



SEADREAM
YACHT CLUB

VIRGIN GORDA, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

The British Virgin Islands (BVI) are made up of approximately 60 isles. Some are hardly bigger than a good-sized rock, while others are large enough to contain a 1,359 ft-/414-m-high mountain. Almost all of the islands are encircled by thin crescents of blinding white sand and dotted with swaying palm trees. They lie on both sides of Sir Francis Drake Channel, about 60 mi/100 km east of Puerto Rico and immediately east of the U.S. Virgin Islands. All of the islands are volcanic in origin with the exception of Anegada, which is a limestone and coral atoll. Most islands are surrounded by coral reefs.

Watergoing vessels have long been important to these islands. The original inhabitants - Ciboney, Arawak and Carib Indians - moved among the islands in their oceangoing craft. In 1493 the islands saw the arrival of several larger boats commanded by an explorer in the service of Spain - Christopher Columbus. Shortly thereafter, pirate ships became fond of the islands, drawn by the same secluded coves that today harbor pleasure craft. They continued to make use of them even after Dutch farmers settled on the islands in the mid 1600s. The British gained control in 1672. They built sugar, cotton and indigo plantations on several of the islands and imported slaves. After slavery was abolished in 1834, the plantation economy came to an end. Most of the landowners abandoned their holdings shortly thereafter, leaving the islands to the former slaves and their descendants. In the 1960s, Laurence Rockefeller's elegant resort on Virgin Gorda, Little Dix Bay, kickstarted the travel industry. The Cary family started its charter yacht company, The Moorings, on Tortola a few years later. Now tourism is the mainstay of the country's economy, although there is a burgeoning banking industry as well.

VIRGIN GORDA

On Virgin Gorda, the hallmarks of a British Virgin Islands vacation - scenery, relaxation and the sea - become even more pronounced. Though it's a small island, the landscape is diverse, with the south rather flat (though partially covered with granite boulders) and the north mountainous (one peak reaches 1,359 ft/414 m). You won't find a lot of activities on Virgin Gorda, but if you enjoy superb snorkeling, scuba diving, sailing and small-scale, exclusive resorts, you'll be quite pleased. Because there's only one tiny town - Spanish Town - visitors spend most of their time unwinding at a resort or beach or taking to the sea.

EXPLORING THE SITES

At **The Baths**, an extraordinary grotto has been created by toppled gigantic boulders which have puzzled geologists for years. They are completely different from any other rock formation in the area. According to some geologists, the rocks may have resulted from eruptions associated with the Ice Age and resemble the stone found in the coastal regions of the Carolinas. Worn smooth by wind and water over the millennia, the enormous rocks have fallen in such a way as to create labyrinths and caves that are fun to explore, although they are not real caves, of course. Where the sea rushes in and out, the formations near the shore catch the water, creating pools of crystal clear water shimmering from the sunlight that filters between the rocks. They are delightful for a refreshing splash - hence their name the "Baths". The Baths are also the most photographed area in BVI, and justly so. A walk to the top of the hill above them takes you to a restaurant, a little shopping complex and, around the corner, a popular open-air bar with a pleasant view. On the southern part of the island is **Devil's Bay National Park**, a secluded coral beach, which can be reached by a fifteen minute walk from the area of the Baths via a scenic trail. **Coppermine Point**, on the island's southeast tip, offers some rather sketchy ruins of a Cornish mine, dating back to the mid 1800s and possibly an even older Spanish mine. All that's left are remains of a chimney, boiler house, cistern and mine shaft. But it's the view that attracts - the strong surf makes for lots of waves crashing against the rocky point, and in the distance is nothing but a vast stretch of the Caribbean Sea. **Gorda Peak National Park** includes Virgin Gorda's highest point (1,359 ft/414 m). The park has two entrances off the road that runs between North Sound and Spanish Town. Self-guided trails lead through a forest that includes mahogany trees (a large number of them were planted in an attempt at reforestation). The views are not particularly good on the way up because the underbrush is thick, but once you

get to the top, you'll find the great views are an ample reward for the rather strenuous hike. From the observation point there is a paved road that leads to *Little Dix Bay*, the sister resort to *Caneel Bay* at ST John, USVI, equally as exclusive and low-key. Another famous spot on Virgin Gorda is the **Bitter End Yacht Club**, a fashionable resort and probably the most popular watering hole in the Caribbean for the yachting crowd.

BEACHES

Virgin Gorda has some of the nicest beaches found anywhere; some are part of resort complexes and others are just off the road. The southwestern shore of Virgin Gorda has several small but beautiful beaches strewn with giant, smooth-surfaced boulders. On most days the water is calm and the snorkeling is good. **Devil's Bay** and **Spring Bay** are beautiful and quiet beaches. **Savanna Bay Beach** is probably the island's prettiest, with a long stretch of white sand and calm water. **Spring Bay** and **Trunk Bay** are two beach areas just north of the Baths and are separated by boulder formations. In fact this area is similar to the Baths, except that there is no grotto here. There are beautiful beaches at or near the principal hotels on Virgin Gorda; Little Dix Bay, Fishers Cove, Biras Creek, and the Bitter End. All beaches in the BVI technically are public property, even if they form part of a resort complex with limited access.

SHOPPING

With the exception of the occasional boutique at resort properties, the only legitimate shopping area on Virgin Gorda is around the marina at Spanish Town. The Yacht Harbor has the largest collection - about a handful - of shops on the island. The stores, which sell jewelry, local crafts, clothing, souvenirs, film and sunscreen, are clustered around two courtyards. There are several souvenir stores and a T-shirt shop at the Baths. At Leverick Bay you'll find the Palm Tree Gallery (one-of-a-kind gifts, books, postcards and art glass) and Pusser's Company Store (men's and women's sportswear, books, nautical memorabilia and, of course, Pusser's Rum).
Shopping Hours: Generally Monday - Saturday 9 am - 5 pm.

DINING

Virgin Gorda is so sparsely populated that there aren't many restaurants, and most are very casual. Those you'll find serve sandwiches, pizzas and hamburgers at lunch and offer typical beef, chicken and lamb entrees plus local fish and lobster in the evening. Prices are reasonable.

- **The Bath & Turtle**
Spanish Town's most popular gathering place, the Bath and Turtle has excellent pizza, hamburgers and grilled fish plus exotic frozen drinks, all of which attract the yachting crowd.
Daily for lunch and dinner. Most major credit cards. Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour, Spanish Town.
- **Bitter End Yacht Club**
A center of activity for the boating set, the Bitter End's Clubhouse has a buffet and an a la carte menu for all meals. Go there for local lobster and fresh fish, grilled steaks and bountiful salad bars.
Daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Most major credit cards. John O'Point, North Sound.
- **Mad Dog's**
Located near the Baths, Mad Dog's is famous for its menu of ultrasmooth frozen drinks. Hot dogs and simple sandwiches are also available.
Daily, with continual service until 7 pm. No credit cards. At the entrance to the Baths.
- **Top of the Baths**
Diners go there for the views of neighboring islands as well as the cuisine. This open-air restaurant, perched above the Baths, serves salads, sandwiches and burgers for lunch. Fresh fish and grilled steaks are dinner specialties.
Daily for lunch and dinner. Most major credit cards. The Baths.