

U S Virgin Islands

Overview:

The United States Virgin Islands are an unincorporated territory of the United States of America comprised of four main islands, Saint Thomas, Saint John, Saint Croix and Water Island (a former military testing site for chemical warfare), and over 60 odd cays and adjacent islands. Tourism is the primary economic activity in the United States Virgin Islands accounting for over 80% of the territory's GDP and employment. The other main economic activity in the U.S. Virgin Islands is the exporting of refined petroleum products from Hess Oil Refinery, one of the world's largest oil refineries, located on the island of Saint Croix. The U.S. Virgin Islands has the protection of the United States Constitution, but they do govern themselves under their own constitution, the Revised Organic Act of 1954. Moreover, the U.S. Virgin Islands maintain policy relations with the United States under the jurisdiction of the Office of Insular Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Territory:

The territory consists of four main islands: Saint Thomas, Saint John, Saint Croix, and Water Island, as well as several dozen smaller islands. Total: 342 km² ; Land: 349 km² ; Water: 359 km² ; Coastline: 188 km. Most of the islands, including Saint Thomas, are volcanic in origin and hilly. The highest point is Crown Mountain, Saint Thomas (474 m) and the lowest point is the Caribbean Sea at 0 m. Saint Croix, the largest of the U.S. Virgin Islands, lies to the south and has a flatter terrain.

Location:

The U.S. Virgin Islands are located between Caribbean sea and North Atlantic Ocean, east of Puerto Rico.

Latitude and Longitude:

18 20 N Latitude and 64 50 W Longitude. The U.S. Virgin Islands do not observe daylight saving time.

Time Zone:

GMT -4

Total Land Area:

342

EEZ:

200

Climate:

Subtropical with low humidity. There is minimal seasonal temperature variation. Rainy season is from October to November. Annual rainfall is 109 cm (43 inches). Average temperatures range from 25 C to 27 C (77 F to 82 F). The Virgin Islands lie on the boundary of the North American plate and the Caribbean Plate. Natural hazards include earthquakes, tropical cyclones, and tsunamis.

Natural Resources:

Sun, sand, sea, surf.

ECONOMY:

Total GDP:	
2002	2,500,000,000.00 USD

Per Capita GDP:	
2000	13,139.00 USD

% of GDP per Sector:			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
2003	80%	19%	1%

% of Population Employed by Sector			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
2003	80%	19%	1%

External Aid/Remittances:

Growth:

2% (2002). International business and financial services are a small but growing component of the economy.

Labour Force:	
2003	48,900
2000	46,565
1990	47,443

Unemployment	
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Year:	Unemployment Rate (% of pop.)
2003	9.3%

Industry:

tourism, petroleum refining, watch assembly, rum distilling, construction, pharmaceuticals, textiles, electronics. Hovensa, one of the world's largest petroleum refineries, is located on Saint Croix.

Niche Industry:

horseback riding; sailing between the islands; water sports such as diving, snorkelling, sport fishing for blue and white marlin, saltfish and wahoo, deep-sea fishing; surfing; hiking.

Tourism:

Tourism is the primary economic activity. The islands normally host 2 million visitors a year, many of whom visit on cruise ships.



Imports and Exports:	
Tot. Value of Imports	2,147,483,647.00 USD (2001)
From Eu:	
Import Partners (EU:)	
Partners Outside EU:	US, Puerto Rico
Import Partners:	US, Puerto Rico
Tot. Value of Exports	2147483647 USD (0)
To Eu:	
Export Partners:	US, Puerto Rico
Partners Outside EU::	US, Puerto Rico
Export Partners:	
Main Imports:	crude oil, foodstuffs, consumer goods, building materials
Main Exports:	refined petroleum products

TRANSPORTATION/ACCESS

External:

Number of Airports: 2

International air jet services operate on St. Thomas and St. Croix. that accommodate daily non-stop passenger and cargo flights from major U.S. cities. Additional air passenger and cargo service provided via Puerto Rico. The Island has 1 airport 3,047 m and 1 airport between 1,524 to 2,437 m.

