

British Virgin Islands

What happens when steady trade winds meet an island-flecked channel with tame currents and hundreds of protected, salt-rimmed bays? Every mariner worth his sea salt sails there – which is how the British Virgin Islands (BVI) became a sailing fantasyland. More than 40 islands bob in the group, welcoming visitors with an absurd amount of beach.

Tortola is the archipelago's father. It holds most of the population and commerce, and its demeanor is a little bit stern as a result. That doesn't mean it won't let its hair down at a full-moon party or out on the bay windsurfing. Virgin Gorda is the BVI's beauty, beloved by movie stars, millionaires and yachties. Somehow she's maintained her innocence, with a clutch of exceptional national parks. Jost Van Dyke is the jovial island, where a man named Foxy is king and 'time flies when you ain't doin' shit,' as the T-shirts proclaim. Not-like-the-others Anegada floats in a remote reef; if you're looking to get away from it all, this atoll has a hammock waiting. Then there are the sprinkling of out islands – some uninhabited, some with just a beach bar, some with shipwrecks to dive on. You'll need your own boat to reach them, but since the BVI are the world's charter-boat capital, you're in luck.

While the islands are British territories, there's little that's overtly British. The BVI are quite close to, and intermingled with, the US Virgin Islands, though the BVI are more virginal as far as development goes.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 59 sq miles
- **Capital** Road Town, Tortola
- **Country code** ☎ 284
- **Departure tax** US\$5 by sea (cruise ship passengers pay US\$7); US\$15 by air (plus US\$5 security tax)
- **Famous for** Yacht charters, the Baths, Pusser's Rum, local resident Richard Branson
- **Language** English
- **Money** US dollar (US\$); US\$1 = €0.65 = UK£0.51
- **Official name** Virgin Islands, but it's referred to as 'British Virgin Islands' to distinguish it from the neighboring US Virgin Islands
- **People** British Virgin Islanders
- **Phrase** Limin' (pronounced 'lime-in'; means 'relaxing')
- **Population** 23,500
- **Visa** Unnecessary for citizens of most Western countries; see p415



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Devil's Bay** (p405) Climb up, over and around sea boulders and grottoes to this sheltered sand crescent
- **White Bay** (p409) Drink at the jovial beach that birthed the rum-soaked Painkiller
- **Anegada** (p410) Leave the world behind on this remote island of hammocks and lobster dinners
- **RMS Rhone** (p398) Scuba dive on this famous shipwreck off Salt Island
- **Set Sail** (p416) Charter a boat and sail to out islands like Norman and Cooper

ITINERARIES

- **One Day** Take one of the quick and frequent ferries to Virgin Gorda, splash around the Baths and Devil's Bay, grab a meal and drink before calling it a day.
- **One Week** Spend a day or two beaching in Tortola's Cane Garden Bay area, then ferry to Virgin Gorda to hike, snorkel and swim for a couple more. Spend two days slowing waaay down on either Jost or Anegada. Take a day-sail tour to the out islands.
- **Two Weeks** Island hop: hit the four main islands, plus nearby St Thomas and St John in the US Virgin Islands, by ferry. Or get adventurous and charter a boat to explore them all (including the out islands).
- **On a Budget** Yes, it can be done. Camp at Brewers Bay on Tortola, White Bay on Jost or Anegada Reef Hotel on Anegada. Buy low-cost take-away foods at Road Town Bakery on Tortola, Christine's Bakery on Jost and Dotsy's Bakery on Anegada. Spend your days on beaches (free) or at national parks (admission US\$3). Use ferries for transportation.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Reliably balmy with gentle trade winds, the BVIs' temperature averages 77°F (25°C) in winter (December through March) and 83°F (28°C) in summer (June through August). Though the islands get less than 50 inches of rain each year, count on brief tropical showers between July and November. Hurricane season peaks in August and September (mostly the latter).

The BVIs' high travel season is from December 15 to April 15. November, early December and May are good times to visit

too, as hotel prices are lower and the cruise ships are fewer.

HISTORY

Columbus & the Pirates

On Christopher Columbus' second trip to the Caribbean in 1493, Caribs led him to an archipelago of pristine islands that he dubbed Santa Ursula y Las Once Mil Virgenes (St Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins), in honor of a 4th-century princess raped and murdered, along with 11,000 maidens, in Cologne by marauding Huns.

By 1595, the famous English privateers Sir Francis Drake and Jack Hawkins were using the Virgin Islands as a staging ground for attacks on Spanish shipping. In the wake of Drake and Hawkins came French corsairs and Dutch freebooters. All knew that the Virgin Islands had some of the most secure and unattended harbors in the West Indies. Places like Sopers Hole (p399) at Tortola's West End and the Bight at Norman Island (p404) are legendary pirates' dens.

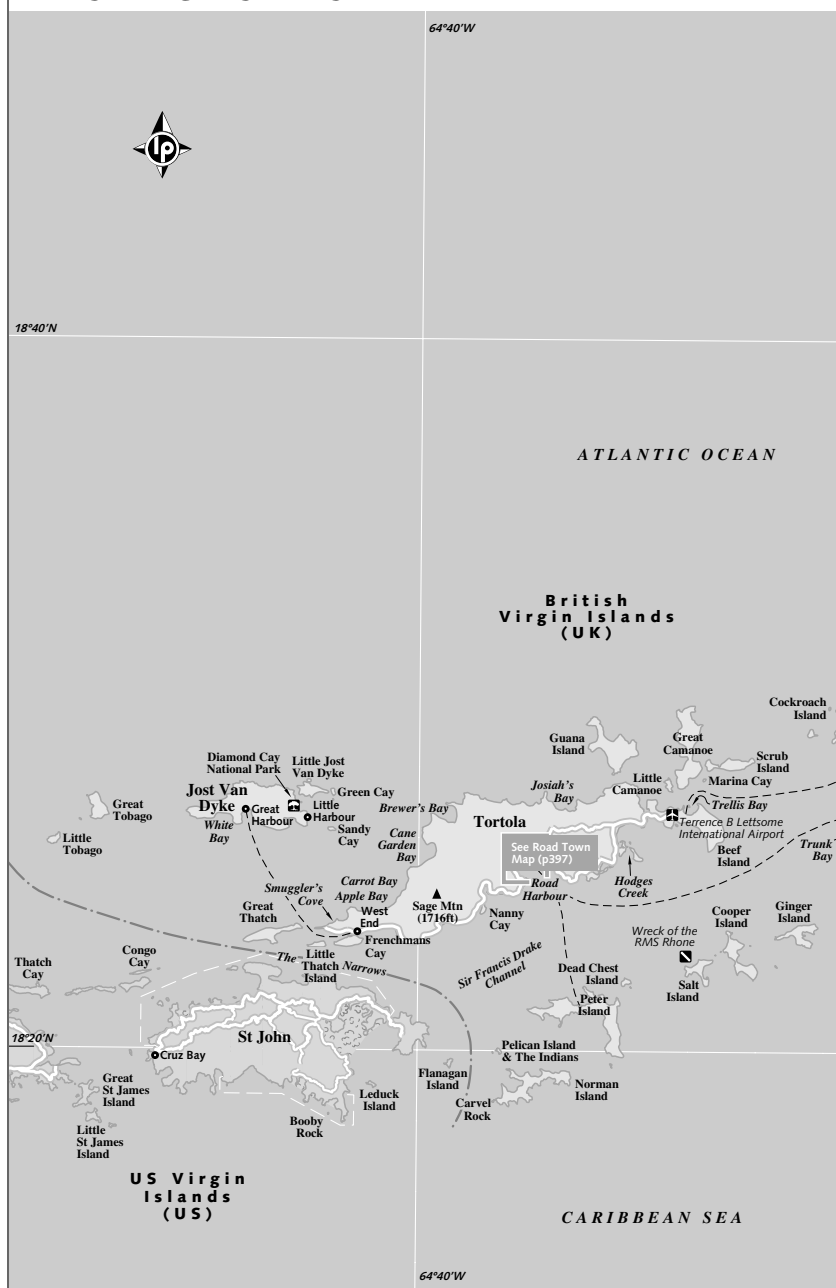
While the Danes settled on what is now the US Virgin Islands (USVIs), the English had a firm hold on today's BVIs. The middle island of St John remained disputed territory until 1717, when the Danish side claimed it for good. The Narrows between St John and Tortola has divided the eastern Virgins (BVIs) from the western Virgins (USVIs) for more than 250 years.

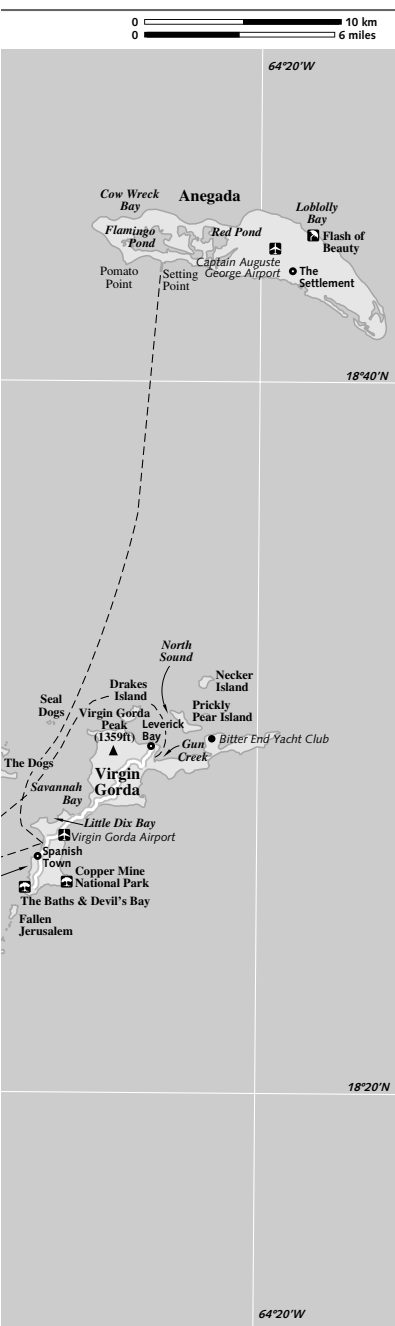
Queen Elizabeth & the Offshore Companies

Following WWII, British citizens in the islands clamored for more independence. In 1949 BVIs citizens demonstrated for a representative government and got a so-called presidential legislature the next year. By 1967 the BVIs had become an independent colony of Britain, with its own political parties, a Legislative Council and an elected Premier (with elections every four years). Queen Elizabeth II also made her first royal visit to the BVIs in 1967, casting a glow of celebrity on the islands that they enjoy to this day. Royal family members still cruise through every few years.

In the mid-1980s the government had the shrewd idea of offering offshore registration to companies wishing to incorporate in the islands. Incorporation fees – along with tourism – now prop up the economy, with

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS





about 750,000 companies currently registered. Locals laughingly call their booming financial services industry 'legal money laundering,' and while that's not quite the case (although odd, one must admit, that of the 750,000 companies on the books, only 10,000 of them actually trade in the BVIs), it does create an unusual island economy infused with foreign accountants, trust lawyers and investment brokers.

THE CULTURE

Despite their name, apart from little touches like Cadbury chocolate, the culture of the British Virgin Islands is West Indian to the core. The population is a mix of professional people working in financial services, folks working the tourist trade or raising livestock, and adventurers whose biochemistry is intricately tied to the seas. The official ethnic breakdown is 87% black, 7% white and the remainder mixed, East Indian or other.

The BVIs have one of the Caribbean's most stable economies. The per capita GDP is US\$46,400 – higher than the UK, USA and Sweden, according to UN statistics. In general, most people live quite comfortably.

Some visitors complain the locals (particularly on Tortola) are unfriendly. The demeanor is not rude so much as reserved.

ARTS

Fungi (*foon-ghee*, also an island food made of cornmeal and fish) is the local folk music. It uses homemade percussion like washboards, ribbed gourds and conch shells to accompany a singer. The full-moon festivals at Aragorn's Studio (p402) and Bomba's Shack (p401) are good places to hear it live.

Quite a few artists work on the islands. Aragorn's Studio hosts a local collective of potters, sculptors, coconut carvers and more; they sell their wares on site. Many local painters and artisans sell their colorful goods at Sunny Caribbean Spice Shop (p399) in Road Town.

The BVIs' most famous literary work was written by a Scotsman who never actually set foot in the region. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island* (1883) after his seagoing uncle inspired him with tales of Norman Island (p404). Or so the story goes. Whatever the genesis, it's a rip-roaring pirate yarn about buried treasure and a one-legged, parrot-toting gent named Long John Silver.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

The BVIs consist of more than 40 islands and cays. The group owes its existence to a series of volcanic eruptions that built up layers of lava and igneous rock, which created islands with three geographical zones: the coastal plain, coastal dry forests and the steep central mountains that dominate the island interiors. The one exception is easternmost Anegada, which is a flat coral island. Sage Mountain on Tortola is the highest point in the islands at 1716ft. Except where houses perch precariously on impossibly steep slopes, the mountains are dense subtropical forests. All of the timber is second- or third-growth; the islands were stripped for sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations in the colonial era. The BVIs have no rivers and very few freshwater streams.

Thousands of tropical plant varieties grow in the islands, and a short drive can transport a nature lover between entirely different ecosystems. Mangrove swamps, coconut groves and sea-grape trees dominate the coast, while mountain peaks support wet forest with mahogany, *lignum vitae*, palmetto and more than 30 varieties of wild orchid.

