CHARTERING IN THE USVI

Charlotte Amalie Harbor

There's a destination for bareboat and fully-crewed charters in the Caribbean with direct flights from over 15 cities. When you land in paradise, you're at most a 30-minute taxi ride from your boat. This is a place with pristine bays unspoilt by development, abundant snorkeling sites, and beautiful hikes. Where you can visit both a floating taco bar and a floating pizza boat. Where you explore historic sites ranging from 18th-century sugar mills to WWII gun emplacements. That's just the beginning. This place is the U.S. Virgin Islands - America's Caribbean Paradise. While the neighboring British Virgin Islands have long been synonymous with chartering, exploring the USVI should be high on the list for your next sailing vacation.

Dinghy's Beach Bar & Grill on Honeymoon Beach

Route A: ST. THOMAS (SOUTHSIDE) AND ST. JOHN

Honeymoon Beach on Water Island

Day 1 - Honeymoon Beach, Water Island

If you're looking to head straight for beach-bar vibes, Dinghy's Beach Bar on Water Island (the 4th of the inhabited U.S. Virgin Islands) will fit the bill. A quick 3NM or less from three marinas in Charlotte Amalie (Crown Bay Marina, Frenchtown Marina, and Yacht Haven Grande), you'll have toes in the sand and a drink in hand in no time. A week of paradise awaits! The shallow, clear waters are home to a number of sea turtles, so be sure to hop in with your snorkel gear while there! Beachside options abound - from friendly beach games to just soaking in the scenery. You can also rent a golf cart to explore Water Island's other hangouts, such as Heidi's Honeymoon Grill, and explore World War II gun emplacements at Fort Segarra.

Day 2 - Honeymoon Beach, Water Island to Christmas Cove (via Buck Island) 7NM

Christmas Cove lies 7NM to the east, offering a worthy challenge to your upwind sailing ability along the southern shore of St. Thomas. Buck Island (St. Thomas) lies almost exactly halfway to Christmas Cove, offering a great lunch stop for a swim and fantastic snorkeling - including the wreck of the Cartanza Senora. The island is a protected bird sanctuary, so while you can't go ashore, you'll spot all types of seabirds.

If you decide to head straight to Christmas Cove from Water Island, reward yourself upon arrival with pizza and cocktails at Pizza Pi - the USVI's famous floating pizza boat. When recovered (if the afternoon called for a post-pizza siesta), grab your snorkel gear and swim over to Fish Cay (just behind Pizza Pi). You'll be delighted by the varied topography, abundant sealife, and calm protected waters. Make sure to take your time when swimming around Fish Cay to enjoy the aquatic scenery.

Note: If you started your charter from Compass Point Marina (Benner Bay) or American Yacht Harbor (Red Hook), Christmas Cove or Caneel Bay both make for excellent first night stops.

Pizza Pi in Christmas Cove

Cruz Bay on St. John

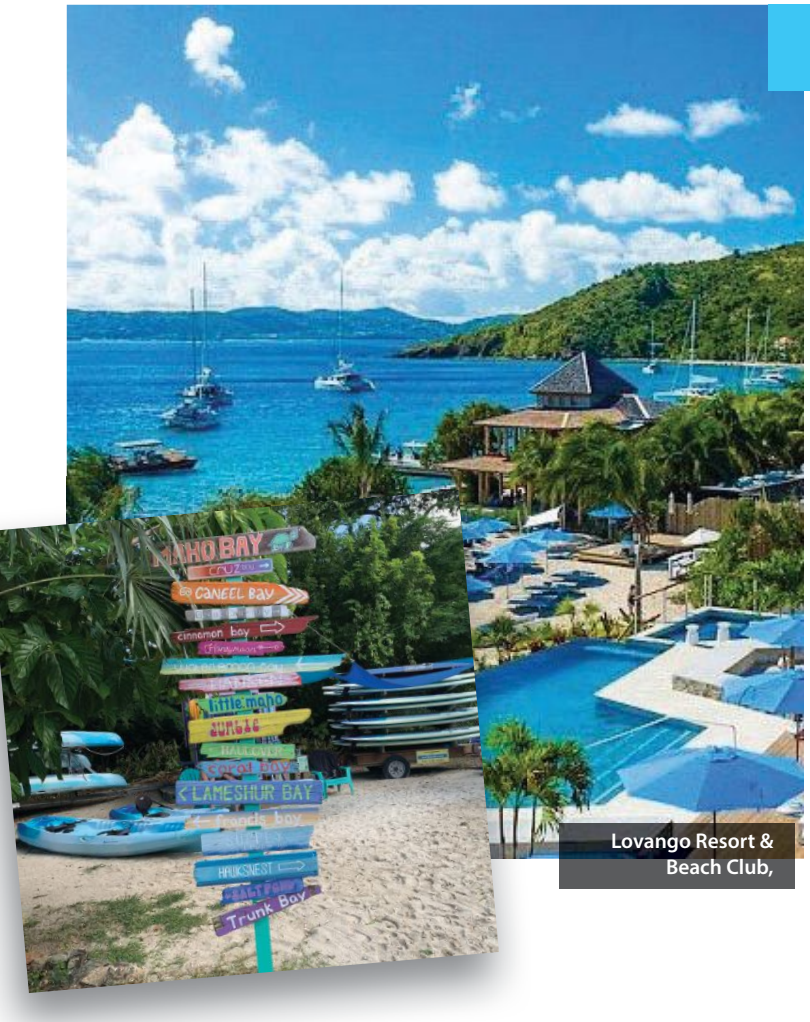
Day 3 - Christmas Cove to Caneel Bay, St. John (6NM)