Number of Main Ports:

Sea-going passenger and cargo vessels connect the ports of Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas, Frederiksted, and Limetree Bay on St. Croix to Ports abroad.

Internal:

Air

Road:

Roadways on the islands are in relatively good condition. On the main islands in the archipelago, taxis and passenger bus services are available. As well, rental agencies are available to rent vehicles (ie cars, bikes, scooters, etc).

Sea:

Inter-island transport by small boat is available.

Other Forms of Transportation:

Economic Zones:

Industrial Development Commission (IDC): IDC Legislation has been enacted to boost economic development and local employment by enticing new industries and businesses to invest in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This act allows a business enterprise to enhance profits and to retain almost all profits tax-free in exchange for guaranteed local employment and the spawning of economic activity beneficial to the territory. Specific qualifications must be met for a company or business to receive IDC benefits, such as investment of at least \$50 000 exclusive of inventory in an eligible business, and employment of at least 10 U.S. Virgin Island residents on a full-time basis. Eligible businesses for IDC benefits include tourism-related facilities such as hotels, guest-houses, transportation services, select recreational facilities; goods-producing businesses including agriculture, mariculture, manufacturing and utilities; and businesses that provide services to customers outside the U.S. Virgin Islands. Incentives for businesses to establish in the U.S. Virgin Islands and apply for IDC benefits include a 90% reduction in local income tax payments, a reduction of the customs duty tax rate from the standard 6% to a 1% for the value of raw materials or component parts imported from outside the United States, and possible exemption from all taxes imposed on businesses.

Energy Policy:

		Type			Sector					
	Total				Total Energy			Public		Public

Year	Energy Production (Mwh)	Thermic (Mwh)	Geothermic (Mwh)	Other (Mwh)	Consumption (Mwh)	Domestic (Mwh)	Commercial (Mwh)	Service (Mwh)	Industry (Mwh)	Lighting (Mwh)
2005	996,100,000	0	0	0	926,400,000	0	0	0	0	0



Official Currency:
United States Dollar (USD)

Banking and Insurance:
Number of Banks and Credit Unions: 6
Number of Agricultural Credit Unions:
Number of Insurance Companies:

Branches of six major financial institutions are represented in the U.S. Virgin Islands, including Chase Manhattan, Citibank, The Bank of Nova Scotia, Banco Popular de Puerto Rico.

Financial Services:
The Department of Banking and Insurance is administered by the Lieutenant-Governor's office. This Division of Banking and Insurance regulates the activities of insurance companies and insurance related businesses pursuant to the Virgin Islands code, as well as banks, small loan companies, and pawn brokers.

Communications/E-Commerce:
Excellent; extensive government and private sector information available online in English and Spanish. Long distance and fax communications are part of the United States domestic network. United States Virgin Islands is part of the United States postal service.

Public Ownership:

Land Use:
arable land 11.76 %; permanent crops 2.94 %; other 85.29%; (2001). The National Park Service owns more than half of Saint John, nearly all of Hassel Island, and many acres of coral reef.

Agriculture/Forestry:
Fruit, vegetables, sorghum, senepol cattle.

Marine Activity:

Fishing:
territorial sea: 12 nautical miles. Exclusive economic zones: 200 nautical miles.

Marine Life:
Predatory fish such as grouper, snapper, shark and barracuda, and algae-eating fish such as parrot fish, doctor fish and surgeon fish rely on the reefs and sea grass beds for food and shelter and as a breeding ground. An estimated 400 species of fish live in and around the East End.