Islanders also grow and collect hundreds of different roots and herbs as ingredients for 'bush medicine.' Psychoactive mushrooms grow wild (and are consumed) on the islands, particularly on Tortola.

Wildlife

Few land mammals are natives; most were accidentally or intentionally introduced. Virtually every island has a feral population of goats and burros, and some islands have wild pigs, horses, cats and dogs.

More than 200 species of bird inhabit the island, adding bright colors and a symphony of sound to the tropical environment. A few snake species (none of which are poisonous) slither around, along with a host of small and not-so-small lizards, including the 6ft-long rock iguanas of Anegada and the common green iguana found throughout the islands. Anoles and gecko lizards are ubiquitous, and numerous species of toad and frog populate the islands.

Environmental Issues

Rapid urbanization, deforestation, soil erosion, mangrove destruction and a lack of

freshwater keep environmentalists wringing their hands with worry. On Tortola, almost all of the flat land has been developed, and houses hang on mountain slopes like Christmas ornaments. High population growth and density have kept sewage treatment plants in a constant scramble to prevent the islands from soiling themselves.

Desalination plants make fresh water out of sea water and without them the islands would seriously lack water. When a storm strikes, islands lose power and diesel facilities shut down, forcing islanders to use rainwater cisterns.

Prior years of overfishing have put conch (a local shellfish) and lobster in a precarious situation. Currently, fishing for these creatures is not allowed from August 15 through November 1 so stocks can replenish.

Environmental concerns have resulted in the formation of the **BVI National Parks Trust** (☎ 494-3904; www.bvinationalparkstrust.org), which protects 15 parks and six islands, including the Dogs and Fallen Jerusalem, which are excellent dive sites. The entire southwest coast of Virgin Gorda is a collection of national parks that includes the giant boulder formations at the Baths.

FOOD & DRINK

Soup and stew are staples. Generally, cast-iron pots are used for 'boilin' down' soups or stews, such as pepperpot – which combines oxtail, chicken, beef, pork and calf's foot with a hot pepper and *cassareep* (sauce made from cassava). *Tannia* (a root vegetable) soup is another traditional offering, as is *calabeza* (pumpkin) soup. Another popular dish is roti (*root-ee*), flatbread envelopes stuffed with curried meat, fish or poultry, often served with a tangy mango chutney.

Fungi (*foon-ghee*) is made from cornmeal and is usually served with fish and gravy.

HOW MUCH?

- **Two-tank scuba dive trip** US\$110
- **Round-trip ferry Tortola to Virgin Gorda** US\$25
- **Half-day sailing trip** US\$80
- **Pusser's Rum 750ml bottle** US\$10
- **Roti** US\$11

Daube meat is a pot roast seasoned with vinegar, onion and native spices. Most dishes arrive with johnnycakes (fried bread).

Fish and shellfish are prevalent, and cooks will bake, grill, stew or boil whatever is the daily catch. Conch (pronounced conk) is often fried into crispy fritters. Fresh lobster is Anegada's claim to fame. As commercial fishing of conch and lobster is forbidden from August 15 through November 1 (see opposite), you're less likely to find them on menus during this period.

While tap water is usually safe, visitors with a sensitive stomach might want to stick to bottled water.

The BVIs are home to a popular cocktail called the Painkiller, a yummy mix of rum, orange juice, pineapple juice and a touch of coconut cream.

TORTOLA

pop 19,600

Among Tortola's sharp peaks and bougainvillea-clad hillsides you'll find a mash-up of play places. Guesthouses and mountain villas mingle with beachside resorts. *Bon Appetite* cooks make island dishes next to elderly Mrs Scatliffe, who prepares them from her garden. You even get your choice of full-moon parties – artsy with Aragorn or mushroom-tea-fueled with Bomba.

About 80% of the BVIs' 23,500 citizens live and work on Tortola, so it's not surprising there's a lot of choice here. It's also the BVIs' governmental and commercial center, plus its air and ferry hub.

As for the name: in Spanish, *tortola* means 'turtledove,' which were the birds flying around with distinctive coos when Christopher Columbus came ashore. Most have since flown the coop (except on neighboring Guana Island).

Orientation

At 21 sq miles in area, Tortola lies less than 2 miles east of the USVIs' St John, across a windswept and current-ripped channel called the Narrows. Tortola's long, thin, tall body stretches 14 miles from west to east but is rarely more than 2 miles wide. The altitude of Tortola's mountain spine creates steep slopes that come almost to the water's edge on the island's north and south shores. Scalloped bays ring the island; the deepest

serves as the harbor for the BVIs' largest town and capital, Road Town.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Terrence B Lettsome Airport (EIS; ☎ 494-3701) is on Beef Island, connected to Tortola by a bridge on the island's east end. Most international flights from North America and Europe connect through a hub (see p415).

BOAT

There are two ports of entry for ferries: the main terminal is in Road Town, the other terminal is at West End on the island's, yes, west-end. Ferries travel to St John (USVIs) and Jost Van Dyke from West End only. Ferries travel to Virgin Gorda and Anegada from Road Town only. Ferries travel to Charlotte Amalie on St Thomas (USVIs) from both Road Town and West End. For ferry costs and schedules within the BVIs, see p417). For sailings to/from the USVIs, see p416).

Getting Around

Public transportation is nonexistent so people either rent cars or make use of the efficient taxis. Although everything looks close on the map, the ruggedness of Tortola's topography makes for slow travel.

CAR

There are several local car-rental agencies on Tortola. High-season rates begin at about US\$55 per day, and can run as high as US\$90, but you'll get a better price for a weekly rental.

Hertz Airport (☎ 495-6600); Road Town (☎ 494-6228; www.hertzbvi.com)

Itgo Car Rentals (☎ 494-5150; Road Town) Good prices; located at Wickhams Cay 1.

Jerry's Car Rental (☎ 495-4111; www.info-res.com/jerry jeep; West End) A good option if you're coming in on a West End ferry. Jerry will pick you up at the dock.

TAXI

Taxis are widely available; see p418 for further details.

The fare from Road Town to the West End, Cane Garden Bay and the airport is the same (one way US\$21).

ROAD TOWN

Let's be honest: the BVIs' capital is nothing special – no mega sights to see or scenery to

drop your jaw. But there's nothing wrong with Road Town, either (unless it's the one or two cruise ships each day whose passengers quickly overwhelm the small area). It's a perfectly decent place to spend a day or night, and most visitors do exactly that when they charter their own boat or take the ferries to the outlying islands, including Virgin Gorda and the USVIs.

The town takes its name from the island's principal harbor, Road Bay, which has served as a 'roadstead' (staging area) for fleets of ships for centuries. It remains a convenient place to stock up on food, drinks and money before journeying onward.

Most of the town's pubs and restaurants are along Waterfront Dr. Main St, Road Town's primary shopping venue, is a nice retreat for anyone seeking shade and quiet. The narrow street winds along the western edge of town and has a collection of wooden and stone buildings dating back about 200 years.

Information

Branches of Scotiabank, FirstBank and First Caribbean are all found on Wickhams Cay 1 in Road Town. All have ATMs.

Bits 'n' Pieces (☎ 494-5957; Wickhams Cay 1; per 30min US\$5; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Internet access: has four computer terminals and a printer.

BVI Tourist Board (☎ 494-3134, 800-835-8530; www.bvitourism.com; DeCastro St, Akara Bldg; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) The main office provides a free map, which is sufficient for navigating roads.

Peebles Hospital (☎ 494-3497; Main St; ☎ 24hr) It has complete emergency services.

Post office (☎ 494-7423; Main St; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

Serendipity Books (☎ 494-5865; Main St; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-3pm Sat) This bookshop has an upstairs café with internet access (per 30min US\$5).

Tourist office (☎ 494-7260; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm) This tiny office is at the ferry terminal.

Dangers & Annoyances

Road Town has little street crime, but areas can become suddenly desolate after dark. Remain alert to your surroundings.

Sights

The **JR O'Neal Botanic Gardens** (☎ 494-4557; www.bvinationalparkstrust.org; cnr Botanic Rd & Main St; admission US\$3; ☎ 8am-4pm) is a four-acre national park and a pleasant refuge from Road Town's traffic, noise and heat. Benches are set amid in-

digenous and exotic tropical plants and there is also an orchid house, lily pond, small rain-forest and cactus grove. The herb garden is rife with traditional bush medicine plants.

In the heart of Main St, the stark white-rubble walls of **HM Prison** date back to the 18th century. The fortress is still a working jail, and you can hear muffled voices and radio music from the cells at night. East of the prison, **St George's Episcopal (Anglican) Church** (☎ 494-3894; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 7am-4pm Sun) is another survivor of the 18th century. Inside is a copy of the 1834 Emancipation Proclamation that freed Britain's slaves in the West Indies. To the west of the prison, the 1924 **Methodist Church** is a fine example of a classic West Indian timber-framed construction.

Standing at the extreme south end of Main St, and looking like an imperial symbol, whitewashed 1880 **Government House** (admission US\$3; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Sat) was once the British Governor's residence. Today it's a small museum with period furniture and historic artifacts.

Activities

Boat charters are big, big business in the BVIs, and Road Town is where it all happens (primarily from the Moorings at Wickhams Cay 2). For more information on bareboat or crewed boat charters, see p416.

The following well-regarded day-sail operators run trips to Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke, Anegada and Norman Island, among others; prices include snorkel gear.

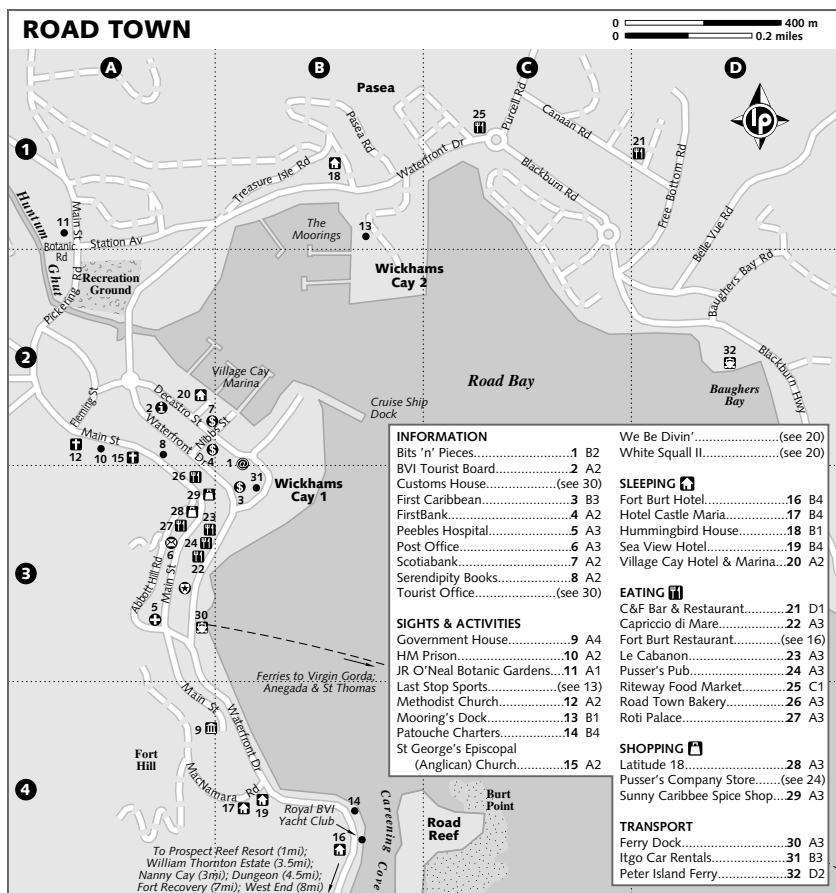
Patouche Charters (☎ 248-494-6300; www.patouche.com; HR Penn Marina; half/full-day tours US\$80/125) A 48ft catamaran.

White Squall II (☎ 494-2564; www.whitesquall2.com; Village Cay Marina, A Dock; full-day tours US\$105) A traditional, 80ft schooner.

For diving and snorkeling hot spots, see the boxed text, p398.

Last Stop Sports (☎ 494-0564; www.laststopsports.com; Wickhams Cay 2, Mooring's Dock) Has great rates on kayak rentals (US\$30/40 per single/double) and windsurfing equipment (from US\$37 per day). It also rents surfboards, bikes and dive gear.

We Be Divin' (☎ 494-4320; www.webedivinbvi.com; Village Cay Marina; 1-2-tank dive US\$85/120) Look for the Aquaventure Scuba office, which works in conjunction with We Be Divin' here. Its boats run to all the major local dive sites.



Sleeping

Sea View Hotel (☎ 494-2483; seaviewhotel@surbvi.com; cnr Waterfront Dr & MacNamara Rd; r/apt incl tax US\$82/120; 🚗 🚻 🚰) At the west end of town, this budget property has about 20 small rooms and efficiency apartments. It's nothing fancy (and despite the name, there's no view), but the motel-like rooms are clean and well kept. Unfortunately, the hotel fronts a busy road so noise can be a problem.

Hotel Castle Maria (☎ 494-2553; www.castlemaria.com; MacNamara Rd; s/d/q US\$95/99/140; 🚗 🚻 🚰) Located up the hill behind the Sea View Hotel, this 30-room property offers decent value in its harbor-view rooms, which have thick wood furnishings and private balconies. The non-view interior rooms tend to be dark, and all

rooms are somewhat faded. There's a good rooftop Thai restaurant that serves dinner.