If you have divers on board, Christmas Cove is a great spot to organize a Rendez-Vous Dive with any of the USVI's wonderful dive operators as you are a short distance away from three great sites, Cow and Calf, Ledges of Little St. James, and Stragglers.

From Christmas Cove, head northeast toward and through Current Cut to enter Pillsbury Sound (the body of water between St. Thomas and St. John). In prevailing conditions, you'll likely leave Two Brothers to starboard before tacking over just before you reach either Mingo Cay or Lovango Cay with a destination to Caneel Bay, St. John. Grab a mooring ball ($26 per night and maintained by the National Park Service) and take in the views. Be sure to watch for sea turtles popping up! If you're ready for some beach time, head to either of the three stunning beaches in front of you: Caneel, Honeymoon, or Scott Beach.

A short dinghy ride around Lind Point brings you to Cruz Bay - a lively, walkable small town brimming with options for shopping, dining, and entertainment. Just pack your flip-flops and explore town to find your vibe. If you're heading in for dinner, do not miss sunset at the Windmill Bar! Though it's a short taxi ride away, the views for sunset are absolutely stunning.

Side Note/Did you Know?
Nearly 57% of St. John is under the protection of the Virgin Islands National Park. Laurance Rockefeller arrived in St. John while cruising the Caribbean. Wanting to preserve the island for future generations to enjoy, Mr. Rockefeller and the Jackson Hole Preserve purchased approximately 5,000 acres that were then turned over to the federal government for the creation of the 29th national park.



