

# a day in™ Tortola



## Factual and Background

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### In a Nutshell

Tortola is part of the beautiful British Virgin Islands (BVI), located in the north-eastern Caribbean. The island is actually closer to St John, one of the US Virgin Isles, than to many of its neighbours in the BVI.

To the north and north-west of Tortola lie Anegada and Jost Van Dyke (plus a host of smaller members of the BVI), Virgin Gorda lies about 5 miles to the east, and a string of smaller BVI - including Peter Island, Salt Island and Cooper Island, are to be found just across the natural harbour of the Sir Francis Drake Channel, to the south. There are few more desirable yachting areas in the world than the BVI.

Tortola is the largest of the BVI. The island is picturesque with lush greenery, rugged mountains, white sand, and quiet harbours. There are plenty of areas to explore on the island. Those who enjoy sailing should head to Brandywine Bay, Cane Garden Bay, Hodge's Creek Marina Cay, Soper's Hole, and Trellis Bay; whilst those who enjoy soaking up the sun should visit the quiet beaches of Apple Bay, Brewer's Bay, Elizabeth Beach, Josiah's Bay Beach, Long Bay Beach, and Smuggler's Cove.

There are also a number of cultural sites to pay a visit to, including a rum distillery.

Road Town is the relatively quiet capital of Tortola which, as an island, tends to be much less frantic than many other places.

#### Visitor Information



BVI Tourist Board  
DeCastro Street  
2nd Floor, AKARA Building  
Road Town, Tortola  
Tel: 284 494 3134  
Fax: 284 494 3866

Being British, Tortola sticks to the British rule of the road which is to drive on the left - not so difficult once you get used to it. If you are driving on the island it is as well to be prepared for some pretty steep roads and longer drives than the island's twelve mile length would imply.



The BVI consists of over 50 islands with a total population of around 26,000 people. Around 17,000 of these live on Tortola itself.



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## Climate

Tortola enjoys a sub-tropical climate. Daily temperatures range between 77°F-85°F (25°C-29°C). The North East Trade Winds cause temperatures to drop about 10°F (6°C) during the night

The hurricane season runs from roughly August to October but Tortola is generally spared the main brunt of these storms.

About 40 inches (102cm) of rain falls every year by the sea shore. The rainy season lasts from September to December. The driest months are between February and April.

British Virgin Islands stamps are much sought after by philatelists. Take a look at what's available at the main post office in Road Town.



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## Currency & Banking

Although still a British dependency, its proximity to the wealthier US Virgin Isles means that the currency of The British Virgin Islands is the US dollar. Major credit cards are accepted in many establishments. There is a 10 cent stamp duty on all cheques and travellers cheques.

Banks are open Monday to Friday from 9.00-15.00.  
Banks also open from 16.00-17.30 on Fridays.

The following banks have ATM facilities:

Banco Popular  
Main Road, Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 2117

Chase Manhattan  
Wickhams Cay 1, Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 2662

The main post office in Road Town is located on Main

Street (Tel: 284 494 3701).

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## Shopping

Visitors will find a wide variety of shops in Main Street, Road Town, selling everything from handcrafts and spices to different types of rum and jewellery.

The shopping opportunities are balanced and varied with a good range of good quality outlets, tourist shops and liquor and jewelry stores.

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## Need Help?

**Police - fire - ambulance**

Emergency services:  
999 or 911



## What's to see

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The coastline of Tortola can only be described as uniquely beautiful: the beaches are pristine and the water crystal clear.

Further inland visitors can discover the island's rain forest, villages, churches, and farms.

For the naturalist there are some fascinating national parks with dry stream valleys, volcanic ridges, and botanical gardens.

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## Try these

J.R. O'Neal Botanic Gardens

[www.bvinternationalparkstrust.com](http://www.bvinternationalparkstrust.com)

Four acres (1.6 hectares) of peaceful gardens located in the centre of Road Town.