Critical Issues:
1. Bovine Landfill: for the last four years, Senate has been looking to re-zone land at the Bovine landfill (Saint Thomas) from residential land to public land so that a tire shredder can be implemented and used to dispose of old tires properly. Currently, the landfill is out of space because the tires that have been disposed of there are full-size. Recently, the Senate voted unanimously to re-zone the land to that a shredder may be used to create more space. To date, there are approximately one million tires that need to be shredded. Although the vote was passed to re-zone the land, residents who live near the Bovine landfill have expressed concerns that this would create more of a breeding ground for mosquitoes carrying dengue fever. Moreover, in December 2003, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted their own independent investigation regarding the current disposal methods, and they (EPA) considered the current situation to be unhealthy, adding that a tire shredder would certainly be an improvement, but would have its own health implications to deal with. 2. Police Using Deadly Force: violence in the U.S. Virgin Islands is increasing, particularly because police officers are using deadly force (ie: shooting and beating suspects and criminals) when it is not absolutely necessary. The problem of police brutality has been ongoing and recorded for at least the last twenty years. There is also considerable controversy about whether or not Island law enforcement officials are aware of the Supreme Court ruling in the case of Tennessee vs. Garner, where the Supreme Court ruled that a police officer is not to use or discharge his/her weapon or use excessive force unless his/her life is in danger; that is, he must use his weapon in self-defence or to protect the life of someone else. It seems unclear if whether or not this law is known among the law enforcement officials (particularly lawyers) namely because the number of shootings and beatings that seem unnecessary and that have been recorded is phenomenal and is increasing. If the Supreme Court law (Tennessee vs. Garner) is known, it certainly is not followed nor enforced in the U.S. Virgin Islands. 3. Saint Croix seeking separation: in November 2004, more than 5,500 residents on the island of Saint Croix signed a petition requesting U.S. Congress to make the island its own U.S. territory instead of being part of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The reason they are looking to separate is because Cruzans (residents of St. Croix) believe that they are not receiving adequate funding since they are the largest of the three islands. As well, they are not proportionately represented in their Senate, having only 7 of the 15 seats.

JURISDICTIONAL RESOURCES

Capital:
Capital: Charlotte Amalie. The U.S. Virgin Islands is administratively divided into 2 districts and subdivided into 20 sub-districts. The districts include: St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John.

Political System:
Presidential system: Republic. The U.S. Virgin Islands are an unincorporated territory of the United States of America. Although the U.S. Virgin Islands have and follow their own constitution, they do also have the protection of the United States Constitution. Local government organization is derived from U.S. Congress under the Revised Organic Act of 1954. The Governor and Lieutenant-Governor are primarily responsible for governing the territory of the Virgin Islands, but some decision making power still rests with Congress and other federal agencies such as the Office of Insular Affairs, Department of the Interior, on the mainland of the United States. Internal Government: The U.S. Virgin Islands currently has a unicameral senate with 15 seats. Seven senators are elected from Saint Croix and Saint Thomas, and one senator with connections to Saint John is elected at-large. Members are elected by popular vote, and serve two-year terms. The Executive Branch of Government consists of the Chief of State, who is the President of the United States; the Head of Government is the Governor of the Virgin Islands and the Lieutenant-Governor, both of which are elected on the same ticket by popular vote and serve four-year terms. Residents of the Virgin Islands do not vote for the United States President, and the Virgin Islands are not represented in the United States Senate. The Virgin Islands has their own Senate. The Virgin Islands also elects one non-voting member to the United States House of Representatives to hold a two-year term. The Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands has general supervision and control of all the departments, bureaus, agencies, and instrumentalities of the Executive Branch of Government. The Governor can appoint commissioners, hire and fire