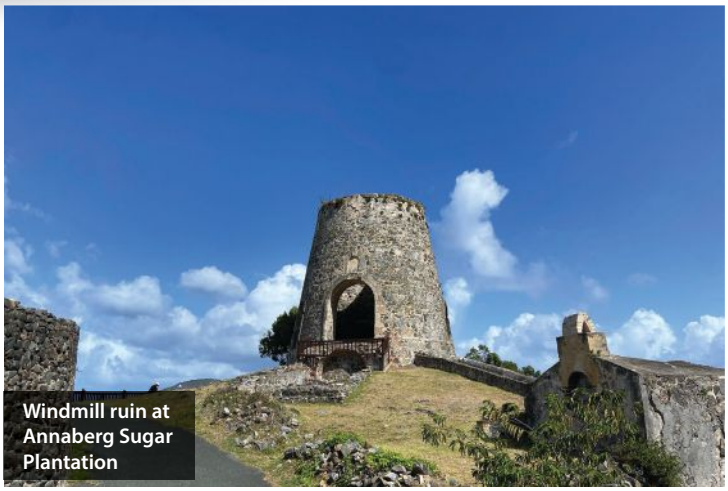
Lovango Resort & Beach Club,

Day 4 - Caneel Bay, St. John to Maho Bay, St. John

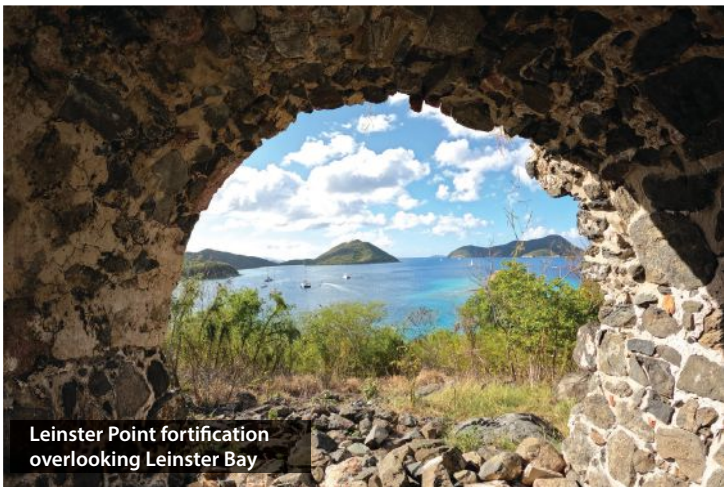
After an easy morning, unfurl the jib for a quick reach over to Lovango Cay, where you can hop in for a quick snorkel before lunch overlooking Pillsbury Sound at Lovango Resort and Beach Club. After lunch, head east along the North Shore of St. John, home to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world.

Side Note/Did you Know? Oppenheimer Beach, found in Hawksnest Bay, is famously named after J. Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb." In the late 1950s, Oppenheimer and his wife, Kitty, moved to St. John and purchased a parcel where they built a small home. The site, now managed by the Virgin Islands government, includes a community center that can be rented for events.

Maho Bay provides the most weather protection (the North Shore can be affected by north swells in the winter), along with one of the best spots to snorkel with sea turtles. The point between Maho Bay and Francis Bay also provides a nice spot to search for juvenile fish and smaller aquatic inhabitants amongst the rocks and coral heads. After your swim, walk down the beach to Maho Crossroads for a sundowner. You deserve it.



Windmill ruin at Annaberg Sugar Plantation



Leinster Point fortification overlooking Leinster Bay

Day 5 - Maho Bay, St. John to Leinster Bay, St. John

From Maho, it's a short 2.5NM jaunt over to Leinster Bay, which is home to both the Annaberg Plantation ruins as well as a great snorkel around Waterlemon Cay. Land your dinghy at the head of the bay and follow the beach/path around, along a flat 0.5-mile path to reach the ruins. In season, a ranger is present for tours, and if you're lucky, the gardener will be there as well, handing out samples of sugar cane and local fruit!

If you're not planning to include Magens Bay (St. Thomas) on your itinerary, you can choose to lounge the day away here. There are no shoreside dining options, so make sure you are adequately provisioned.

Historic sugar mill ruins overlooking Little Lameshur Bay

Day 6 - Leinster Bay, St. John to Lameshur Bay or Salt Pond Bay, St. John (via Coral Harbor)

Continuing eastward is a 9NM leg taking you around the east end of St. John and into Coral Bay. The first 4NM involves tacking up the Sir Francis Drake Channel between Tortola and St. John before bearing away as you round East End Point. From here, you'll be downwind sailing the rest of your trip.

Coral Harbor is home to two storied lunch stops that should not be missed - LimeOut and Skinny Legs. LimeOut is the world-famous floating taco bar serving up delicious tacos and delectable beverages. Grab a lilly pad and lime the day away! Skinny Legs (reached by the Coral Harbor dinghy dock) is an equally renowned haven for sailors serving fantastic burgers and offering a wonderful boutique for shopping. You can't go wrong with either - or visit both!

After lunch, head out of Coral Harbor, minding (and leaving well to starboard) Johnson Reef off of Lagoon Point. You'll generally be on a beam reach heading nearly due south, making for Ram Head - St. John's southernmost point. Plot your course to stay at least 0.5 NM off of Ram Head to avoid what can be a confused sea state nearer to shore. As you round Ram Head, gybe over and make for either Salt Pond or the Lameshurs (Great Lameshur or Little Lameshur), depending on which has moorings available (remember - no anchoring allowed in the National Park). Rest assured, though, all three bays are absolute stunners with excellent snorkelling. There's no wrong choice here.