Fort Burt Hotel (☎ 494-2587; www.bviguide.com/fortburt; Waterfront Dr; r/ste from US\$120/200; 🚗 🚻 🚰) The hotel rises on the ruins of a 300-year-old Dutch fort that once guarded the harbor from a steep hillside. The 12 rooms have all amenities; most have sweeping sea views and some of the five suites even have private pools. Be ready to climb lots of steps – it'll help work off dinner at the gourmet restaurant on site.

our pick Hummingbird House (☎ 494-0039; www.hummingbirdbvi.com; Pasea; r incl breakfast US\$135-160; 🚗 🚻 🚰) This is a real B&B (the BVIs' only one), run by long-time UK transplant Yvonne. Tile floors, batik decor and thick towels fill the four breezy rooms; you'll feel

SOAK IT UP

You can't stick your toe in the water without splashing an extraordinary underwater site in the BVIs. For a list of dive operators who will take you to the sites listed here, see p412. For day-sail operators who will take you to the snorkeling sites, see p396.

Top Five Dive Sites

- **Wreck of the RMS Rhone** This famous 310ft shipwreck sits in just 30ft to 90ft of water off Salt Island (p404), making it an accessible wreck dive for all levels.
- **Blond Rock** A pinnacle between Dead Chest and Salt Islands, this coral ledge has many caves, crevices and deep holes.
- **Alice's Wonderland** This spot off Ginger Island has some of the best deepwater coral formations in the BVIs.
- **The Indians** Just off Norman Island, three cone-shaped rock formations rise from 36ft underwater to 30ft above water.
- **Angel Reef** Off Norman Island, this site is a crossroads for species from different habitats, with shallow canyons rising to the surface.

Top Five Snorkeling Sites

- **The Baths** Virgin Gorda
- **Loblolly Bay** Anegada
- **Brewers Bay** Tortola
- **Dry Rocks East** Cooper Island
- **The Caves** Norman Island

like you're staying in a friend's big ol' guest room. Breakfast is a full cooked affair served poolside. There are surcharges to use the air-conditioner (per night US\$20) and internet (per 30 minutes US\$5), though wi-fi access is free. Hummingbird is located in the leafy Pasea neighborhood, a 25-minute walk from town, or US\$4 cab ride.

Village Cay Hotel & Marina (☎ 494-2771; www.igy-villagecay.com; Wickhams Cay 1; r US\$165-220; ♿ 📺 📶) Located smack in the middle of Road Town overlooking the bay's yacht slips, Village Cay is a sweet place to rest your head, especially if you want to schmooze with fellow boaters. The 19 rooms and two condos have all the first-class amenities of a resort at a fraction of the price. There's also wi-fi. Everyone is onto the deal, so it books up fast. If nothing else, come for a drink at the pier-side bar-restaurant.

Eating & Drinking

Tortolians love to eat out, and Road Town has restaurants to match every wallet. Pick up the free *Limin' Times* for entertainment listings. Self-caterers can stock up at **Riteway**

Food Market (☎ 494-2263; Pasea; 🕒 7:30am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 9pm Sun).

our pick Road Town Bakery (☎ 494-0222; Main St; sandwiches US\$5-8; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) New England Culinary Institute students bake the goods here. The small counter mostly serves take-away, though you can eat at the five outdoor tables along with the chickens pecking for scraps. The soups and sandwiches are dandy, but it's the pumpkin spice muffins, brownies and fat slices of weep-worthy cake that will set you free.

Capriccio di Mare (☎ 494-5369; Waterfront Dr; mains US\$9-14; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Set on the porch of a classic West Indian house across from the ferry dock, this Italian café draws both locals and travelers. Breakfast includes pastries and cappuccino. Lunch and dinner feature salads, pasta dishes and pizza, with plenty of wines to wash it all down.

Roti Palace (☎ 494-4196; Abbott Hill Rd; rotis US\$9-16; 🕒 lunch & dinner) On a side street that leads up the hill off Main St, this cramped little restaurant serves some of the island's best roti at its open-air plastic tables. Fiery chutney sets off the chicken, beef, conch or vegetable fillings.

Pusser's Pub (☎ 494-3897; Waterfront Dr; mains US\$11-17; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This English-style, nautical-themed pub gets lively with pizza, burger and sandwich eaters whooping it up at brass-ringed tables.

C&F Bar & Restaurant (☎ 494-4941; mains US\$12-20; 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) For totally authentic West Indian cuisine, come to this neighborhood joint in Purcell Estate, east of Road Town. It's worth the trouble it takes to find (take a cab your first trip – about US\$7 from the ferry dock). Tortolians show up in droves to consume barbecue seafood and curry dishes from chef Clarence Emmanuel.

Le Cabanon (☎ 494-8660; Waterfront Dr; mains US\$20-30; 🍷 dinner) Parisian Christopher Boisgirard concocts his bistro's escargot, foie gras and seafood dishes using provisions flown in from French St-Martin. The open-air terrace, carved from a classic West Indian house, becomes a happenin' scene at night.

Fort Burt Restaurant (☎ 494-2587; Waterfront Dr; mains US\$20-35; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a delightful view of the harbor, this upscale restaurant in the Fort Burt Hotel serves dishes (say, saltfish cakes or lobster with avocado salsa) created by students of the nearby New England Culinary Institute. It's a great place to come for romantic dinners.

Shopping

Craft hawkers come out in droves around Wickhams Cay 1 when cruise ships sail into port, but the top shops are on Main St.

Latitude 18 (☎ 494-7807; Main St) For those in need of flip-flops, sunglasses, Kipling bags or good-quality souvenir T-shirts, Latitude 18 stocks them all.

Pusser's Company Store (☎ 494-2467; Waterfront Dr) Adjoining Pusser's Pub, this shop sells logoed clothing and accessories, as well as bottles of Pusser's Rum – the blend served on Her Majesty's Royal Navy ships for 300 years.

Sunny Caribbean Spice Shop (☎ 494-2178; Main St) It's a favorite for its colorful array of island-made seasonings like 'rum peppers' and 'mango magic.' Spices are also packaged as hangover cures and bad-spirit repellents. The adjoining gallery sells paintings, pottery, jewelry and dolls by local craftspeople.

AROUND ROAD TOWN

Just west of Road Town the road hugs the shoreline past a couple of historic sites and big resorts. The ruined walls and founda-

tions of the **William Thornton Estate** plantation great house lie unpreserved and unguarded just west of Nanny Cay. Thornton went on to design the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC.

Halfway between Road Town and West End, the **Dungeon** is a ruined fort built in 1794 by the Royal Engineers. It was dubbed the Dungeon because its underground cell holds remnants of what might be prisoners' graffiti.

Closer to the West End, **Fort Recovery** is the BVI's oldest intact structure. Villas now surround the fort.

Just beyond Fort Burt, on the western border of Road Town, sits **Prospect Reef Resort** (☎ 494-3311, 800-356-8937; www.prospectreefbvi.com; r US\$150-475; 🍷 🍷), Tortola's largest resort. The 137 rooms come in several configurations, from garden studios (US\$150) to two-bedroom villas (US\$475). There are all the amenities you'd expect from a 44-acre seaside resort...except a beach. Prospect Reef compensates by running a regular glass-bottom ferry to Peter Island, 3 miles offshore. Tennis, fishing and yacht charters are at your doorstep, as is diving instruction with **Dive Tortola** (☎ 494-9200, 800-353-3419; www.divetortola.com; 1-2-tank dive US\$75/110).

A 'swim with the dolphins' program also operates on site, but remember: these are wild animals brought here forcibly, a practice that is widely condemned by environmental groups.

Nanny Cay Resort & Marina (☎ 494-4895; www.nannycay.com; s/d standard US\$170/200, ste US\$200-295; 🍷 🍷), 3 miles west of Road Town, describes itself as 'an island unto itself,' and the description fits. The 42-room resort has two pools, two restaurants, a tennis court, marina, windsurfing school, dive shop, mountain bike center, boutiques and a minimarket – in short, it's a self-contained pleasure dome on a 25-acre islet. Rooms have kitchenettes, private balconies and wooden cathedral ceilings. **Island Surf & Sail** (☎ 494-0123; www.bviwatersports.com; Nanny Cay) also offers windsurfing rentals and lessons for approximately US\$100 per three-hour session.

WEST END

The small settlement of West End has the main ferry terminal for vessels going to and from the USVIs (see p416) and Jost Van Dyke (see p408). **Sopers Hole** (www.sopershole.com), the former site of a 16th-century pirate's den, is a

major anchorage, with a marina and shopping wharf that has some great restaurants and bars. Anyone needing transportation from here can call **West End Taxi Association** (☎ 495-4934).

Jolly Roger Inn (☎ 495-4559; www.jollyrogerbvi.com; mains US\$9-20; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) On the north side of Sopers Hole, next to the ferry dock, this popular restaurant and bar has a great waterfront location and the chefs serve up delicious grilled fish and pizzas. Locals and travelers flock to the Caribbean barbecue on Friday and Saturday nights. Five very basic rooms (shared/private bathroom US\$70/112) sit above the restaurant.

Pusser's Landing (☎ 495-4554; mains US\$18-27; 🍳 lunch & dinner) This fun pub offers outdoor harborside seating and a Margaritaville ambience. The seafood-based dinners are a bit pricey for their quality. It's best to stick to snacks and booze (happy hour is from 5pm to 6:30pm).

CANE GARDEN BAY AREA

A turquoise cove ringed by steep green hills, Cane Garden Bay is exactly the kind of place Jimmy Buffet would immortalize in song – which he did in 1978's 'Mañana.' The area's perfecto 1-mile beach and throngs of rum-sipping bars and restaurants make it Tortola's most popular party zone.

Rid yourself of visions of a sprawling resort area, however; the sheer mountains dominate the landscape, so everything hugs the water along a small strip of road. South of Cane Garden Bay are a series of picturesque bays. Speckled amid clumps of shoreside holiday villas are small West Indian settlements. When you stay out here you're living among locals.

The north shore lies only a few miles as the crow flies from Road Town, but the winding, precipitous roads travel over the mountains, making it about a 25-minute drive.

Sights & Activities

You can't miss the funky **North Shore Shell Museum** (☎ 495-4714; Carrot Bay; admission free), which also serves great meals in its restaurant. Just off the North Coast Rd at the west end of Cane Garden Bay, the **Callwood Rum Distillery** (tour US\$1; 🕒 8:30am-6pm Mon-Sat) is the oldest continuously operated distillery in the Eastern Caribbean. The Callwood family has been producing Arundel rum here for generations, using copper vats and wooden aging casks. A small store sells the delicious local liquor.

BEACHES

Brewers Bay, a palm-fringed bay on the north shore east of Cane Garden Bay, has excellent snorkeling and a tranquil scene – possibly because getting here involves either an expensive cab ride or a brake-smoking do-it-yourself drive down steep switchbacks. There are a couple of beach bars and a campground here.

Cane Garden Bay is probably on the postcard that drew you to the BVIs in the first place. The gently sloping crescent of sand hosts plenty of water-sports vendors and beachside bars. It's a popular yacht anchorage, and becomes a full-on madhouse when cruise ships arrive in Road Town and shuttle passengers over for the day.

Apple Bay, southwest of Cane Garden, is the 'surfing beach,' especially in late December to February when the consistent swells roll in. On many maps, Apple Bay includes Cappoons Bay, home of the infamous Bomba's Surfside Shack (see opposite).

Long Bay is an attractive 1-mile stretch of white-sand beach that spreads west of Apple Bay. **Smuggler's Cove**, at the island's southwest-ern tip, has good snorkeling.

SAGE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

At 1716ft, Sage Mountain rises higher than any other peak in the Virgin Islands. Seven trails crisscross the 92-acre surrounding park. Pick up a trail map at the main entrance, about 0.3 miles from the car lot.

The park is not a rainforest in the true sense, because it receives less than 100 inches of rain per year, but the lush area possesses many rainforest characteristics. It's cool and damp, populated by bo-peep frogs and lizards. Hikers should keep an eye out for 20ft fern trees, mahogany trees, coco-plum shrubs and other flora that have not changed since the dinosaur days. You'll also see spectacular vistas of both the USVIs and BVIs. Allow two hours for your rambles.

Festivals & Events

BVI Music Festival (☎ 495-3378; www.bvimusicfest.info) brings big-name acts like Percy Sledge and Wyclef Jean to wail at Cane Garden Bay in late May.

Sleeping

You could feasibly stay at Cane Garden Bay without a car, but you'll need wheels to stay at any of the other lodgings.

FULL MOONS, MUSHROOMS & A MAN NAMED BOMBA

Bomba's Surfside Shack (☎ 495-4148; Cappsos Bay) near Apple Bay has achieved mythic status in the Caribbean for reasons including bras, booze, full moons and trippy mushrooms.

The place truly is a shack, built from a mishmash of license plates, surfboards and graffiti-covered signposts espousing carnal wisdom such as 'Wood is Good!'. Bras and panties are woven throughout, along with snapshots of topless women. Very often, sitting smack in the middle of these photos and wearing a wide grin along with his trademark sunglasses, is Bomba.