### **Sage Mountain National Park**

[www.bvinternationalparkstrust.com](http://www.bvinternationalparkstrust.com)

At 1,780 ft (543 m), Sage Mountain is the highest peak in the BVI.

Fort Burt

Road Town area

Now a hotel, this fort was rebuilt by the British, who annexed the islands in 1672.

Fort Recovery

This fort, built by the Dutch in 1660, is one of the oldest structures in the BVI. At the West End is the BVI's oldest intact structure. A turreted gun emplacement with three foot thick walls, it was built by the Dutch in 1660.

Thornton plantation

Pleasant Valley

Former home of architect William Thornton who designed the US Capitol Building.

The Dungeon

Pockwood Road, between Road Town and West End

The Dungeon was built in 1794 by the British Royal

Located on the slopes of Sage Mountain, the Mountain View Restaurant is worth a visit. There is a free viewing platform outside the restaurant and inside, a well stocked and interesting gift shop (see Eating Out) 

Engineers.

#### Mount Healthy Windmill National Park

This national park is located above Brewer's Bay. Visitors can see the remains of an old stone windmill, which powered an 18th century sugar plantation.

#### Virgin Island Folk Museum

Main Street, Road Town

Arawak and Carib pottery are on display here.

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## Specials

#### Vigilant

This traditional wooden boat is one of only three sloops remaining in the BVI. These boats were used to transport goods and people between the islands.

#### Callwood Rum Distillery

Cane Garden Bay

This distillery has been producing rum for over two centuries, which is still stored in original demi-johns. There is a gift shop here where three types of rum can be purchased.

#### The Wall

On the way to Sage Mountain take a look at the long painted wall beside the road. Locals have painted a string of interesting murals depicting life on Tortola. There are paintings of donkeys carrying salt, rum distilling, field work and a great deal more.

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# Shopping

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Tortola has plenty of shopping opportunities and a very varied offer for the discerning tourist. The "Crafts Alive" centre - very close to the Cruise Terminal and waterfront offers a wide range of local clothing and crafts in the form of a picturesque West Indian village - complete with a viewing platform by the sea which provides excellent panoramas of the bay.

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## Clothes

BVI Apparel  
West End / Soper's Hole  
Tel: 284 494 5511  
Men and women's clothing.

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## Jewellery

Caribbean Jewellers & Internet Cafe  
West End / Soper's Hole  
Tel: 284 495 4137  
Handmade jewellery.

Colombian Emeralds International  
Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 7477  
Duty-free jewellers.

Samarkand Jewellers  
Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 6415

D'Zandra's  
Off Admin Drive, Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 8330

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## Gifts/Books

Arawak Designs Boutique & Gift Shop  
Nanny Cay  
Tel: 284 494 5240

Gifts and clothing.

Buccaneer's Bounty  
West End / Soper's Hole  
Tel: 284 494 7511  
Souvenirs and gifts.

Caribbean Corner Spice House  
West End / Soper's Hole  
Tel: 284 495 7377  
For jams, hot sauces, and cigars.

The Coral Studio  
Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 3853  
Collectable items made out of local coral.

Lady Sarah's Fine Things  
Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 4244  
Gifts.

Pusser's Company Store  
Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 2467  
For rum, chutney, spices, and t-shirts.

Bolo's Department Store  
42, DeCastro St, Road Town  
Tel: 284 4942 867  
Sells a variety of gifts and local produce.

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# History & Economy

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## History

The first inhabitants of Tortola are believed to have been the Ciboney tribe. The Caribs were living on the island when the Spanish arrived in 1493.

The Virgin Islands were named after the Virgins of St Ursula. St Ursula is thought to have been a 4th century Romano-British princess who was sent from Britain to Brittany for her marriage with 11,000 virgin hand-maidens in tow. When she arrived at her destination Ursula decided to go on a fatal pilgrimage via Rome to Cologne, where she ran into an invading army of Huns who are said to have beheaded all 11,000 virgins and shot Ursula.