Lime Out, Coral Bay, St. John

Day 7 - Lameshur Bay or Salt Pond Bay, St. John to Brewers Bay, St. Thomas

Spending the morning soaking in the natural beauty found on St. John's South Side before embarking on a 15NM downwind run back to St. Thomas for your last night.

You'll be presented with three easy options for your last night's anchorage close to Charlotte Amalie - Brewers or Lindbergh Bay (St. Thomas) or Druif Bay (Water Island). Brewers Bay offers all-weather protection (from prevailing conditions), a quiet beach, and a swim area usually filled with turtles.

Lindbergh Bay is home to LimeOut's newest location. If you didn't satisfy your cravings at their Coral Harbor, St. John location, now is your chance! Lindbergh can be affected by wrap-around swells if the trades have a southerly to them. If that's the case, take it as a lunch stop and then head over to either Brewers Bay (St. Thomas) or Druif Bay (Water Island) for better protection.

Route B: ST. THOMAS (SOUTH AND NORTH) AND ST. JOHN - THE CLASSIC "FIGURE 8"

Day 5 - Maho Bay, St. John to Lameshur Bay or Salt Pond Bay, St. John (via Coral Harbor)

From Maho after rounding Mary Point, enjoy a 6NM tacking adventure through the famed Sir Francis Drake Passage between St. John and Tortola. Bear away after East End Point, as noted before, and set your course for Coral Harbor to enjoy LimeOut or Skinny Legs. Time will likely be too tight for a stop in Leinster Bay, but make sure to catch it on the return trip!

Magens Bay, St. Thomas

Day 6 - Lameshur Bay or Salt Pond Bay, St. John to Magens Bay, St. Thomas

After a morning snorkel, gear up for a fantastic 16NM downwind sail taking you around the bottom of St. John and up the north shore of St. Thomas to the world-famous Magens Bay. The entrance is truly spectacular with steep hills to both sides and a 0.5NM long beach at the head of the bay. Pay attention to forecast north swells in the winter season. While you can still find reasonable protection at the eastern end in about 35' of water, the usual return route along the North Shore and St. Thomas' West End might be an uncomfortable ride for some crew.

On shore, you'll find Fairchild's Beach Bar and Grill (open until 5 PM) as well as a seemingly endless stretch of beach to walk and unwind. While there isn't much snorkeling to be had, it is a wonderful stop.

Magens Bay, St. Thomas

Day 7 - Magens Bay, St. Thomas to Brewers Bay, Lindbergh Bay (St. Thomas) or Druif Bay (Water Island)

Head northwest out of Magens and bear off to the west for a 7NM downwind leg, taking you between Inner Brass and St. Thomas. Continue along the north shore until you round Salt Cay and work back upwind 5NM to reach your final night's stop. As mentioned before, Brewers Bay, Lindbergh Bay, and Druif Bay.

Buck Island St. Croix

St. Croix

Ready for some serious sailing? The roughly 35 nautical mile passage to St. Croix offers a real blue-water experience. You'll definitely want to have fishing gear for this trip as you pass over the Puerto Rico Trench with great opportunities for Tuna, Mahi-Mahi, and Wahoo. Allocate a minimum of 3 days of your itinerary to properly visit this wonderful island.

Spend your first four days at a combination of the previously discussed itinerary options. Your departure point should be from as far east as possible to ensure a favorable wind angle to Christiansted - at least Christmas Cove, but even better from Lameshur or even Coral Bay.

Christiansted, St. Croix

Day 5 - St. Thomas/St. John to Buck Island/Christiansted, St. Croix

An early morning start is well worth it for both fishing opportunities and to ensure a lunch time arrival at Buck Island (St. Croix).

Buck Island (also part of the National Park) offers a stunning scene - a jaw-dropping beach, varied hues of Caribbean blue, and fringing reefs. Snorkeling is excellent, along with exploring the island itself (make it up to the observation post and bring water!). As always, be sure to anchor in sand and within the designated anchorage area. Unfortunately, overnight stays are not permitted. But, fortunately, Christiansted Harbor is a short 4NM downwind sail away.

The Christiansted Boardwalk offers an array of dining and entertainment options. Simply tie up your dinghy and stroll about the beautiful preserved Danish architecture. Also in the harbor lies Protestant Cay, which features a beautiful beach in its own right, along with a happening little beach bar (The Beach Bar STX).

