



VIRGIN GORDA

B. V. I.

Virgin Gorda, along with Tortola - a few miles to the west, and Anegada - a few miles to the north, make up the three main islands of the fifty which comprise the United Kingdom's Dependent Territory of the British Virgin Islands (B.V.I.). Virgin Gorda is a quiet, peaceful island with a leisurely lifestyle which is understandably cherished and protected by local residents.

The B.V.I. has been claimed by all the major powers who were involved in Europe's expansion into the Caribbean beginning in the early 1500s. The islands eventually came under British control in the late 1600s and despite some early legal battles as to rightful ownership, they have remained a part of the empire ever since.

The slave-based plantation economy is long gone and it was not until the last few decades of the 20th century when tourism and offshore banking combined to slowly strengthen the B.V.I. economy. Today the British Virgin Islands are one of the most popular vacation destinations for pleasure sailing and scuba diving to be found anywhere in the Caribbean.

HISTORY

As was the case with most of the islands throughout the Caribbean, by 300 AD the Virgin Islands had been settled by a peaceful Indian tribe commonly known as the Arawak. Centuries later the warlike Carib Indians killed, enslaved or drove off the Arawak and occupied the islands of the Antilles. In November, 1493 on his second voyage to the New World Cristoforo Colombo and his fleet of 17 Spanish ships came upon a group of islands which he named in honor of the 11,000 virgin martyrs of St. Ursula. The Admiral personally named "Virgin Gorda" (The Fat Virgin). No Indians seem to have been living in the BVI when the first Europeans arrived.

The Spanish were not interested in the Virgin Islands. This was a strategic and costly mistake. Less than 100 miles to the east of the B.V.I. the Spanish built La Fortaleza and the great fort of San Felipe del Morro, protecting Puerto Rico's San Juan harbor. The Virgin Islands were in a perfect position from which to launch attacks against Spain's Treasure Fleets.

The islands were first settled by the Dutch West India Company in the early 1600s. Each time they established a foothold the Spanish came ashore, drove them off or simply wiped them out. Though the B.V.I. did not come under the full control of the English until 1672, some of the greatest English sea captains, explorers, pirates and privateers sailed the surrounding waters and made use of the B.V.I. Admiral Sir John Hawkins of the Royal Navy came through the B.V.I. numerous times in the mid 1500s as he developed the England's lucrative slave trade. One of the most famous English sailors, Sir Francis Drake, used the British Virgin Islands as a base from which to sail and wreck havoc upon the Spanish Treasure Fleets. The main channel between the islands is named in his honor.

From the latter half of the 1600s through the early 1700s English pirates were using the B.V.I. as a base to pillage and plunder Spanish treasure ships. It was a "target rich environment". The most notorious buccaneer to never sail the waters of the B.V.I. was Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard. We say "never sail" because the myth of his daring exploits