Bomba started his bar-restaurant about 30 years ago to feed the surfers who still ride the waves curling out front. Today the shack is famous for its monthly full-moon parties, which feature an outdoor barbecue, live reggae and plenty of dancing and drinking. Bomba also serves free psychoactive mushroom tea (mushrooms grow wild on Tortola and are legal), and up to 500 people, both tourists and locals, show up for his bacchanals. Note to those who don't wish to end up topless in photos: mind your intake of tea and rum punch.

Even if you're not on-island during the full moon, the Bomba Shack is a sight to behold. It hosts live bands on Wednesday and Sunday evenings.

Brewers Bay Campground (☎ 494-3463; Brewers Bay; campsites/equipped tents US\$20/40) Tortola's only commercial campground is around the bend from Cane Garden Bay, although it's a hell of a ride over zigzagging mountain roads. The sites sit under sea-grape trees and tall palms right on the beach. You can bring a tent or use the prepared sites (which include two cots, linens and a cook stove); the latter are a bit worn and gloomy, so you're better off with your own gear. Everyone shares the cold-water bathhouse and flush toilets. There's a beach bar for beer and other sustenance.

Ole Works Inn (☎ 495-4837; www.quitorymer.com; Cane Garden Bay; d with hill/beach view US\$110/145; ♿ ♻) This bright yellow hotel can't be beat for ambience. Owner and reggae master Quito Rymer placed the 18 small rooms within the walls of a 320-year-old rum factory.

Rhymer's Beach Hotel (☎ 495-4639; Cane Garden Bay; d US\$117; ♿) On the beach and right in the center of the action, Rhymer's was one of the area's first inns. The big pink concrete building with its restaurant and laundry shows serious signs of hard use, but the price and energy of the place make up for it. Rooms are mostly studios with kitchenette and patios.

Sebastian's (☎ 495-4212, 800-336-4870; www.sebastiansbvi.com; Little Apple Bay; r US\$135-275; ♿) Well known for its friendly staff and its gorgeous stretch of beachfront, Sebastian's 26 rooms have teak furnishings, a sea view, a balcony and a refrigerator or kitchen. There's a good onsite restaurant if you're feeling too lazy to travel elsewhere.

Heritage Inn (☎ 494-5842; www.heritageinnbvi.com; Windy Hill; 1-/2-bedroom apt US\$185/285; ♿ ♻) High

on Windy Hill between Cane Garden Bay and Carrot Bay, this place has nine spacious apartments that seem to hang out in thin air. It also has a pool, sundeck, restaurant. Minimum stay three nights.

Sugar Mill Hotel (☎ 495-4355, 800-462-8834; www.sugarmillhotel.com; Apple Bay; studio/ste from US\$325/340; ♿ ♻) In a league of its own for ambience, intimacy and customer service, this boutique hotel rises from the ruins of the Appleby Plantation that gave Apple Bay its name. Guests stay in the 16 studios and suites that hide on the steep hillside among mahogany trees, bougainvillea and palms. The property's centerpiece is the gourmet restaurant.

Eating & Drinking

Many restaurants in this area turn into bars at night, offering live music, dancing or just solid boozing time.

Palm's Delight (☎ 495-4863; Carrot Bay; mains US\$7-13; ☺ dinner) Located right on the water's edge, this family-style West Indian restaurant serves up great cheap eats and local ambience. Friday nights provide a lively scene, with families eating on the patio and a bar crowd watching cricket or baseball on the TV.

North Shore Shell Museum (☎ 495-4714; Carrot Bay; mains US\$7-18; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This zany mix of fascinating museum and eatery, owned by Egberth Donovan, specializes in delicious big breakfasts and grilled fish dinners. The staff often lead the patrons in making fungi music by blowing and banging on conch shells. Call before coming, as hours can be erratic.

Rhymer's (☎ 495-4639; Cane Garden Bay; mains US\$15-25; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Beachside Rhymer's

(attached to the eponymous hotel) serves a great breakfast (about US\$7), and the dinner menu includes fish and ribs. The bar draws beachgoers seeking refreshment.

Quito's Gazebo (☎ 495-4837; Cane Garden Bay; mains US\$15-25; ☺ lunch & dinner, closed Mon) Another beachside draw, this bar-restaurant takes its name from its owner, Quito Rymer, whose band has toured with Ziggy Marley. You can dance up a storm to Quito's reggae rhythms, and hundreds pack the restaurant on weekends to do just that. Rotis and fresh salads make for popular light luncheons. At night grilled items such as snapper fill the menu.

Mrs Scatliffe's Restaurant (☎ 495-4556; Carrot Bay; mains US\$25-32; ☺ dinner) Senior citizen Mrs Scatliffe serves West Indian dishes on her deck, using fruits and veggies she yanks straight from her garden. You must call for reservations before 5pm, since she'll be making the chicken-in-coconut or conch soup just for you. She's in the yellow building across from the primary school.

ourpick Sugar Mill Hotel (☎ 495-4355; Apple Bay; mains US\$25-36; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Foodies salivate over the mod Caribbean concoctions like poached lobster and eggplant Creole. Owners Jeff and Jinx Morgan, contributing writers for *Bon Appetite* magazine, oversee the constantly changing menu that's served in the restored boiling house of the plantation's rum distillery. Reservations are a must.

EAST END

Tortola's eastern end is a mix of steep mountains, remote bays and thickly settled West Indian communities. **Beef Island**, the large isle off Tortola's eastern end, is home to the BVIs' only major airport, as well as an arts collective that ramps up during the full moon.

Local coppersmith Aragorn Dick-Read started **Aragorn's Studio** (☎ 495-1849; www.aragornsstudio.com) under the sea-grape trees fronting **Trellis Bay**, a broad semicircular beach just east of the airport. The studio grew to include space for potters, coconut carvers and batik makers, all of whom you can see at work. He also hosts his own **full-moon party**, an artsy, family-friendly alternative to Bomba's bash (p401). Aragorn's event kicks off around 7pm with fungi music, stilt walkers and fire jugglers. At 9pm he sets his steel 'fireball sculptures' ablaze on the ocean.

The row of shops by Aragorn's also includes **Boardsailing BVI** (☎ 495-2447, 800-880-7873;

www.windsurfing.vi; Trellis Bay) for windsurfing rentals or lessons, a local produce market, a **cyber-café** (per 15min US\$5) and the landing for Virgin Gorda's North Sound Express ferry (p417).

Beaches on the East End include **Josiah's Bay**, a dramatic windswept strand with a surfable point break in winter. There's a small beach bar here surrounded by acres of empty space. Several charming and inexpensive guesthouses lie inland on the valley slopes. **Lambert Bay**, to the east of Josiah's, offers a wide, palm-fringed beach.

Sleeping

Near-D-Beach Limin' Bar & Hostel (☎ 443-7833; www.josiahsbaybvi.com; r/apt US\$55/100) This no-frills guesthouse in Josiah's Bay caters mostly to surfers, since it's only a two-minute walk from the popular surfing beach. The three rooms each have a queen-size bed and simple furnishings; they all share gender-segregated, cold-water bathrooms and a game-filled common room. There's also a studio apartment with a private, hot-water bathroom and kitchenette.

Serendipity House (☎ 499-1999; www.serhouse.com; Josiah's Hill; r US\$90-205; ☺) For tropical seclusion about half a mile from Josiah's Bay, this is one of the best values on Tortola, with special deals for longer stays. Canadians Carol and Bill Campbell welcome travelers with the invitation to 'spend a vacation, not a fortune.' There are four units, ranging from an apartment to a two-bedroom villa, all with full kitchens.

Beef Island Guest House (☎ 495-2303; www.beefislandguesthouse.com; r incl breakfast US\$130) Located on Trellis Bay next to De Loose Mongoose restaurant, this place is a five-minute walk to the airport and therefore an excellent choice for anyone with a late arrival or early departure. Set on a thin beach among a grove of low coconut palms, the one-story guesthouse looks more like a contemporary West Indian home than an inn, but the four rooms have unexpected character. All rooms come with fans.

Tamarind Club Hotel (☎ 495-2477; www.tamarindclub.com; r incl breakfast US\$139-165; ☺) Just 100yd down the hill from Serendipity House near Josiah's Bay, the nine rooms at this red-roofed West Indian-style building surround a central garden and pool. The rooms have batik-print decor, but are a bit dark; each has a private veranda. The onsite restaurant serves good local dishes, and the swim-up bar is a fine touch.

Eating

our pick De Loose Mongoose (☎ 495-2303; mains US\$8-23; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner, closed Mon) Next to the Beef Island Guest House, this windsurfer hangout is a great place to have breakfast, eat lunch or watch the sunset over dinner. Try the conch fritters, arguably the BVIs' best.

Secret Garden (☎ 495-1834; Josiah's Bay Plantation; mains US\$12-22; ☎ dinner, closed Tue) One of the most delightful places to eat on Tortola, Secret Garden sets its outdoor tables amid the distilling buildings of an old plantation (now an art gallery and boutique). The imaginative menu ranges from grilled swordfish Creole to coconut chicken or Bajan flying-fish pie. Reservations required.

Fat Hog Bob's (☎ 495-1010; Maya Cove; mains US\$17-32; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a 100ft porch hugging the seaside, this fun-times rib house offers a huge and surprisingly creative menu, featuring items like baby-back ribs marinated in Guinness and crab-stuffed steak.

VIRGIN GORDA

pop 3500

It's certainly a testament to Virgin Gorda's awesomeness that a billionaire such as Richard Branson – who could live anywhere in the world – chooses this little patch of earth. Of course, it should be noted he's not actually on Virgin Gorda, but has his very own personal island right offshore. But you get the point. And you should get to Virgin Gorda, an ideal blend of extraordinary sights, easy access, good restaurants and villas and, somehow, no rampant commercialism.

The giant granite rock formations of the Baths are the BVIs' biggest tourist attraction, and guess what? They live up to the hype, especially when combined with the hike up, over, around and through them to Devil's Bay. Trekkers can also summit Virgin Gorda Peak, relishing the cool breeze, and meander around wind-pounded Copper Mine National Park. Sea dogs can take ferries over to Bitter End Yacht Club and Saba Rock to drink with the yachties.

This is Virgin Gorda ('Fat Virgin' in Spanish) who, until the 1960s, sat quietly day-dreaming. Her population was only about 600 souls until Laurence Rockefeller constructed the Little Dix Bay resort, which brought jobs, roads and utilities. A few years

later, the Virgin emerged from her slumber an undeniable beauty.

Orientation

Virgin Gorda lies 8 miles east of Tortola. Its elongated, serpent shape makes it an easy place to navigate. The main highway, North Sound Rd, runs along the spine.

The prominent Virgin Gorda Peak, 1359ft high, dominates the northern half of the island. At its foot lies North Sound. The island's southern half is a rolling plain called 'the Valley.' Virgin Gorda's main settlement, Spanish Town, lies on the western shore of the Valley; the airport is 1 mile to the east.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Sunshine (☎ 495-8900, 800-327-8900; www.airsunshine.com) flies to Virgin Gorda Airport from San Juan and St Thomas. **Seaborne Airlines** (☎ 340-773-6442, 888-359-8687; www.seaborneairline.com) flies floatplanes to North Sound from St Thomas.

BOAT

Speedy's (☎ 495-5240; www.speedysbvi.com) and **Smith's Ferry** (☎ 494-4454; www.smithsferry.com) run several times daily between Spanish Town and Road Town, Tortola (round trip US\$25, 30 minutes). **North Sound Express** (☎ 495-2138) runs between Virgin Gorda's North Sound and Tortola's Beef Island; see p417 for details.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Virgin Gorda Airport (VIJ; ☎ 495-5621) is on the Valley's east side. You can count on taxis waiting when flights arrive. Expect to pay about US\$13 for a ride into Spanish Town; US\$25 will get you to Gun Creek and the North Sound resorts.

CAR

Virgin Gorda has several Jeep rental companies that will pick you up from the ferry and drop you off almost anywhere on the island. You'll pay US\$55 to US\$85 per day.

L&S Jeep (☎ 495-5297)

Mahogany Car Rentals (☎ 495-5469)

Speedy's Car Rental (☎ 495-5240)

TAXI

Cab rates on Virgin Gorda are some of the highest in the Caribbean. The rate from the

OUT ISLANDS

The BVIs 'out islands' (a Creole expression for remote or undeveloped cays) are a wonderful mix of uninhabited wildlife sanctuaries, luxurious hideaways for the rich and famous, and provisioning stops for sailors. Most are reachable only by charter or private boat. If you don't have your own vessel, hook up with a day-sail operator (p396).

Guana Island

One mile off Tortola's northeast tip, this 850-acre island is the seventh-largest island in the BVIs. Guana takes its name from a rock formation called the 'Iguana Head' that juts out from a cliff at the island's northwest corner.

Today the island is a private nature reserve, home to flamingos, red-legged tortoises, seven sandy beaches and miles of hiking trails. Unfortunately, unless you're one of the 32 guests staying at the **Guana Island Club** (☎ 494-2354, 800-544-8262; www.guana.com; r/villas from US\$1150-2150; 📞 closed Sep & Oct; 🚫 📵 🚫), you aren't allowed to visit. You can rent the entire island for US\$26,500 a day.

Norman Island

Since 1843, writers have alleged that treasure is buried on Norman Island, supposedly the prototype for Robert Louis Stevenson's book *Treasure Island*. It fits the bill: Norman is the BVIs' largest uninhabited land mass.

Two fantastic beach bars lure boaters. The **William Thornton** (Willie T; ☎ 494-0183) is a schooner converted into a restaurant-bar and moored in the bight. On the beach, **Pirate's Bight** (☎ 496-7827) is an open-air pavilion. Both have good food and the owners often bring in live West Indian bands or just crank Bob Marley and Jimmy Buffett over high-voltage sound systems.