Remember, St. Croix is the home to both Cruzan Rum and Captain Morgan; it is important to pay respect to both.

Take an easy morning listening to the waves break across the outer edge of Long Reef before heading into town to explore Fort Christiansvaern - one of the best-preserved colonial forts in the Caribbean.

St. Croix is a diver's paradise! If you have divers on board, this is a definite do-not-miss opportunity!

Day 6 - Christiansted, St. Croix to Frederiksted, St. Croix

After lunch, head out of Christiansted harbor and point the bow west for a lovely 15NM downwind run to Frederiksted. Get that fishing gear out again and follow the depth contours for another chance at fresh fish!

Fun Fact/Note: If you're changing crew, St. Croix offers a number of direct flights back to the mainland from Henry E. Rohlsen (STX) as well as the seaplane from the Christiansted Boardwalk to downtown Charlotte Amalie (St. Thomas).

Frederiksted presents a much smaller and calmer pace. Anchorage can be found on either side of the Frederiksted Pier in sand, though generally most choose the north side for easier access to town. Don't miss snorkeling or diving at the Pier!! You'll find exceptional macro photography opportunities, coral-covered pillars, and vibrant marine life, including seahorses, frogfish, and turtles. Note/Tip: Check the cruise ship schedules to ensure one will not be in port.

For those seeking a beach bar atmosphere, don't miss Rhythms at Rainbow Beach. If you're seeking a poolside respite, The Fred has you covered. Dining and provisioning options abound in town as well.

Frederiksted Pier

Day 7 - Frederiksted, St. Croix to Brewers Bay, Lindberg Bay (St. Thomas) or Druiff Bay (Water Island)

The return to St. Thomas from Frederiksted promises a fast, exhilarating 35NM beam reach, again with fantastic fishing opportunities. From the anchorage in Frederiksted, the 1,000ft depth contour is within 1NM - be sure to get your lines in quick to troll the drop!

As you approach the South Drop (7NM south of Water Island), make sure to have a keen eye on your lines for a chance at a fish dinner! You'll be presented with three easy options for your last night's anchorage - Brewers or Lindbergh Bay (St. Thomas) or Druif Bay (Water Island). Brewers Bay offers all-weather protection (from prevailing conditions), a quiet beach, and a swim area usually filled with turtles.

Lindbergh Bay is home to LimeOut's newest location. If you didn't satisfy your floating taco and cocktail bar cravings at their Coral Harbor, St. John location, now is your chance! Lindbergh Bay can be affected by wrap-around swells if the trades have a southerly to them. If that's the case, take it as a lunch stop and then head over to either Brewers Bay (St. Thomas) or Druif Bay (Water Island) for better protection.

Day 8 - The Return

The last day is always the hardest when faced with trading toes in the sand for a keyboard on land. But there's a remedy! Start planning your return to America's Caribbean Paradise, which by now you surely can appreciate has a vibe like no other. For your return trip, plan on including St. Croix if you missed it this time. There are also the neighboring Spanish Virgin Islands - Culebra and Vieques - that make for equally compelling charter itineraries, all easily accessible from operators based in the USVI.

USVI Carnival Dates:
St. Croix (Christmas/New Years)
St. Thomas (Late April/Early May)
St. John (Late June – Early July)

USVI Bareboat Charter Operators:
Waypoints Yacht Charters
Virgin Islands Yacht Charters
Island Yacht Charters

USVI Crewed Yacht Charter Operators:
Charter Caribe
Paradise Yacht Management
Virgin Islands Yacht Charters

Notes on Fishing and Catch Requirements:
Unlike neighboring jurisdictions, you can legally catch Caribbean Spiny Lobster and Conch in the USVI - including within the Virgin Islands National Park.

Lobster:
Carapace must be greater than 3.5 inches in length. Must be captured by hand or snare. Must land whole. No harvest of females with eggs. No spear fishing, hooks, or gigs. National Park Waters – 2 per fisher per day.

Conch:
Minimum size 9" shell length from the spire to the distal end, or 3/8" lip thickness. Must land whole in shell. Territorial Waters – 6 per day per fisher, not to exceed 24 per boat per day. Federal Waters – 3 per day per fisher, not to exceed 12 per boat. No use of hookah gear. National Park Waters – 2 per fisher per day. Closed season July 1 – Sept 30.

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