unclassified workers, issue executive orders, propose legislation, call legislature into special session, approve or veto legislation, draft a budget, decide what gets funded, grant pardons and reprieves, and maintain law and order. The Governor can call in the National Guard or the U.S. Military if he deems it necessary to prevent or suppress violence. The Governor cannot undo a veto override; that is, if Senate votes to override a gubernatorial veto, the bill becomes law and can only be undone through new legislation to rescind the law. As well, the Governor cannot spend Virgin Island money on his own – all government expenditures require the approval of Senate. Finally, the Governor cannot serve indefinitely. He/She is allowed to serve two consecutive four-year terms, and after being out of office for one full term, can be re-elected to office. The Lieutenant-Governor has very different responsibilities than the Governor, but does assume the role of Governor when and if the Governor is out of the Territory, ill, or dead. The Lieutenant-Governor is also the Territory's insurance commissioner, chairman of the Virgin Islands' Banking Board, and Executive of an office that has many different tasks, including assessing property taxes, and issuing and documenting trademarks and names for local companies. The Senate also has very specific responsibilities and works very closely with the Governor to govern the Virgin Islands. The Senate can pass, amend, or repeal laws applicable to the Virgin Islands as per the Revised Organic Act of 1954; however, the U.S. Congress reserves the power to annul any act of the legislation if necessary in order to protect or improve the rights and freedoms of the residents. The Senate cannot pass any legislation that violates any other law or impairs the rights of the people. The Revised Organic Act of 1954 contains a Bill of Rights that is very similar and often repeats many of the provisions of the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, the Senate cannot pass laws that would impair rights such as due process, freedom of speech, equal protection under the law, practice of religion, etc. Judicial Branch: The judicial power of the Territory of the Virgin Islands rests in the court of general jurisdiction, "District Court of the Virgin Islands," as set out in the constitution, Revised Organic Act of 1954. There is also a court of local jurisdiction, "Territorial Court of the Virgin Islands." In the Territorial court, Judges are appointed for ten-year terms. The Municipal court of the Virgin Islands is the consolidation of municipal courts on the three main islands into a single court system.

Political Parties:

The main political parties in the U.S. Virgin Islands are the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, the Independent Citizens Movement (ICM), and the Republican Party of the Virgin Islands. Additional candidates run as independents.

Important Legislation:

Principal Taxes:

Individuals: Income tax rates are the same as those in the United States. Because the U.S. Virgin Islands use the Federal Internal Revenue Code, the Virgin Islands use the same regulations for income tax, filing, and forms. Local business tax rates include gross receipts 4%; excise tax 3%; customs duty 6%; property 1.25% of 60% of assessed value; hotel room 8%. Businesses/Corporations: Several exemptions exist for small businesses such as hotels, manufacturing plants, export and distribution services, exempt international financial corporations including banking, insurance and foreign sales corporations. A tax incentive program is conducted by the government of the Virgin Islands to entice businesses and to encourage new industries to locate and establish there. Currently, special tax incentives have enticed over 2,500 foreign sales corporations to establish themselves in the Virgin Islands. This influx in economic activity has helped spur growth in financial service industries taking advantage of the U.S. Virgin Islands good infrastructure, modern communications, excellent transportation links, U.S. currency and postage, and generous tax benefits. General: The U.S. Virgin Islands is the only jurisdiction that can offer a tax-free entity under the United States flag. Because it is a United States territory and not a state, it has a familiar legal system and infrastructure, but is treated as foreign for numerous reasons, usually related to tax incentives or exemptions. Tax revenue is retained in the U.S. Virgin Islands. As a result of using the United States Federal Internal Revenue Code, Virgin Islands residents general pay tax on worldwide income to the Virgin Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue. United States residents and corporations pay taxes in Virgin Islands income to the Virgin Islands Bureau of Internal Revenue and on United States income to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Associated Power:

United States

Citizenship:

U.S. Virgin Island residents are residents of the United States, which was granted to inhabitants of the islands in 1927. Even though they are U.S. citizens, Virgin Islanders cannot vote in U.S. Presidential elections.

Paradiplomacy:

Interpol (subbureau) – International Criminal Police Organization; IOC – International Olympic Committee.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Population (age): 0-14 years: (25,886); 15-64 years: (71,814); 65 years and older: (11,075) (2004).

2005			
Island	Area (km sq.)	Population	% of Total Population
U S Virgin Islands	1,910	108,448	%

Population:	
Year	Resident Population

Age of Population:	0-14	15-24	25-49	50-64	65 and up
2004	25886	0	0	0	11,075

Migration:

Net Migration: -8.94 migrants / 1,000 population (2004).