Weekends are always a huge party scene; as one local puts it, 'Everyone just gets fucking mental.'

Peter Island

This lofty L-shaped island, about 4 miles south of Tortola, is the BVIs' fifth-largest and home to the luxurious, all-inclusive **Peter Island Resort** (☎ 495-2000; 800-346-4451; www.peterisland.com; r from US\$670; 📞 📵 🚫). In the late '60s, Norwegian millionaire Peter Smedvig fell in love with the island and built a resort, which he operated until his death in the late 1970s.

Anyone with reservations (and a fat wallet) can come to the resort's **Tradewinds restaurant** (☎ 495-2000; mains US\$25-55; 📞 breakfast, lunch & dinner). The Peter Island ferry (round trip US\$20) sails from Road Town.

Salt Island

This T-shaped island is a forlorn place. The salt making (which gave the island its name) still goes on here, but the RMS *Rhone* is the big attraction. The *Rhone* crashed against the rocks off Salt Island's southwest coast during a hurricane in 1867. Now a national park, the steamer's remains are extensive, making it one of the Caribbean's best wreck dives. See p56 for more on this dive.

Cooper Island

Lying about 4 miles south of Tortola, Cooper Island is a moderately hilly cay and is virtually undeveloped except for the **Cooper Island Beach Club** (☎ 494-3721; www.cooper-island.com), whose restaurant makes it a popular anchorage for cruising yachts. Divers also swarm to the island's surrounding wrecks and sites.

The Dogs

This clutch of six islands lies halfway between Tortola and Virgin Gorda. Protected by the BVI National Parks Trust, the Dogs are sanctuaries for birds and marine animals. The diving here is excellent.

Necker Island

This private island belongs to Richard Branson, famous adventurer and scion of Virgin Atlantic Airways and Virgin Records. About 1 mile north of Virgin Gorda, Necker is one of the world's most luxurious retreats. If you've got US\$40,000 you can rent it for the day (Branson not included).

North Sound resorts or Gun Creek to Spanish Town is US\$25 for a 3-mile trip; from the ferry dock to the Baths is US\$8 round trip. **Andy's Taxis** (☎ 495-5252, 495-5160) and **Mahogany Taxi Service** (☎ 495-5469) are the major providers.

SPANISH TOWN & THE VALLEY

Spanish Town isn't a town so much as a long road with businesses strung along it. It's the commercial center of Virgin Gorda, and probably gets its name from a (severe) corruption of the English word 'penniston,' a blue woolen fabric used long ago for making slave clothing on the island, rather than from any Spanish connections. Islanders referred to their settlement as Penniston well into the 1850s.

The harbor dredged here in the 1960s is home to today's Yacht Harbour, the heart of Spanish Town. Overall the settlement is a sleepy place, but the mix of islanders, yachties and land travelers creates a festive vibe.

Information

The mall fronting Yacht Harbour holds most of the town's services, including a couple of banks.

BVI Tourist Board (☎ 495-5181; Yacht Harbour mall; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Chandlery Ship Store (Yacht Harbour mall; per 10min US\$5; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) Has a couple of internet terminals.

Nurse Iris O'Neal Clinic (☎ 495-5337; ☎ 9am-4:30pm) On the ridge road in the Valley near the airport. There's a physician on staff, but for hospital services you must go to Tortola. Call ahead.

Sights & Activities

THE BATHS

This collection of **giant boulders** (admission US\$3), near the island's southwest corner, marks a national park and the BVIs' most popular tourist attraction. The rocks – volcanic lava leftovers from up to 70 million years ago, according to some estimates – form a series of grottoes that flood with sea water. The area makes for unique swimming and snorkeling; the latter is distinctive as many boulders also lurk under water.

The Baths would totally live up to its reputation for greatness if it wasn't overshadowed by adjacent **Devil's Bay** to the south, and the fantastically cool trail one must take to get there. Actually, there are two trails. The less exciting one takes off behind the taxis at the Baths' parking lot. But the trail you want

leaves from the Baths' beach and goes through the 'Caves.' During the 20-minute trek, you'll clamber over boulders, slosh through tidal pools, squeeze into impossibly narrow passages and bash your feet against rocks. Then you'll drop out onto a sugar-sand beach.

Spring Bay also abuts the Baths, but to the north. It has fine white sand (more than at the Baths), clear water and good snorkeling off the boulder enclosure called the Crawl.

While the Baths and environs stir the imagination, the places are often overrun with tourists. By 10am each morning fleets of yachts have moored off the coast, and visitors have been shuttled in from resorts and cruise ships. All you have to do, though, is wait until about 1pm, and you'll get a lot more elbow room.

The Baths' beach has a changing station, snack shack and snorkel gear rental (US\$10). Taxis run constantly between the park and ferry dock (round trip US\$8).

COPPER MINE NATIONAL PARK

You'll drive a heck of a winding road to reach this forlorn bluff at Virgin Gorda's southwest tip, but it's worth it to see the impressive stone ruins (including a chimney, cistern and mine-shaft house) that comprise **Copper Mine National Park** (admission free; ☎ sunrise-sunset). Cornish miners worked the area between 1838 and 1867 and extracted as much as 10,000 tons of copper, then abandoned the mine to the elements. A couple of trails meander through the ruins, and the hillside makes an excellent place for a picnic as the blue sea pounds below.

BEACHES

Beachcombers can wander for hours along Virgin Gorda's 14 beaches. The most beautiful ones are **Trunk Bay**, **Little Dix Bay** and – the best – **Savannah Bay**, which features more than 1 mile of white sand. No other beach provides such opportunities for long, solitary walks. Sunsets here can be fabulous.

DIVING

Dive BVI (☎ 495-5513, 800-848-7078; www.divebvi.com; 1-2-tank dive US\$80/105), at Yacht Harbour and Leverick Bay, has four fast boats that take you diving at any of the BVIs sites.

BOAT TRIPS

Two recommended day-sail operators depart from Yacht Harbour. Both companies supply lunch and beverages.

Double 'D' (☎ 495-6150; www.doubledbvi.com; half/full-day trips US\$55/95) A 50ft sloop.

Spirit of Anegada (☎ 499-0901; www.spiritofanegada.com; half/full-day trips US\$65/95) A 44ft schooner.

Festivals & Events

Spanish Town around the yacht harbor fills with *mocko jumbies* (costumed stilt walkers representing spirits of the dead), fungi bands, a food fair and parades for the **Virgin Gorda Easter Festival** (☎ 495-5181), held Friday through Sunday during the Christian holiday (usually late March or April).

Sleeping

Ocean View Hotel (☎ 495-5230; r US\$85; 🏠) This budget guesthouse, situated across the street from Yacht Harbour and a 10-minute walk from the ferry, has 12 units above the Wheel House restaurant in a concrete-block building. Rooms are small with dingy blue furnishings, but they're clean and the grounds are well maintained.

Bayview Vacation Apartments (☎ 495-5329; www.bayviewbvi.com; apt US\$110-145; 🏠) Each of these apartments, behind Chez Bamboo restaurant, has two bedrooms, a full kitchen, dining facilities and an airy living room. It's plain-Jane ambience, with dowdy rattan furnishings, but it can be a good deal, especially if you have three or four people. There is a roof deck for sunbathing.

Fischer's Cove Beach Hotel (☎ 495-5252; www.fisherscove.com; r/cottage US\$160/190) Surrounded by gardens and located just a few steps from the beach, Fischer's Cove has a collection of eight triangular-shaped cottages and a main hotel building with 12 dated studios. The cottages have full kitchens, but no phones, TVs or air-con; the hotel units do have phones and TVs, and a few also have air-con. The popular open-air restaurant overlooks the beach. It's a 15-minute walk from ferry dock.

ourpick Guavaberry Spring Bay Homes (☎ 495-5227; www.guavaberryspringbay.com; cottages US\$220) A stone's throw from the Baths and plopped amid similar hulking boulders, Guavaberry's circular cottages come with one or two bedrooms, a kitchen, dining area and sun porch. The setting amazes. Only some units have air-conditioning, so ask for it when booking if you need it.

Little Dix Bay (☎ 495-5555, 888-767-3966; www.little-dixbay.com; r from US\$725; 🏠 📺 📶) This is the resort that rocketed Virgin Gorda to glory, and it

remains the island's swankiest, celebrity-filled digs. An army of staff keep the grounds and 98 rooms perfectly coiffed, and it wafts an overall South Seas vibe. Wi-fi costs US\$20 per day.

Eating & Drinking

Mad Dog (☎ 495-5830; mains US\$7-12; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Expatriates and tourists often gather at this airy pavilion set among the rocks where the road ends at the Baths. They can't resist the piña colodas and sandwiches.

Bath & Turtle (☎ 495-5239; mains US\$8-25; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) In a courtyard surrounded by Yacht Harbour's mall, this casual pub cooks up good pizza, quesadillas and seared ahi tuna salad. At night it's a fun scene.

Thelma's Hideout (☎ 495-5646; mains US\$12-22; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Find this West Indian hangout on the side road leading to Little Dix Bay resort. Seating is in an open-air courtyard, and there is a stage where a band plays during high season. Thelma will serve you breakfast, but most travelers come here for her conch stew. Make dinner reservations by 3pm.

Rock Café (☎ 495-5482; mains US\$17-34; 🍷 dinner) Nestled among the boulders at the traffic circle south of Spanish Town, this place has indoor and outdoor dining, plus a popular terrace bar that rocks with live music several nights per week. The cuisine is mostly Italian, with pastas, mahimahi, snapper and other fresh fish.

ourpick Mine Shaft Café (☎ 495-5260; sandwiches US\$10-14, mains US\$22-32; 🍷 lunch & dinner) You can't beat the location, high on a hill overlooking the Atlantic on Copper Mine Rd. You can't beat the food either, which includes burgers (even the veggie variety), wraps and mains like lobster in rum-lemon-cream sauce. Owner Elton Sprauve throws a monthly full-moon party, complete with live music, warm breezes, cheap rum punch and grilled meats. If you can't make that shindig, at least come for a sunset cocktail.

Chez Bamboo (☎ 495-5752; small plates US\$8-14, mains US\$22-40; 🍷 dinner) Just north of Yacht Harbour, this bistro (in a converted West Indian home and yard) couldn't be in a better setting, amid candlelight and tropical plants. The chefs specialize in French Creole Caribbean cuisine; there's also a small plates menu with saltfish croquettes and hummus. Jazz, blues or calypso fills the air on weekend evenings. The only problem: the food is overpriced. Still, the yacht owners pour in, so reservations are a good idea.

The island's main grocery store, **Buck's Food Market** (☎ 495-5423; 🕒 7am-7pm), is located in Yacht Harbour's mall.

NORTH SOUND & AROUND

Steep mountain slopes rise up on Virgin Gorda's northern end. They reach their pinnacle at 1359ft Virgin Gorda Peak, part of protected **Gorda Peak National Park** (admission free; 🕒 sunrise-sunset). Two well-marked trails lead to the summit off North Sound Rd, and make a sweet hike. It's easiest to start at the higher-up trailhead, from where it's a 30-minute, half-mile walk to the crest. You'll see Christmas orchids, bromeliads (pineapple family members), bo-peep frogs (named for their sound) and hummingbirds. The lookout tower at the top provides vistas of the entire archipelago. If you have time, return via the lower trail (about a 50-minute walk).

North of the park lies **North Sound**, the island's only other settlement, whose main job is to serve the big resorts and myriad yachts anchored in the surrounding bays. A mini-armada of ferries tootle back and forth from the Sound's **Gun Creek** to Bitter End Yacht Club (right) and Saba Rock Resort (right), both excellent for a happy hour drink and sea views at their bars, even if you're not staying there.

The strand of gently curving beach and vivid blue water at the Mango Bay Resort is called **Mahoe Bay**. **Mountain Trunk Bay**, **Nail Bay** and **Long Bay** lie north of Mahoe Bay and run nearly undisturbed for about 1 mile.

You can reach North Sound directly from Beef Island, Tortola, by ferry; see p417 for details.

It's all resorts over here, although Leverick Bay Resort also rents more than two dozen area villas through its **Virgin Gorda Rental Properties** (www.virgingordabvi.com).

our pick **Leverick Bay Resort** (☎ 495-7421, 800-848-7081, restaurant 495-7154; www.leverickbay.com; r US\$149; 🍷 🍷 🍷) is great value. When you see the purple, green and turquoise buildings splashed up the hillside, you'll know you've arrived. The 14 rooms are dandy, each with two full beds, rattan furnishings, free wi-fi and a private balcony. Then there's the beach, marina, tennis court, dive shop, spa, market and internet café – oh, and the restaurant, which is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner (mains US\$8 to \$25) with nightly specials such as jumbo shrimp (Wednesday), crab (Thursday), pig roast and stilt dancers (Friday) and sushi (Saturday).

On a fleck of island just offshore from Bitter End Yacht Club, **Saba Rock Resort** (☎ 495-9966; www.sabarock.com; r incl breakfast US\$175-550; 🍷 🍷) is a warm and charismatic boutique resort with eight rooms, a restaurant and two bars. It's the most laid-back place to get your North Sound resort experience – the owners even make their own rum. Visitors can come over on a free ferry from Gun Creek (call the resort to arrange pick up) for a sip and to check out all the shipwreck booty on site, such as the cannon from the RMS *Rhone*.

