

Best Scuba Diving in the U.S. Virgin Islands

Experience some of the best diving the USVI has to offer at any of these

By TRAVIS MARSHALL Updated: SEPTEMBER 22, 2021

Scuba diving in the U.S. Virgin Islands couldn't be an easier getaway for U.S. travelers — there's no passport required from the mainland. Once there, the wide variety of Caribbean diving keeps good times going, including plunging walls, reefs.

What are you waiting for? Let's kick back, relax and blow some bubbles!

Scuba Diving in St. Thomas

WIT Shoal II

This 330-foot freighter and former tank landing ship was first sunk by a tropical storm in 1984, then towed six months later west of Saba Island. The ship sits upright at 90 feet, with the pilothouse starting at 30 feet. Cup corals and sponge open holds and companionways provide refuge for grouper and barracuda.

Recommended minimum skill level: Intermediate

French Cap

This small cay south of St. Thomas is too far for most dive boats to visit with any regularity, but when the weather is perfect, the spots to dive here are worth it. There are a few spots to dive here, but don't miss Pinnacle. A handful of rock spires shoot up from 40 feet. Jacks and barracuda chase swarms of reef fish around the summit while craggy fissures provide ample nooks for octopus.

Recommended minimum skill level: Intermediate

Tunnels of Thatch

The tunnels on the north side of Thatch Cay are only safe when flat calm surface conditions keep the surge down. You can explore a path of baitfish- and tarpon-packed canyons and caverns, then explore a sloping, boulder-strewn hillside at depths of 20 to 30 feet.

Recommended minimum skill level: Intermediate

Cow and Calf

These sister sites are easily accessible from either St. Thomas or St. John. Both feature undersea playgrounds complete with swim-throughs at a max depth of 45 feet. At Cow Rock, a tunnel packed with silversides ends with "The Champagne Cavern" where the surge pops divers out onto the surrounding staghorn coral reef. Look for gray reef sharks cruising the perimeter.

Recommended minimum skill level: Beginner

Scuba Diving in St. Croix

Salt River Canyon

St. Croix's north shore is one of the best-kept secrets in wall diving, and this site has two walls facing each other across the water. Hordes of reef fish swarm the tops of the walls, deep-water sea fans and black coral cling to the deeper sections. Hammerheads and blacktip reef sharks sometimes make appearances.

Recommended minimum skill level: Intermediate to Advanced

Butler Bay Wrecks

Carval Rock

Drop down on the sheltered south side of this rock formation, then kick hard against the stiff current flowing through "The Cathedral" submerged passage through the rock. Let the current take you 360 degrees around the rock, past dramatic formations and a canyon packed with baitfish and tarpon. The sheer wall on the east end drops to 80 feet, and the shallow coral gardens are good places to look for nurse sharks, reef squid and octopus.

Recommended minimum skill level: Intermediate

Congo Cay

This dive starts in a wide sand channel where large southern stingrays rest and forage for food. Follow your dive guide through the coral-draped wall. Dolphins sometimes cruise the sand channel surrounding the cay. Depths are between 35 and 60 feet, and formations and marine life between 35 and 60.

Recommended minimum skill level: Beginner to Intermediate

Eagle Shoals

This rarely visited site off the east end of St. John is best known for "The Cathedral," a large, open chamber accessed up to see streams of sunlight pouring in from the "skylight."

Recommended minimum skill level: Beginner

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Need to Know

Country: USA

Primary Languages: English, but locals also speak a Virgin Islands creole.

Currency: U.S. dollar.

Cultural Influences: Danish, American, African.

Signature Dishes: Callaloo, a spinach- or collard greens-based soup, and fungi, a type of cornmeal porridge.

Signature Marine Life: Southern stingrays make regular appearances in the sand channels between the reefs, and donkey tarpon show up to feed on the schools of baitfish.

Topside Sporting Pastime: Sailing. And during the first week in July, St. Croix's Emancipation Day donkey races draw big laughs.

Topside Trinkets: Caribbean hook bracelets, Cruzan rum.

Travel Savvy Tip: No passport is required to travel in "America's Caribbean," but bring one along if you want to take a day trip to a Virgin Island.

Weather: Low 60s to mid-70s in winter; mid-80s in summer.

Dive Conditions: Water temps range from the high 70s in winter to mid-80s in summer. Vis averages 60 to 100 feet.

More Information: To learn more about planning your U.S. Virgin Islands dive vacation, log on to the official USVI Department of Tourism website.