It is likely that the islands were first used by European pirates. The Dutch established settlements as early as the 1620s. These were conquered by the British in the mid 17th century. By 1672 the islands had been claimed for the Crown and the British established several sugar plantations and imported slaves to run them. The islands witnessed a number of slave rebellions and uprisings, many of which were quashed quickly.

The islands suffered significant economic slump when slavery was abolished in 1834. When the Emancipation of the Slaves was proclaimed on 1st August 1834 there were just over 5,000 slaves on the islands.

There was a period of great unrest and poverty during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and there were many uprisings. The islands survived by exporting cattle and selling locally caught fish.

It was only in the 1960s as an independent territory of the Crown that the BVI began to develop their tourist and financial industries.

Tortola is the home of  Pusser's Rum. The manufacturers still use the original recipe that was issued on all Royal Navy warships. A proportion of the revenue from every bottle is given to the Royal Navy's Tot Fund, which provides facilities and support for serving Royal Navy seamen.

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## Economy

Financial services and the tourism industries both play

important roles in supporting the local economy. The islands are now used as an offshore financial base by many companies.

The island also produces extremely good rum.

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## Art & Culture

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### Art Galleries

Aragorn Studio

Beef Island

Tel: 284 495 1849

There are displays of steel and copper sculptures here by local artist Aragorn Dick-Read.

Bamboushay

Nanny Cay

Tel: 284 494 0393

This is a local pottery studio and art shop, which also sells local crafts.

Crafts Alive

Visitors can see traditional dolls in African clothing, pottery, and straw items at this artisan's village.

Sunny Caribbee Spice Company and Art Gallery

Road Town area

Tel: 284 494 2178

This gallery contains a large collection of Caribbean art work.

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### Museums

North Shore Shell Museum

Carrot Bay

Tel: 284 495 4714

There are some interesting displays of local shells and wooden boats here.

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### Music

BVI Music Fest

Cane Garden Bay

Caribbean calypso, reggae, soul, and jazz music are all performed at this annual music festival.

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## Recreation & Sport

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### Water Sports

There are many sports for visitors to try on the island including windsurfing, paragliding, waterskiing, swimming, snorkelling, scuba diving, trekking and golf.

Off the south coast of Salt island lies the wreck of the RMS Rhone - a 310 ft Royal Mail Ship that came to grief during a hurricane in the year 1867. Now it is a treasure for underwater explorers.

The island also has some of the best sailing waters in the Caribbean, especially across Sir Francis Drake's Passage.

### Beaches

There are many fine beaches on Tortola including:

Apple Bay Beach (Apple / Capoons Bay): good for surfing

Cane Garden Bay (on the north shore): a sheltered anchorage and beautiful beach with many bars and restaurants.

Smuggler's Cove (West End / Soper's Hole): a small but secluded beach that is fairly difficult to get to due to the unpaved road.

Brewer's Bay Beach (North Shore): good for snorkelling.

Elizabeth Beach (East End): ideal for sunbathing.

Josiah's Bay Beach (North Shore): good surfing conditions during the winter.

Lambert Bay (North Shore): a peaceful beach sheltered by palms.

 The western beaches on all of the islands in the Leeward and Windward chains are calmer and more sheltered.

## Getting Around

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### Local Tours

Caribbean Wings

Beef Island

Tel: 284 495 6000

[www.bvi-airlines.com](http://www.bvi-airlines.com)

This company organises flights and sightseeing tours.

Clair Aero

Beef Island

Tel: 284 495 227

[www.clairaero.com](http://www.clairaero.com)

Tours of the island from the air.

Fly BVI, Ltd.

Beef Island

Tel: 284 495 1747

[www.flybvi.com](http://www.flybvi.com)

This company offers 45 minute sightseeing tours.

Island Birds

Beef Island

Tel: 284 495 2002

[www.islandbirds.com](http://www.islandbirds.com)

For charter flights and tours of the island from the air.