Mango Bay Resort (☎ 495-5672; www.mangobayresort.com; villas US\$245-450; 🍷 🍷 🍷), overlooking Mahoe Bay, is a compound of 12 Italian-style villas, from one-bedroom duplexes to four bedroom cottages, all nestled beside the beach.

Bitter End Yacht Club & Resort (☎ 494-2746, 800-872-2392; www.beyc.com; d incl meals US\$860; 🍷 🍷 🍷), a sporty, all-inclusive resort at the east end of North Sound, has 85 villas adorned with batik bedspreads and teak floors. Some villas have hammocks, wrap-around verandahs and are open to the trade winds; others have air-con and decks; none have TVs. Rates include three meals a day and unlimited use of the resort's bountiful equipment for sailing, windsurfing, kayaking and much more.

The water-sports gear and Yacht Club bar are open to the paying public. Many people also come to the Clubhouse Grille for the monumental buffet (lunch US\$22, dinner US\$44.50). Whatever the pretense, you definitely should make the trip to Bitter End. A free ferry departs Gun Creek on the half hour.

JOST VAN DYKE

pop 200

Jost (pronounced 'yoast') is a little island with a big personality. It may only take up 4 sq miles of teal-blue sea, but its good-time reputation has spread thousands of miles beyond. A lot of that is due to calypsonian and philosopher Foxy Callwood, the island's main man. But more on him later.

For over 400 years Jost has been an oasis for seafarers and adventurers. A Dutch pirate (the island's namesake) used the island as a base in the 17th century. In the 18th century it became a homestead for Quakers escaping religious tyranny in England. Quaker surnames, such as Lettsome and Callwood,

survive among the islanders, mostly descendants of freed Quaker slaves.

In the late 1960s free-spirited boaters found Jost's unspoiled shores, and Foxy built a bar to greet them. The tide ebbed and flowed for a quarter century, and not much changed. Electricity arrived in 1991 and roads were cut a few years later.

Though locals now all have cell phones and websites, and Jost is no secret to yachters and glitterati (Jimmy Buffet and Keith Richards stop by), the island's green hills and blinding beaches remain untrammelled by development. As one local says, 'When Main Street is still a beach, you know life is good.' Hear, hear!

The island has no banks and relatively few accommodations. Many businesses shut down in September and October.

Orientation

Jost floats about 4 miles northwest of Tortola. Ferries land at the pier on the west side of Great Harbour, the island's main settlement. It's about a 10-minute walk from the pier to the town center. The main road runs along Jost's south shore. If you follow it over the hill to the west for about 1 mile, you reach White Bay. Go east for about 2 miles to reach Little Harbour. Further north-east is Diamond Cay National Park and some secluded snorkeling sites.

Getting There & Away

New Horizon Ferry (☎ 495-9278; www.jostvandykeferry.com; round trip US\$20) sails five times daily between Tortola's West End and Jost's Great Harbour. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, **Inter-Island** (☎ 776-6597; round trip US\$50) makes the half-hour trip to Cruz Bay, St John (USVIs) and onward to Red Hook, St Thomas (USVIs). It leaves Jost at 9:15am and 3pm.

Getting Around

Paradise Jeep Rental (☎ 495-9477; per day US\$70) in Great Harbour can hook you up with a vehicle. You can call a **water taxi** (☎ 443-1488, 495-9969) if your destination involves the wet stuff.

GREAT HARBOUR

In Jost's foremost settlement, Main St is a beach lined with hammocks and open air bar-restaurants, if that gives you a hint as to the vibe. Kick off your shoes, then join Foxy and friends to let the good times roll.

Other than hanging out, there's not much to do besides stop by **JVD Scuba** (☎ 495-0271; www.jostvandykescuba.com; ☎ 8am-6pm), which can set you up with ecotours, kayak rentals and dives.

The **customs office** (☎ 494-3450; ☎ 8:30am-3:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12:30pm Sat) is on Main St. The police station next door stocks a few brochures about local businesses.

If you want the true local lowdown, Foxy's your man. Stop by Foxy's Tamarind Bar or check out www.foxybar.com.

Since most of Jost's businesses cater to crews from visiting yachts, almost all of the restaurants and bars stand-by on VHF radio channel 16 to take reservations and announce nightly events.

On the waterfront, just east of Foxy's, the gracious Ivy Chinnery Moses has four large studio apartments at the **Sea Crest Inn** (☎ 495-9024; seacrestinn@hotmail.com; apt US\$145; ♿), each with a kitchenette and balcony.

Christine's Bakery (☎ 495-9281; mains US\$5-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch) is the kind of out-island bakery you dream about. Christine has the settlement filled with the scent of banana bread, coconut and coffee by 8am; burgers and sandwiches are for lunch. She also rents out a couple of simple rooms above the bakery.

Rudy George runs **Rudy's Mariner's Rendezvous** (☎ 495-9282; mains US\$17-32; ☎ lunch & dinner), a bar, restaurant and convenience store rolled into one. The oceanside restaurant serves delicious seafood; lobster and local fish are the specialties. Nearby, **Ali Baba's** (☎ 495-9280; mains US\$22-35; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) has a lazy, down-island atmosphere on its open-air patio. Patrons come for fresh fish and the Monday night pig roast (US\$25).

our pick **Foxy's Tamarind Bar** (☎ 495-9258; www.foxybar.com; mains US\$22-35; ☎ lunch & dinner) is not to be missed. You probably heard about him long before you arrived: so who is this Foxy? Well, he's Foxy (Philiciano) Callwood, born on Jost in 1938, and he single handedly put the island on the map with this beach bar. Local bands play several nights a week (usually Thursday through Saturday) in season and draw a mix of islanders and party animals off the boats. The light fare is a mix of rotis (US\$14) and burgers (about US\$10), while the dinner mains are mostly meat and seafood. Foxy has his own microbrewery on site, so fresh tap beers accompany the food. For years Foxy sang his improvisational calypso at the

SHIP AHOY

No, it's not the booze playing tricks with your eyes. If you walk 'round back of Foxy's complex, you really do see a 32ft wooden sloop rising from the yard. It's the handiwork of the **JVD Preservation Society** (www.jvdps.org) or, more accurately, the local teenagers employed by the society to construct the *Endeavor II*.

It's part of a nonprofit project to provide Jost's kids with traditional boat-building skills and to keep them from straying into off-island temptations. The society pays the boys and girls for their efforts, they stay on the island and learn a time-honored trade, and in the process Jost preserves its culture.

'We're not building a boat,' says Kevin Gray, the long-time resident and ship captain who leads the project. 'The boat is building a community.'

The group has been hammering away since 2004; the *Endeavor* is scheduled for completion in late 2008. The kids will then learn to sail the sloop, as well as study local marine science and conservation.

Check **Sloop News** (www.sloopnews.org) for reports of their progress.

bar, but throat issues have curtailed the tunes for now.

WHITE BAY

Jost's most attractive strand of beach hugs a barrier reef that shelters the bay from swells and waves, which makes for good swimming and anchoring. It's a primo place to stay, thanks to its multibudget lodging options and highly entertaining beach bars. It's a hilly, one-mile, bun-burning walk from Great Harbour.

White Bay Campground (☎ 495-9312, 495-9358; campsites/equipped tents/cabins US\$20/40/65) is one of Virgin Islands' most popular stops for backpackers. Ivan, the owner, mixes it up by offering bare sites (the best of the bunch, right on the beach, where you can string your hammock between sea-grape trees), equipped tents (beds, linens) and cabins (add electricity to the beds and linens). Everyone shares the communal kitchen and cold-water bathhouse. The tents, cabins and facilities are very barebones, which may explain why Ivan recently added a couple of apartments with private bathrooms (from US\$1000 per week). Ivan's Stress-Free Bar draws crowds for the cook-outs and cold beer; it's a Jost institution.

ourpick Perfect Pineapple (☎ 495-9401; www.perfectpineapple.com; villas from US\$150; 🍷) has six great-value, white-with-purple-trim villas set on a steep hill back from the beach. Each unit has a full kitchen and private porch with ocean views. They're owned by Foxy's son Greg; the family also owns a restaurant down on the beach if you don't want to cook your own meals.

At **White Bay Villas** (☎ 410-571-6692, 800-778-8066; www.jostvandyke.com; villas from US\$200) Bonnie rents out beachfront villas, some private and some with shared common areas. Rentals typically are for weekly stays, but you might snag a three- or five-night opening.

Right on the beach at White Bay's west end, **Sandcastle Hotel** (☎ 495-9888; www.sandcastle-bvi.com; d US\$245-295) offers four cottages and two hotel rooms, all sans phone and TV (and only the hotel rooms have air-conditioning). The hotel holds the infamous Soggy Dollar Bar, which takes its name from the sailors swimming ashore to spend wet bills. It's also the bar that created the Painkiller, the BVIs' delicious-yet-lethal cocktail. The restaurant offers a four-course gourmet candlelit dinner for US\$39 per person. Ruben Chinnery sings calypso on most Sunday afternoons, when lots of yachts stop by for lunch.

One Love (☎ 495-9829) Foxy's son Seddy owns this reggae-blasting beach bar. He'll wow you with his magic tricks, and certainly magic is how he gets the place to hold together – old buoys, life preservers and other beach junk form its 'walls.'

LITTLE HARBOUR

This is Jost's quieter side, with just a few businesses. Little Harbour's east edge has a thin, steep strand of white sand perfect for sunbathing and swimming in water totally protected from wind and waves.

Swimmers can reach **Bubbly Pool**, a natural whirlpool formed by weird rock outcrops, via a goat trail from Foxy's Taboo.

Right on the water, **Sidney's Peace and Love** (☎ 495-9271; mains US\$10-25; 🍴 lunch & dinner) serves up West Indian specialties, along with burgers and barbecue. Live reggae bands play here most nights. Saturday night rocks with charter yacht crews. T-shirts left behind by visiting revelers decorate the rafters. A popular T-shirt for sale here proclaims 'Time flies when you ain't doin' shit.'

On the east side of the harbor, **Abe's by the Sea** (☎ 495-9329; mains US\$10-30; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) specializes in West Indian fish dishes. There's often live fungi music at night.

Foxy teams up with his daughter Justine at **Foxy's Taboo** (☎ 495-0218; mains \$13-22; 🍴 lunch & dinner) to serve easy, breezy dishes such as pizza and pepper-jack cheeseburgers for lunch, and more sophisticated fare (say lobster-stuffed tilapia) for dinner, all accompanied by Foxy's microbrews. Taboo sits in a scenic dockside shack by Diamond Cay.

ANEGADA

pop 200

Anegada is a killer island. Literally. The island takes its name from the Spanish word for 'drowned' or 'flooded,' and that's what it did to more than 300 ships in the early years – it sunk 'em. The island is so low (28ft above sea level at its highest) that mariners couldn't see it to get their bearings until they were trapped in the surrounding coral maze known as Horseshoe Reef.

Today it's the salt ponds rife with flamingos, blooming cacti and giant rock iguanas that will slay you (figuratively, of course!). You can dive on many of the shipwrecks, or snorkel from ridiculously blue-watered beaches such as Loblolly Bay and Flash of Beauty.

The ferry takes only 1.5 hours to reach this easternmost Virgin, about 12 miles from Virgin Gorda, but you'll think you've landed on another planet. Its desert landscape looks that different, and its wee clutch of restaurants and guesthouses are that baked-in-the-sun mellow. It's a mysterious, magical and lonesome place to hang your hammock for a stretch.

The Anegada Reef Hotel, located near the dock, serves as the unofficial information center for the island. Anegada has no banks, so stock up before you get here.

Orientation

Anegada is a coral atoll stretching about 12 miles from west to east and, at most, 3 miles from north to south. Because it's so pancake-flat, the island's horizon holds few visual landmarks except for odd clumps of casuarinas and coconut trees.

The main road starts at the airport in the island's center and swings by the Settlement, Anegada's only 'town' (a strong word for such a small place). From the Settlement, the road heads west to the yacht anchorage and ferry dock at Setting Point, then onward past several pristine beaches.

Getting There & Away

Smith's Ferry (☎ 494-4454; www.smithsferry.com; round trip US\$50) sails from Road Town, Tortola on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7am and 3:30pm; it departs Anegada at 8:30am and 5pm. The boat makes a quick stop at Spanish Town, Virgin Gorda, en route each way.

Otherwise, **Fly BVI** (☎ 495-1747, 866-819-3146; www.fly-bvi.com) offers charter flights from Tortola's airport from US\$155 (round trip). Tiny Captain Auguste George Airport lies 1 mile northwest of the Settlement.

Getting Around

Jeep rentals cost about US\$75 per day at the Anegada Reef Hotel. Roads are unpaved sand for the most part.

Tony's Taxi (☎ 495-8037) waits for inbound ferries, and Tony will give you a three-hour island tour for about US\$50. Shuttles (one way US\$8) run to the beaches from the Anegada Reef Hotel.

WEST END

If you take the ferry to Anegada, you'll arrive at Setting Point, by the Anegada Reef Hotel, which serves as the unofficial information center. **We Be Divin'** (☎ 494-4320, 541-0489; www.webedivinbvi.com) sits on the property's beachfront and can organize whatever activity your heart desires: shore dives (two tanks US\$125), boat dives (two tanks US\$150), snorkel gear rentals (per day US\$20), kayak rentals (per day US\$50) and ecotours (half day per person US\$50). If you're interested in **fishing** or **cycling** enquire at the hotel's office, where they'll make arrangements.