Crude Birth Rate:	
2004	14.49%

Life Expedctancy:

78.75 years (2004)

Crude Death Rate:	
2004	6.1%



Ethnicity:
black 78%; white 10%; other 12%; West Indian 81%. Of the West Indian population, 49% were born in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 32% were born elsewhere in the West Indies.

Class Division:
Economic stratification among social classes is a primary symptom of the American economic model's imposition on the Virgin Islands. This primarily corresponds to race. Though slavery was eradicated from the islands during the 19th century, blacks remain on the bottom of the social ladder, working as cabbies, waiters, and clerks, while the smaller yet infinitely more prosperous descendants of the caucasian mercantile community dominate both the more lucrative positions and sectors. Virtually all the jewelry outlets in the capital city of Charlotte Amalie, for example, are staffed by whites.

Languages:
English (official); Spanish; Creole.

Religion:
Baptist 42%; Roman Catholic 34%; Episcopalian 17%; Other 7%.

Literacy:
There are 50 small islands plus St. John, St. Croix, St. Thomas. Literacy rate among the islanders ranges between 90% to 95%.

Education System:
The education system in the U.S. Virgin Islands is remarkably similar to the education system in the United States. Subsidized by federal grants, the government of the Virgin Islands operates and maintains the public education system. Children are required to attend public, private, parochial, or denominational school until they are 16 years old. Currently, there are approximately 27,000 students enrolled in public or private schools. As well, the University of the Virgin Islands provides post-secondary education to approximately 4,200 full-time and part-time students.

Total Pre-schools:()	
Total Primary Schools	
First Level:	
Second Level:	
Third Level:	
Total Secondary Schools:	
Total Professional Schools	
Universities:	1

Number of Schools per Island:										
	Pre-school		Elementary			High-school		Prof.	University	
	Pub	Priv	1	2	3	Pub	Priv		Pub	Priv

Students Enrolled:					
Year:	Pre-School	Elementary	High-school	Prof.	University

Teachers							
Year	Pre-School	Elementary			High-School	Prof.	University
		1	2	3			

Modeled on U.S. patterns, the USVI's public education system operates in English. There are 18 schools in the St. Thomas - St. John's school district and 22 on St. Croix. The University of Virgin Islands has a campus on St. Croix and St. Thomas.

Medical Services:
Major hospitals and medical centres are located on Saint Thomas and Saint Croix. Saint Thomas has 6 general practitioners in 5 general clinics and specialists in all other fields are available. Saint Croix has 6 general practitioners in 5 general clinics available, also with specialists in all other fields available. Saint John has 1 general practitioner in 1 clinic, and also has 1 obstetric/gynecologist available.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

History:
During the 17th century, the archipelago Å– now known as the British and U.S. Virgin Islands Å– was divided into two territorial units: British and Danish. Denmark chartered the Danish West Indies and began colonizing Saint Thomas in 1671 and Saint John in 1684. Denmark later purchased Saint Croix from France in 1733. Between the 1600s and 1800s, sugarcane was the primary economic resource grown on the islands. This resource was primarily grown on slave-holding estates and produced by slave labour. In 1917, Denmark sold the three islands (Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croix) to the United States under the Treaty of 1917 for \$25 million. The United States purchased the Danish portion of the West Indies, which has been in economic decline since the abolition of slavery in 1848. The U.S. Virgin Islands were formerly under the jurisdiction of the navy. Jurisdiction was transferred to the Department of the Interior in 1931. When Christopher Columbus visited the islands, the inhabitants were primarily Caribe Indians.

Today's current island population consists of a mixture of African, Puerto Rican, American mainlanders, French, Danish, Scottish, Portuguese, Asian, and West Indians.

Referenda:

Recent Significant Events:

In recent history, substantial damage was caused by Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and Hurricane Marilyn in 1995. The islands were also struck by Hurricane Bertha in 1996, Hurricane Georges in 1998 and Hurricane Lenny in 1999, but damage was not as severe in those hurricanes.

Music, Dance, Handicraft and Patrimony:

Sources:

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