Island Helicopters International

Beef Island

Tel: 284 495 2538

[www.helicoptersbvi.com](http://www.helicoptersbvi.com)

For organised day trips in a helicopter.

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### Ferries

Tortola Fast Ferry

Tel: 284 494 2323

This 50-minute service runs from Road Town to Charlotte Amelia, St Thomas.

Speedy's Ferry

Tel: 284 495 5240; 284 495 5235; 284 495 5779

[www.speedysbvi.com](http://www.speedysbvi.com)

For ferries between Tortola, Virgin Gorda, and St Thomas.

There are also ferries to Beef Island, Jost Van Dyke,  
Peter Island, and the West End:

Inter-Island Boat Service  
Tel: 284 495 4166

Marina Cay Ferry  
Tel: 284 494 2174

Peter Island Ferry  
Tel: 284 495 9287

Smith's Ferry Services Ltd  
Tel: 284 495 4495

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## Sea Trips

White Squall II  
Tel: 284 4942 564  
Full day sailing trips to the local islands from 09.00 to  
16.00.

ROV  
Tel: 284 4437 336  
For underwater tours in comfort. TV pictures from a  
remote vehicle are piped back to a 50" plasma monitor.  
There are three tours a day from Nanny Cay.

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## Car Hire & Limousines

Hertz Car Rental  
Road Town, Tortola  
Tel: 284 4946 228

Avis Rent-a-Car  
Road Town, Tortola  
Tel: 284 4943 322

Dollar Rent a Car  
Long Bay  
Tel: 284 494 6093

National Car Rental  
West End (Soper's Hole)  
Tel: 284 495 3197

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## Local taxis

United BVI Taxi Federation  
Tel: 284 494 2743  
[www.unitedbvitaxi.com](http://www.unitedbvitaxi.com)  
This taxi company also arranges tours.

Beef Island Taxi Association  
Beef Island  
Tel: 284 495 1982

Quality Taxi Association  
Tel: 284 494 8397

Waterfront Taxi Stand  
Road Town  
Tel: 284 494 3456

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# Eating Out

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## Local specialities

The local specialities on the island include fresh lobster, conch, curries, goat, and Johnny Cakes.

Eclipse Restaurant  
East End  
Tel: 284 495 1646  
Continental cuisine

Beach Club Terrace  
Road Town Area  
Tel: 284 494 2272  
American, Mediterranean, Mexican, and West Indian cuisine

Callaloo On The Reef  
Road Town Area  
Tel: 284 494 3311  
International and West Indian cuisine

De' Cal's Restaurant & Catering  
East End  
Tel: 284 494 1429  
West Indian cuisine

Genaker Café  
Nanny Cay  
Tel: 284 494 2512  
Continental cuisine

Long Bay Beach Resort  
North Shore  
Tel: 284 495 4252  
International

Mountain View  
Ridge Road  
Tel: 284 495 9536  
International and West Indian cuisine

Palm's Delight  
North Shore  
Tel: 284 495 4863  
West Indian cuisine

Pusser's Road Town  
Road Town Area  
Tel: 284 494 3897  
International cuisine

Struggling Man's Place  
Nanny Cay  
Tel: 284 494 4163  
West Indian cuisine

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### A Linguistic Note

A Day In™ Guides are designed to meet the needs of a global audience. Modern tourists from Brisbane, Cincinnati, Edinburgh, and Los Angeles have English as their common language but each has a special way of spelling words and even a few grammatical idiosyncrasies. No single document can hope to cope with all these differences so the A Day In™ Guides have been deliberately written in what one might call a mid-Atlantic English. They use American, British and Australian spellings interchangeably and without worrying too much when or how. We hope that this approach will not offend any of the world's English-speakers and that you will tolerate the word 'center' as readily as 'centre' and 'favorite' as well as 'favourite'.

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