The large salt pond at the west end of the island is home to a flock of flamingos, which were successfully reintroduced to the BVIs

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Everard Faulkner, aged 75, is a retired builder who was born and raised on Anegada.

What changes have you seen on Anegada over the years?

We had 500 people here when I was a boy. Now there are about 200. I left, too. I went to St Thomas to work. When my father died in 1981, I came home to build his coffin. I decided to stay and build more. I built some of Neptune's Treasure and many of the other shops and hotels.

How has the environment changed?

We had more flamingos. People used to shoot them and eat them. Tastes like chicken, I hear. I've never eaten one. For a while we had no flamingos. So biologists brought in 18 from Bermuda. Now there are about 50 flamingos here on the salt pond. They eat shrimp, that's what makes them pink. Another thing: lobsters. They were just bait when I was a boy; we used them to catch fish. Now people pay a lot of money to eat lobsters.

What makes Anegada different from other islands?

The quiet. Nobody to trouble you. I get up in the morning and don't have to worry about a thing.

from 1987. The BVI National Parks Trust designated **Flamingo Pond** and its surrounding wetlands as a bird sanctuary; you can also see egrets, terns and ospreys nesting and feeding in the area.

Secluded **Cow Wreck Bay** stretches along the island's northwest end and offers good snorkeling in its shallow waters; kayaks are available, too.

The nine simple, color-washed rooms at **Neptune's Treasure** (☎ 495-9439; www.neptunestrea.sure.com; r from US\$115; 🍷) sit right on the sand and garner lots of loyal patrons. The rooms surround a restaurant that's open for lunch and dinner, which has a meat-and-seafood menu (mains US\$18 to US\$30) similar to the island's other waterfront establishments, but with one difference: it's served in an air-conditioned dining room rather than the great outdoors.

Neptune's is a 15-minute walk west from the **Anegada Reef Hotel** (☎ 495-8002; www.anegadareef.com; r garden/ocean view from US\$175/200; 🍷 📺). The island's first and largest hotel, this seaside lodge by the ferry dock has the feel of a classic out-island fishing camp. The property's 16 rooms and two-bedroom villas are nothing fancy, but the fishing dock, restaurant (mains US\$8 to \$30, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner) and beach bar here are Anegada's social epicenter. A lot of yachts pull up to join the party, while fish and lobster sizzle on the grill. For those on budgets: if you ask nicely, the owners will let you pitch a tent (US\$20) in the garden.

our pick **Anegada Seaside Villas** (☎ 495-9466; www.anegadavillas.com; villas US\$200) has seven units, each with a fully equipped kitchen and big sea-view patio. People book a year in advance

in high season to stay in these one-bedroom, yolk-yellow concrete cottages. The onsite **Pomato Point Restaurant** (🍷 lunch & dinner) has a cool 'museum' to explore (basically a side room that exhibits a bizarre mix of archeological relics and shipwreck items owner Wilfred Creque collected from local waters).

You want peace and quiet? It'll just be you and the wandering bovines who share the grounds at **Cow Wreck Villas** (☎ 495-8047, restaurant 495-9461; www.cowreckbeach.com; villas US\$250-300; 🍷). Three sunny yellow-and-green cottages front the perfect, hammock-strewn beach. The open-air restaurant (mains US\$10 to \$25) features lobster, conch and shellfish cooked on the outdoor grill, and is open for lunch and dinner.

Whistling Pines (☎ 495-9521; mains US\$20-40; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is one of the island's newer bar-restaurants and offers the usual seafood suspects. Located on the beach between the Anegada Reef Hotel and Neptune's Treasure, Pines has good views of moored yachts out front plus an island rarity: a pool table.

Potter's by the Sea (☎ 495-9182; mains US\$25-40; 🍷 dinner) is the first place you stumble into when departing the ferry dock. Potter lived in Queens, New York and worked in the restaurant biz there for years, so he knows how to make customers feel at home while serving them ribs, fettuccine, curried shrimp and lobster. Graffiti and T-shirts cover the open-air walls; live bands play Monday and Tuesday.

EAST END

The **Settlement**, Anegada's only town, lies on the East End. It's a picture of dead cars (you

can get them on the island, but you can't get them off), laundry drying in the breeze and folks feeding goats and chickens. There are a couple of teensy shops where you can buy food and supplies.

The **Rock Iguana Nursery** (☎ 8am-4pm) sits behind the government administration building; just let yourself in. The Parks Trust started the facility because feral cats were eating the island's baby iguanas, endangering the rare species. So workers now bring the babes to the nursery's cages to grow safely. After two years, they're big enough to be released back into the wild, where they'll sprout to 6ft long.

Top beaches with thatched-umbrella shelters and bar-restaurants include **Loblolly Bay** on the northeast shore, about 2 miles from the Settlement. You can snorkel over a widespread area with spotted eagle rays and barracudas. At time of writing, a **kitesurfing facility** (☎ 549-2019) was set to open. Snorkeling at **Flash of Beauty**, just east of Loblolly, is through a more compact area but with bigger coral and lots of funny-looking fish.

Locals come to the small, tin-roofed **Dotsy's Bakery & Sandwich Shop** (☎ 495-9667; mains US\$6-14; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) in the Settlement for her fresh-baked breads, breakfasts, fish-and-chips, burgers and pizzas.

After you finish snorkeling, climb up to shore to **Flash of Beauty Restaurant** (☎ 495-8014, 441-5815; mains US\$9-18; ☺ lunch & dinner), where Monica and crew await with sandwiches, burgers, conch stew and, yep, lobster (it's usually lower-priced here, around US\$40). She also makes a mean 'bushwhacker' – a milkshake-esque drink using seven liquors.

LOBSTER LOWDOWN

Cracking an Anegada lobster is a tourist rite of passage. Every restaurant serves the *mondo* crustaceans, usually grilled on the beach in a converted oil drum and spiced with the chef's secret seasonings. Because the critters are plucked fresh from the surrounding waters, you must call ahead by 4pm to place your order so each restaurant knows how many to stock. Most places charge US\$50 to indulge. Note that lobster fishing is prohibited from August 15 through November 1 so stocks can replenish, thus they're not on menus (nor is conch) during that time.

Aubrey Levons' popular restaurant-bar **Big Bamboo** (☎ 495-2019; mains US\$14-25; ☺ lunch & dinner) is on the beach at Loblolly Bay's west end and specializes in island recipes for lobster, fish and chicken.

DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

One of the best things about the BVIs is the range of accommodations available, especially on Tortola, where you can find moderately priced guesthouses as well as swanky resorts. The **BVI Tourist Board** (www.bvitourism.com) provides lodging information on its website; it breaks out locally owned properties as 'Jewels' and has a special telephone number (☎ 866-468-6284) for more information. Some properties have three-night minimum stay requirements during the December 15 through April 15 peak season.

On every hotel bill, you'll see an added 7% government tax and often a service charge of 10% to 15% more.

ACTIVITIES

Sailing is the BVIs' main claim to fame. For information on how to get on board, see the boxed text, p416.

Diving & Snorkeling

The islands huddle to form a sheltered paradise of secluded coves, calm shores and crystal-clear water, which in turn provide outstanding underwater visibility, healthy coral and a wide variety of dive and snorkeling sites. Conservation is a big deal here, and there are lots of permanent mooring buoys. Safe, professional dive operators are plentiful and all go to the good spots, including the wreck of the RMS *Rhone*; see p398 for information on this and other top sites. Expect to pay about US\$80 for a one-tank dive, US\$110 for two tanks.

We recommend the following dive operators for their professionalism, friendliness and safety.

Dive BVI (☎ 495-5513, 800-848-7078; www.divebvi.com) Offices at Yacht Harbour and Leverick Bay, Virgin Gorda and at Marina Cay, Tortola.

Dive Tortola (☎ 494-9200, 800-353-3419; www.dive.tortola.com) At Prospect Reef Marina, Tortola.

Sail Caribbean (☎ 495-1675; www.sailcaribbeandivers.com) At Hodges Creek Marina, Tortola.

We Be Divin' (☎ 494-4320; www.webedivinbvi.com)
Offices in Road Town, Tortola and Setting Point, Anegada.

Surfing & Windsurfing

The BVIs offer ideal conditions for beginner and seasoned windsurfers. The water is warm and safe, the winds average a gentle 10 to 15 knots. Tortola's north coast serves surfers reliable swells from November to March, especially off Apple Bay and Josiah's Bay.

On Tortola, Island Surf & Sail (p399) and Boardsailing BVI (p402) offer windsurfing rentals and lessons for approximately US\$100 per three-hour session. Last Stop Sports (p396) offers board rentals from US\$37 per day.

BOOKS

Birders should check out *A Guide to the Birds of Puerto Rico & the Virgin Islands* by Herbert Rafaela and *The Nature of the Islands: Plants & Animals of the Eastern Caribbean (A Chris Doyle Guide)* by Virginia Barlow. Shell collectors can use *A Field Guide to Shells: Atlantic and Gulf Coasts and the West Indies* by R Tucker Abbott and Percy A Morris.

Jinx and Jeff Morgan, owners of Tortola's Sugar Mill Hotel and highly acclaimed restaurant (see p402), fill their *Sugar Mill Caribbean Cookbook: Casual & Elegant Recipes Inspired by the Islands* with delicious recipes.

The Cruising Guide to the Virgin Islands, by Nancy and Simon Scott, is the essential guide for any sailor.

BUSINESS HOURS

General BVI hours are below. Many places close on Sunday and many businesses shut down entirely in September and October.

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

Bars & pubs ☎ noon to midnight

Government offices ☎ 8:30am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday

Post offices ☎ 8:30am to 4pm Monday to Friday, 9am to noon Saturday

Restaurants ☎ breakfast 7am to 11am, lunch 11am to 2pm, dinner 5pm to 9pm

Shops ☎ 9am to 5pm Monday to Saturday

CHILDREN

The BVIs are an excellent destination for children. Many resorts have children's programs and babysitting services. Because this is such a big yachting and sailing destination, you'll see a lot of families around the marinas.

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** The three weekly newspapers are *Island Sun*, *BVI Beacon* and *StandPoint*. The free *Limin' Times* lists weekly entertainment.
- **Radio & TV** There are seven radio stations, including ZWAVE (97.3FM, reggae) and ZVCR (106.9FM, Caribbean). Puerto Rico's WOSO, at 1030AM, has international news, weather and hurricane coverage. For BVIs TV news, check Channel 5, the local-access channel.
- **Electricity** 110 volts; North American-style plugs have two (flat) or three (two flat, one round) pins.
- **Weights & Measures** Imperial system. Distances are in feet and miles; gasoline is measured in gallons.

On Virgin Gorda, **Tropical Nannies** (☎ 495-6493; www.tropicalnannies.com) provides babysitting services by trained, professional nannies. They'll come to your hotel or take the kids off your hands starting at US\$15 per hour.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The BVIs have little street crime. Nevertheless, the usual rules of cautious conduct for travelers apply here. Drivers should be careful of wandering cattle, especially at night. Mosquitoes and sand fleas are an unfortunate part of life; you'll want good bug spray with you.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

There are no foreign embassies or consulates in the BVIs. Head to the US Virgin Islands (p385) if you need consular assistance.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

As well as Tortola's monthly full-moon festivals at Bomba's Shack (p401) and Aragon's Studio (p402), there are several big draws throughout the year.

Virgin Gorda Easter Festival (☎ 495-5181) Three-day celebration surrounding the Christian holiday in March or April; see p406.

BVI Spring Regatta (☎ 494-3286; www.bvispringregatta.org) The granddaddy of Tortola's myriad yacht races has become one of the Caribbean's biggest parties. It features seven days of small- and large-craft races in early April and provides a time-honored excuse to swill beer, sip

rum, listen to live music and party with sailors and crew from around the world.

BVI Music Festival (☎ 495-3378; www.bvimusicfest.info) Big-name acts wail at Cane Garden Bay, leading up to Foxy's regatta in late May; see p400.

Foxy's Woodenboat Regatta (☎ 495-9258) Foxy hosts several sailing events, but are none bigger than this regatta, held off Jost van Dyke over the US Memorial Day weekend in late May. Since 1974 the annual regatta has drawn in classic wooden yachts for four days of light racing and heavy partying.

Highland Spring HIHO (☎ 494-7963; www.go-hiho.com) Windsurfers converge on the BVIs in late June for the Hook-In-Hold-On races.

BVI Emancipation Festival (☎ 494-3134) Occurs over two weeks at the end of July and beginning of August. During this time, Tortola rocks from the West End to the East End, celebrating its African-Caribbean heritage.

Jost van Dyke also has garnered an international reputation as the place to be on New Year's Eve.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

While a fair number of islanders and travelers in the BVIs are gay, West Indian taboos on the lifestyle are slow to crumble. You are not likely to meet many 'out' gays or lesbians, nor are you likely to see public displays of affection among gay couples.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day January 1

Commonwealth Day Second Monday in March

Good Friday Friday before Easter (in March or April)

Easter Monday April

Whit Monday May or June (date varies)

Sovereign's Birthday June (date varies)

Territory Day July 1

BVI Festival Days First Monday to first Wednesday in August

St Ursula's Day October 21

Christmas Day December 25

Boxing Day December 26

INTERNET ACCESS

On Tortola and Virgin Gorda you'll find internet cafés near the main marinas; we've listed several places in the chapter's Information sections. Rates are about US\$5 per half hour. Access is not common in hotels.