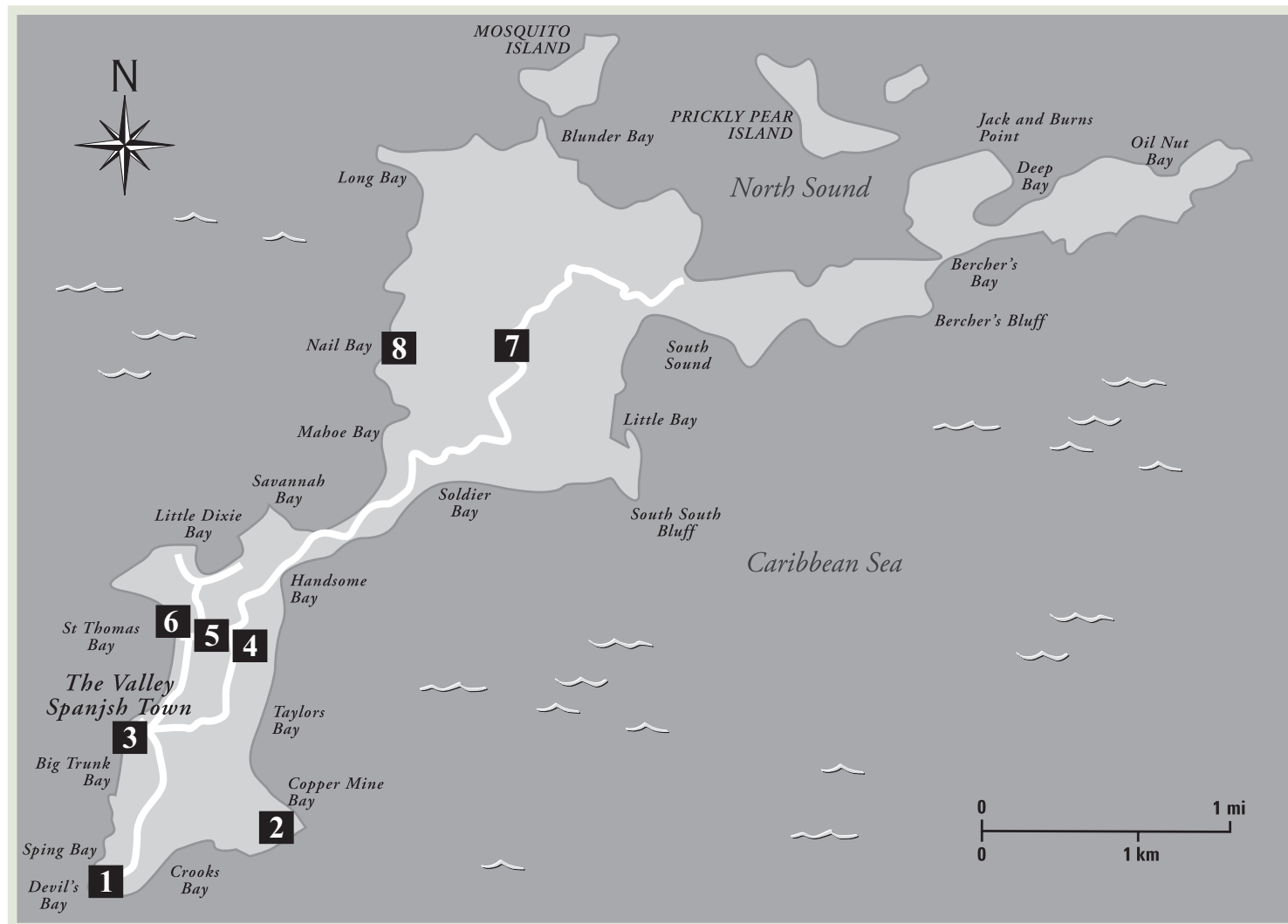


in the Virgin Islands persists despite the fact there has never been a single shred of evidence to support the stories.

Throughout the years the slave-based economy of the B.V.I. was centered on cotton and sugarcane. After many violent revolts, in August 1834 the slaves were emancipated. However, it was the numerous devastating hurricanes in the mid 1800s which literally destroyed the plantations and the island's economy. Combined with the falling price of sugar, the English planters basically abandoned the B.V.I. to the former

slaves. Many of their descendants still own much of the land to this day.

The British Virgin Islands are one of the United Kingdom's Dependent Territories, a leading center for "off shore" banking and one of the most popular yachting destinations in the Caribbean. Treasure, pleasure and sailing...the English pirates and the Admirals of her Royal Navy would have been proud and most likely felt right at home.



VIRGIN GORDA PLACES OF INTEREST

1 Baths National Park is one of the most beautiful and interesting spots on Virgin Gorda. Giant boulders on the shoreline have been carved and shaped by wind and water over countless millennia thereby creating a wonderful geological formation of pools, water filled caves and grottos.



2 Copper Mine National Park is the site of an extensive mining operation which took place on Virgin Gorda primarily between the late 1830s and the late 1860s. Though it is believed the Arawak Indians first dug copper from the area, the Dutch were the first Europeans to discover the valuable deposit. They were unsuccessful in exploiting their find. Eng-

lish miners from the southwest county of Cornwall came to Virgin Gorda to work the mines, eventually withdrawing over 10,000 tons for shipment back to Britain.

3 Fort Point National Park is a small nature preserve which is located around the remnants of an old Spanish fortification dating back to the late 1600s.

4 St. Mary's Anglican Church dates to the late 1800s. There were a number of churches on this site going back to the 1700s. The earlier wooden buildings were all destroyed by frequent hurricanes. The current brick and stone structure has survived, not due to any miracle but rather to sturdy design and construction.

5 The Methodist Church is reputed to be the oldest remaining structure on Virgin Gorda. Built in the early 1800s

the church is simple yet classic. The church is said to have been built upon the foundation of an early Catholic / Spanish Mission House dating back to the 1700s.

6 The **Historic Graveyard** dates back to the 1700s and is the final resting place for many of the island's earliest settlers.

7 The **Gorda Peak National Park** consists of land which was given to England's National Parks Trust in the early 1970s by American philanthropist Lawrence Rockefeller. With numerous hiking trails and covering over 250 acres, the forest receives very little rain yet retains an interesting and diverse eco-system. From the top of Gorda Peak, over 1,350 feet above sea level, visitors can see many of the surrounding islands.

8 The **Nail Bay Sugar Mill** displays the well preserved architectural remains of a sugar factory which was in operation during the plantation era.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Virgin Gorda we suggest you take one of our organized Shore Excursions. For more information, please consult your Shore Excursion Brochure or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, be advised to take with you only necessary items and secure any valuables onboard.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Prices are fixed in restaurants and stores. Major credit cards are widely accepted.

Tipping: A 10-15 % tip is customary.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

As is common throughout much of the Caribbean, local cuisine in the B.V.I. is a combination of European (primarily English, Spanish, French and Dutch), West African and East Indian. When the early explorers, sailors and settlers came to the Antilles they brought their local recipes for beef, pork and salt fish (cured fish was a necessity on long sea voyages). The same thing occurred when slaves from West Africa were transported to the islands. They brought their love of such foods as beans yams, okra, and greens. Following the abolition of slavery, workers from the East Indies came to the region. Their favorite recipes and spices came along with them. It is this combination of styles and techniques, flavors and foods which make up the West Indian cuisine which we know today.

The popularity of seafood in the B.V.I. is understandable. There is a fishing zone know as the "North Drop" located off the coast of the island of Anegada, just north of Virgin Gorda. The combination of currents and very deep water draws a wide variety of fish to this area. Tuna, marlin, and Mahi-Mahi are a few of the many "blue water" fish which make it to the grills of local families and restaurants. Other popular selections in the B.V.I. include lobster and conch. When West Indian dishes are combined with the amazing variety of fresh tropical fruits it all adds up to a wonderful dining experience.

Rum has been produced in the B.V.I. since the 1700s. If you are not a rum drinker and you decide to try a fresh fruit rum punch take one thing into consideration. The drinks are delicious, however, the rum is very smooth and the fruit will disguise the strength of the alcohol. To put it nicely, if you wish to remember you great day in Virgin Gorda, when it comes to rum punch, "punch" is the operative word.

SHOPPING

The Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbor Shops have a few stores catering to visitors.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The U.S. dollar is the official currency in the Virgin Gorda and throughout the BVI.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

B.V.I. stamps and a postbox are available at the marina. There is a Post Office located at island's Administration building, a short walk from the marina.

Dial the following access numbers to use a personal calling card:

AT&T: 1.800.872.2881

MCI: 1.800.888.8000

