

British Virgin Islands

By Tom Kirvan

A CARIBBEAN PARADISE AWAITS ADVENTURE SEEKERS

The British Virgin Islands (BVI), a British Overseas Territory in the Caribbean, is home to approximately 30,000 people. Despite its small population, the BVI boasts a cultural heritage influenced by African, European, and Caribbean traditions.

The majority of the population resides on Tortola, the largest island, while other inhabited islands include Virgin Gorda, Anegada, and Jost Van Dyke. English is the official language, and the territory's residents are known for their warm hospitality and deep connection to the sea. The population is predominantly Christian, with various denominations present, and the community is closely knit, with a strong emphasis on family and tradition.

The British Virgin Islands consist of around 60 islands and cays, but only 16 of them are inhabited. The islands are located in the northeastern Caribbean, east of Puerto Rico, and are part of the Virgin Islands archipelago, which also includes the U.S. Virgin Islands. The BVI is known for its stunning natural beauty, characterized by rugged hills, lush tropical vegetation, and pristine white-sand beaches. The waters surrounding the islands are crystal-clear and teeming with marine life, making the BVI a premier destination for sailing, snorkeling, and diving.

The rich history of the British Virgin Islands is shaped by indigenous cultures, European colonization, and African heritage. The islands were originally inhabited by the Arawak and later the Carib peoples before Christopher Columbus arrived in 1493, naming the islands "Las Islas Virgenes" in honor of Saint Ursula and her 11,000 virgins. The BVI became a focal point of European interest in the Caribbean, and by the 17th century, the British had established control over the islands.

The economy initially relied on sugar plantations, which were worked by enslaved Africans. After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834, the economy transitioned towards small-scale farming and fishing. The BVI remained relatively isolated until the mid-20th century when tourism began to emerge as a major industry, transforming the islands into the affluent and popular destination they are today.

The British Virgin Islands is one of the most prosperous territories in the Caribbean, with a thriving economy largely driven by tourism and financial services. The BVI is renowned as a global offshore financial center, offering services such as company incorporations, asset management, and trust services. The financial sector contributes significantly to the territory's GDP, attracting businesses and



Fast Facts

Capital: Road Town

Population: 30,000

Language: English

Economic engines: Tourism, financial services

Highest Mountain: Sage Mountain, 1,716 feet

Primerus Member: Quijano & Associates

Quijano & Associates, located in Road Town, is a full-service business law firm.

British Virgin Islands

individuals from around the world seeking tax advantages and a stable regulatory environment. Tourism is the other major pillar of the BVI's economy, with visitors coming to the islands for their natural beauty, luxury resorts, and world-class sailing conditions.

Road Town, located on the southern coast of Tortola, is the capital and largest city of the British Virgin Islands. With a population of around 12,000, Road Town serves as the political, economic, and cultural heart of the territory. The city is named after its natural harbor, which is one of the busiest in the Caribbean, frequented by yachts, ferries, and cruise ships.

Top 5 Must-See Tourist Destinations

- **The Baths, Virgin Gorda:** The Baths, located on the island of Virgin Gorda, is one of the most famous and unique natural attractions in the Caribbean. This stunning geological formation consists of massive granite boulders scattered along the beach, creating hidden caves, grottoes, and tidal pools. Visitors can explore the maze-like paths between the boulders, swim in the clear, turquoise waters, and relax on the pristine sandy beaches. The Baths are part of a national park, and the area offers excellent snorkeling opportunities, with coral reefs and abundant marine life.
- **Anegada:** Anegada, the northernmost of the British Virgin Islands, is known for its flat terrain, unlike the hilly landscapes of the other islands. This coral island is surrounded by the Horseshoe Reef, one of the largest coral reefs in the Caribbean, making it a paradise for snorkeling and diving. Anegada's pristine beaches, such as Loblolly Bay and Cow Wreck Beach, are perfect for those seeking solitude and natural beauty.
- **Jost Van Dyke:** Jost Van Dyke, named after a Dutch pirate, is a small island known for its beach bars, beautiful beaches, and lively atmosphere. The island's most famous beach, White Bay, is lined with beach bars, including the renowned Soggy Dollar Bar, where the Painkiller cocktail was invented. Visitors can enjoy swimming, snorkeling, and soaking up the sun on the white sandy beaches. Jost Van Dyke is also home to Great Harbour, a popular anchorage for yachts, and Foxy's Tamarind Bar, known for its legendary New Year's Eve parties.
- **Norman Island:** Norman Island, located at the southern tip of the BVI archipelago, is steeped in pirate lore and is said to have inspired Robert Louis Stevenson's classic novel, "Treasure Island." The island is uninhabited and offers secluded anchorages, making it a popular spot for yachts and day-

trippers. The most famous attraction on Norman Island is The Caves, a series of sea caves that are ideal for snorkeling.

- **Sage Mountain National Park:** Sage Mountain National Park, located on Tortola, is the BVI's first national park and home to the highest point in the islands, Sage Mountain, which rises to 1,716 feet above sea level. The park covers 92 acres and features lush tropical rainforest, offering a cool and refreshing escape from the coastal heat. Visitors can hike the network of trails that wind through the park, providing opportunities to spot native flora and fauna, including the BVI's unique bird species.