INTERNET RESOURCES

British Virgin Islands (www.bvitourism.com) BVI Tourist Board's official website.

BVI Beacon (www.bvibeacon.com) The local newspaper's website, with news updates.

BVI Welcome Magazine (www.bviwelcome.com) Online version of the free tourist magazine that lists anchorages, beaches, diving sites and more.

Foxy's (www.foxy'sbar.com) The man, the legend, provides Jost info (dated but still useful).

Limin' Times (www.limin-times.com) When and where local bands are playing.

MAPS

Pick up a free road map at the BVI Tourist Board (above). It covers all the islands and should suffice for driving trips.

MEDICAL SERVICES

The BVIs' only hospital, **Peebles Hospital** (☎ 494-3497; Main St; ☒ 24hr), is in Road Town. The other islands have small, part-time clinics.

MONEY

The US dollar is used throughout the BVIs. You'll find FirstBank, Scotiabank, First Caribbean and Banco Popular in Road Town, with ATMs hooked into worldwide networks (Plus, Cirrus, Exchange etc). Spanish Town has a couple of banks, but there's nothing on the other islands.

POST

The BVIs have their own postal service. Tortola has five post offices, one at Road Town and small regional offices at Cane Garden Bay, Carrot Bay, East End and West End. Virgin Gorda has two. The other islands have none. Letters to the USA/Europe/Australia cost US\$0.50/0.60/0.75; postcards cost US\$0.35/0.40/0.50.

TELEPHONE

The BVIs country code is ☎ 284, but you just dial the seven-digit local number on the islands. To call from North America, dial ☎ 1 + 284 + the local number. From elsewhere, dial your country's international

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 999, 911
- **Fire** ☎ 999, 911
- **Police** ☎ 999 or 911
- **Virgin Islands Search & Rescue**
☎ 767, VHF 16

dialing code then ☎ 284 + the local number. We've included only the seven-digit local number in BVIs listings in this chapter.

Many businesses also have toll-free numbers; these begin with ☎ 800, ☎ 888 or ☎ 877.

GSM phones work on the islands. SIM cards are available at local shops. They cost about US\$20, which includes US\$10 of air time (at roughly US\$0.30 per minute calling time to the US). CCT Global and Digicel provide the local cellular service. Working pay phones are difficult to find.

Be prepared for whopping charges – the BVIs are one of the most expensive places in the world to call.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Contact the **BVI Tourist Board** (☎ 800-835-8530; www.bvitourism.com or www.bvi.org.uk) pre-departure, or stop into one of its offices once you're on the islands.

Tortola (☎ 494-3134; DeCastro St, Akara Bldg;

☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) In Road Town.

Virgin Gorda (☎ 495-5181; Yacht Harbour mall;

☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) In Spanish Town.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

The BVIs are not particularly accessible and do not have any specific services geared toward travelers with disabilities.

VISAS

Visitors from most Western countries do not need a visa to enter the BVIs for 30 days or less. If your home country does not qualify for visa exemption (check www.bvi.org.uk/nationals_requiring_a_visa.asp.html), contact your nearest **British embassy** (www.ukvisas.gov.uk) or the **BVI Immigration Department** (☎ 494-3471).

WOMEN TRAVELERS

It's safe for women to travel solo in the BVIs. Just use the same degree of caution you would in a big city at home: be aware of your surroundings, especially when walking alone at night.

WORK

Only Belongers (naturalized citizens) can work without a permit in the BVIs. The government doesn't issue work permits easily, as it's keen to give jobs to locals.

DEPARTURE TAX – AIR

You must pay a US\$20 departure tax to leave the BVIs by air. This is not included in the ticket price, and must be paid separately at the airport.

TRANSPORTATION

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering the British Virgin Islands

Everyone needs a passport to enter the BVIs; some nationalities also need a visa (see left). Officials might ask to see a return ticket and proof of funds, though that's rare. It can take a half hour or so to clear customs. There's no reason why, other than it's just a slow-moving process. If you're arriving on a ferry from the USVIs, you'll clear through a **customs house** (☎ 494-3864; www.bviports.org) near the dock; there are customs houses in Road Town and West End on Tortola, and on Virgin Gorda and Jost Van Dyke.

Air

The BVIs have three airports. **Terrence B International Lettsome Airport** (EIS; ☎ 494-3701) is the BVIs' main airport; it's a modern facility at Beef Island, off Tortola. **Virgin Gorda Airport** (VIJ; ☎ 495-5621) is a small facility with a restaurant, and Captain Auguste George Airport is a tiny facility on Anegada for charter flights.

There are no direct flights to the BVIs from the USA, Canada or Europe. Flights connect through hubs in the Caribbean, usually via Puerto Rico, St Thomas or Antigua. Some airlines flying to/from the BVIs:

Air Sunshine (☎ 495-8900, 888-879-8900; www.airsunshine.com) San Juan

American Eagle (☎ 495-2559, 800-433-7300; www.aa.com) San Juan

Cape Air (☎ 495-2100, 800-352-0714; www.flycapeair.com) San Juan

LIAT (☎ 340-774-2313; www.liatairline.com) Antigua

Seaborne Airlines (☎ 340-773-6442, 888-359-8687; www.seaborneairlines.com) St Thomas

WinAir (☎ 494-2347, 495-1298; www.fly-winair.com) St-Martin/Sint Maarten

Sea

CRUISE SHIP

Cruise ships call at Road Town's harbor on Tortola. One or two ships typically arrive

YACHT CHARTER BASICS

The BVIs provide it all: a year-round balmy climate, steady trade winds, little to worry about in the way of tides or currents, a protected thoroughfare in the 35-mile-long Sir Francis Drake Channel, and hundreds of anchorages, each within sight of one another. These factors make the islands one of the easiest places to sail, which explains why more than a third of all visitors come to do just that.

If you want to sail, there are three basic options: a sailing school; a bareboat charter (bare of crew but fully equipped) with or without a skipper; or a more luxurious crewed charter, complete with captain, cook and crew.

A typical week-long itinerary involves sampling the islands, while partially circumnavigating Tortola. The attraction of a sailing vacation is that you can sail or stay put as long as you want, look for quiet anchorages or head for the party spots and add on diving, hiking or shopping trips at will.

The cost of chartering a boat depends on the vessel's size and age and the time of year. It is a misconception that sailing is too expensive; once you do a little research you might be pleasantly surprised.

Choosing a Company

Charter companies depend on their reputations. Ask for references and spend time talking with the company's representatives. Most companies sail out of the Moorings at Wickhams Cay 2 in Road Town.

For an up-to-date list of services, prices and equipment check the **Sail magazine website** (www.sailmag.com).

Charters

Catamaran Company (☎ 494-6661, 800-262-0308; www.catamaran.com)

Horizon Yacht Charters (☎ 494-8787, 877-494-8787; www.horizonyachtcharters.com)

Moorings (☎ 494-2331, 888-952-8420; www.moorings.com)

Sunsail Yacht Charters (☎ 495-4740, 888-350-3568; www.sunsail.com)

Tortola Marine Management (☎ 494-2751, 800-633-0155; www.sailtmm.com)

Crewed Boats

People looking for a crewed-yacht vacation can contact the **BVI Charter Yacht Society** (☎ 494-6017; www.bvicrewedyachts.com), an overarching trade group for the industry. Crewed boats are also booked by brokers who know individual boats and their crews. The following is a list of reputable brokers.

Catamaran Company (☎ 494-6661, 800-262-0308; www.catamaran.com)

Ed Hamilton & Co (☎ 800-621-7855; www.ed-hamilton.com)

Sailing Vacations (☎ 495-4740, 888-350-3568; www.sunsail.com)

Sunsail Sailing Vacations (☎ 800-327-2276; www.sunsail.com)

Sailing Schools

Bitter End Sailing School (☎ 494-2745, 800-872-2392; www.beyc.com) The Bitter End Yacht Club (p407) on Virgin Gorda offers beginner to advanced courses.

Offshore Sailing School (☎ 800-221-4326; www.offshore-sailing.com) Has learn-to-cruise courses out of Road Town, Tortola.

each day during winter, and their passengers quickly overwhelm the small settlement. Many passengers flock via taxis to Cane Garden Bay beach, or else they hop on the ferry to Virgin Gorda to take a look at the Baths.

See p830 for more information on cruises and individual lines.

FERRY

There are excellent ferry connections linking Tortola, Virgin Gorda and Jost Van Dyke with

the USVIs' St Thomas and St John. You must have a valid passport to travel between the BVIs and USVIs.

Smith's Ferry (☎ 494-4454; www.smithsferry.com) and **Native Son** (☎ 495-4617; www.nativesonbvi.com) alternate departure times in traveling from Road Town to downtown Charlotte Amalie on St Thomas, first stopping at West End (round trip US\$45, about 60 minutes). **Road Town Fast Ferry** (☎ 494-2323; www.roadtownfastferry.com) makes the trip to Charlotte Amalie direct (round trip US\$49, 50 minutes).

Ferries travel from West End (Tortola) to Red Hook (St Thomas) four to five times daily (round trip US\$45, 30 minutes) with **Native Son** (☎ 495-4617; www.nativesonbvi.com). Ferries also travel from West End to Cruz Bay (St John) three times daily (round trip US\$45, 30 minutes) via **Inter-Island** (☎ 495-4166).

Inter-Island makes limited runs between Jost Van Dyke and Red Hook (St Thomas) via Cruz Bay (St John). Ferries sail the route twice daily on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (round trip US\$50, 45 minutes). Inter-Island also operates between Virgin Gorda and Red Hook (St Thomas) via Cruz Bay (St John), with service once daily on Thursday and Sunday (round trip US\$60, 75 minutes).

YACHT

Lots of yachts drift into the BVIs. In Tortola they cluster in Road Town at the Moorings at Wickhams Cay 2; in Virgin Gorda they cluster at Yacht Harbour near Spanish Town; in Jost they cluster at Great Harbour; and in Anegada they're at Setting Point. Any of these places would be good for enquiring about hitching a ride as a crew member.

GETTING AROUND

Ferries are the primary mode of transportation between islands and a great way to meet locals. None of the islands has public bus service.

Air

To fly between islands you'll have to charter a plane. **Fly BVI** (☎ 495-1747, 866-819-3146; www.fly-bvi.com) is a well-regarded company that flies not only within the BVIs but to islands throughout the Caribbean.

Boat

The islands have a frequent and inexpensive ferry service that's easy to navigate, despite

DEPARTURE TAX – BOAT

You must pay a US\$5 departure tax to leave the BVIs by ferry. This is usually included in your ticket price (unlike the air departure tax). The ferry prices listed throughout this chapter have the tax already factored in. Cruise ship passengers pay a US\$7 departure tax.

convoluted schedules. The full schedules are printed in most of the tourism guides, including the **BVI Welcome Guide** (www.bviwelcome.com), but the essentials are listed here.

See opposite for information on chartering a yacht.

BEEF ISLAND TO NORTH SOUND

North Sound Express (☎ 495-2138) runs ferries from Trellis Bay on Beef Island (near Tortola's airport) to the north end of Virgin Gorda, stopping at the Valley (one way US\$25, 20 minutes), Bitter End (one way US\$35, 45 minutes) and Leverick Bay (one way US\$20, 15 minutes). Reservations are required.

ROAD TOWN TO ANEGADA

Smith's Ferry (☎ 494-4454; www.smithsferry.com) round trip US\$50) sails from Road Town, Tortola on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7am and 3:30pm; it departs Anegada at 8:30am and 5pm. The boat makes a quick stop at Spanish Town, Virgin Gorda, each way.

ROAD TOWN TO SPANISH TOWN

Speedy's (☎ 495-5240; www.speedysbvi.com) and **Smith's Ferry** (☎ 494-4454; www.smithsferry.com) run trips between Road Town, Tortola and Spanish Town, Virgin Gorda almost half-hourly (round trip US\$25, 30 minutes).

WEST END TO JOST VAN DYKE

New Horizon Ferry (☎ 495-9278; www.jostvandykeferry.com; round trip US\$20) sails five times daily between Tortola's West End and Jost's Great Harbour.

Car

Driving is undoubtedly the most convenient way to get around individual islands, but be prepared for some crazy conditions. Steep, winding roads are often the same width as your car. Chickens and dogs dart in and out

of the roadway and, oh, did we mention the goats? Driving is on the left-hand side. Most cars come from the US, so the steering wheel is on the left-hand side of the vehicle.

Drivers often stop dead in the middle of the road. Watch for the flap: when drivers are about to do something (stop, turn etc), they flap their arm out the window. Be careful not to lose your keys; there are no locksmiths on the islands.

RENTAL

There are several good local car-rental agencies on the islands. Often the vehicles are jeeps. High-season rates begin at about US\$55 per day and can run as high as US\$90, but

you'll get a better price for a weekly rental. See each island's Getting Around section for local car-rental companies and their contact information.

Taxi

Taxis are convenient and essential if you're not renting a car. Several are the open-air variety, with bench seats and awnings, able to carry up to 12 passengers; others are vans. Taxis do not have meters; fares are set rates (many of which are listed throughout this chapter).

Beef Island Taxi Association (☎ 495-1982)

BVI Taxi Association (☎ 494-3942)

Waterfront Taxi Stand (☎ 494-6362)

West End Taxi Association (☎ 495-4934)