Link, and others.

Boats

The visitors will have a lovely voyage across the North Atlantic Ocean or the Caribbean Sea, if they decide to reach the Virgin Islands by a cruise. The passengers are expected to reach islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix, which are popular cruise destinations. The visitors can avail the cruise mainly from Miami, Florida, etc. You can also get cruise from Puerto Rico, which journeys to this place. Some major cruise operators are Carnival Cruise Line, Celebrity Cruise Line Disney, Cruise Line, Holland America Line Norwegian Cruise Line, Premier Cruises, Princess Cruises, Royal Caribbean Int, Seabourn Cruise Line, Sun Cruises, Topaz International Shipping, etc. Apart from all these, the tourists can avail ferries which run between the three US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Sailboat rentals are possible and at Red Hook you can get around the US Virgin Islands through water. While on boat tourists can also get an idea of snorkelling in the Virgin Islands. Besides, there is a ferry boat that transports cars between Red Hook, St. Thomas, and Cruz Bay, St. John.

Road

All the islands have a bus service and regulated taxi service. If you come at Cruz Bay you will get taxis, rental cars, and even scooters. However, transportation in the United States Virgin Islands is best by car. There are many car rental agencies in the islands and therefore are recommended. While driving it is always advisable to stay at the left-hand side of the road.

If advanced reservations are made, the rates are generally lower. If you want to take the mountain roads, you must have an insurance. For the tourists' benefit, there are colored directional signs to major destinations. When you come to the Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas you can rent a taxi or take buses to Charlotte Amalie or to Red Hook for your transportation in United States Virgin Islands. Both of these have ferry service to Cruz Bay, St. John. The taxi and bus fares are regulated. Taxi rates are published by the Virgin Islands Taxicab Commission. In United States Virgin Islands the taxi rates are charged per person one way. If you are planning to visit many destinations, then renting a car is worthwhile and more economical.

Leisure

The United States Virgin Islands are duty free. This means no taxes are levied on items that you buy from here like watches, cameras, fine jewelry, and leather goods. If you go to Christiansted King's Alley on St. Croix, you can find some handmade goods and designer fashions. Mongoose Junction on St. John is a shopper's paradise selling almost everything from jewelry, clothing, crafts to artwork.

Besides, Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas has been termed the best shopping port in the world. Thus, whether you are in St. John or in St. Croix, you can always buy things at the best price. The shops in the downtown areas are usually closed on Sundays. However, if a cruise ship is in port, things are different. You will be glad to know that the shops at the larger hotels are usually open on Sundays. Stuffs like perfume, liquor, cameras, porcelain, crystal, imported clothing, leather goods, watches, jewelry and gold, as well as crafts made by local artisans can be bargained for. Several of these items can be bought for 40 percent less than in the United States. Other things like liquor and cigarettes are often 60 percent less than in the United States. The citizens of the United States of America are allowed a duty-free shopping quota in the Virgin Islands. The quota is of \$1,600, which is twice that of any other island in the Caribbean and three times that of European countries. A six percent duty is charged on purchases over \$1,600 allowance.

The culture of these islands gets manifested in its unique cuisine. Such a cuisine has its origins in Africa, Puerto Rico, other West Indian islands and Europe. Here, the food consists of the locally grown and raised spices, tropical fruits, root vegetables, and all kinds of meats. The local beverage of the Virgin Islands is 'maubi'. It is a slightly fermented drink extracted from ginger root, yeast, herbs, and the bark of the maubi tree. Non-alcoholic ginger beer, bush tea, soursop juice, and the creamy sea-moss cooler are also popular in the category of native drinks. Needless to say that these are liked by tourists from all corners of the world. The restaurants in the United States Virgin Islands offer international cuisine such as French, Japanese, Italian, and Chinese. Even then the island specialties such as conch fritters, fried plantains, sweet potato pudding, and curried chicken should not be missed. Some other Virgin Island food specialties include Kallaloo which is a simmering stew of okra, meat, seafood, local greens, and spices. Souise is a lime-flavored stock of pig's head, tail, and feet. Fungi is a cornmeal and okra side dish that comes along with fried or boiled fish. Johnnycakes are also quite popular. These cakes are deep-fried breads.

Tourists can enthral themselves by dancing, bar hopping, or getting into karaoke. Many of the bars and clubs in these islands play a mixture of American hits and popular Caribbean music. There are happy hours at bars and restaurants which are a good way of starting a fun evening. During the happy hours, discounts on food and drinks are offered.

Places to see

There is a melange of tourist attractions in the US Virgin Islands:

- Coral World Ocean Park
- Blackbeard's Castle
- Fort Christian
- Hassel Island
- Hans Lollik Island
- Thatch Cay
- St. Thomas Synagogue

Tips

Though passports are not required for American citizens to travel to the US Virgin Islands, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) has made the documentation requirements stringent.

During April and May the hotels can be booked at lower prices.

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