

Top 5 Dive Sites Of The US Virgin Islands

By **Charles Davis** - October 3, 2019



Flag of Virgin Islands, USA with waving fabric texture

The Caribbean has some of the best diving in the world, it is also an area that shows the influence of many cultures. A number of the islands are currently a part of different countries or are former colonies. The U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) is a territory of the United States and consist of the main islands of Saint Thomas, Saint Croix, and Saint John. There are also around fifty small islands, most uninhabited that are also included in the USVI. The area is known for clear blue waters and outstanding reefs.

The U.S. Virgin Islands is one of the leading tourism destinations in the Caribbean and has an excellent reputation. Saint Thomas is one of the leading cruise ship destinations in the world. It is an outstanding romantic and family destination. Mixed into the tourism mix, is an outstanding dive destination. There are thirty primary dive sites with over ninety more being listed by different dive centers.

Each of the three main islands has its own personality. Saint Thomas is the most tourist-focused. Charlotte Amalie, the capital of the USVI and the main city on Saint Thomas, has a lively nightlife scene. It also is well-known for the shops that line the streets, you will find quaint stalls selling local goods to elegant shops selling designer brands and one of a kind jewelry. It features many hotels and resorts as well as vacation condominiums. The islands coast line is the home of forty beaches.

Saint John is just a short ferry ride from Saint Thomas but can seem like it is on the other side of the world. Virgin Islands National Park is located on this island and takes up much of the island. The

United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Virgin Islands National Park as one of the first International Biosphere Reserve in 1976. Development around the park has been limited and the island is well suited for those who are looking to connect with nature. Hotels and resorts here tend to be on the simple side. Saint John is an enjoyable day trip from Saint Thomas for those who want both the laid back days and exciting nightlife.

Saint Croix is beyond the range of a day trip from Saint Thomas. While Saint Thomas has a high energy vibe and Saint John has the back to nature feel, Saint Croix has the small-town feel. In 1916, the United States bought the Danish West Indies from Denmark which became the USVI. While the Danish heritage has mostly disappeared from Saint Thomas and Saint John, it is still strong on Saint Croix. Many of the building in the historical section of Christiansted dates back to 18th-century Danish settlements.

Location

Top 5 Dive Sites Of The US Virgin Islands

Caribbean diving is always great and the USVI will not disappoint even the most seasoned diver. In some ways, the islands that create the northern and eastern boundaries of the Caribbean Sea function similar to a barrier reef. While storms can create rough conditions in the Caribbean, they are generally calm when compared against the Atlantic Ocean. We can see throughout the Leeward Islands this effect. Sea conditions in the Caribbean side of an island may be calm, while the Atlantic side has more waves and currents. We can definitely see this situation on the Atlantic side of the Virgin Islands. This gives divers different diving conditions to select from. The islands have fringing reefs and many shallow reefs away from the visible islands. This condition gives an amplitude of opportunities for a seaman to run aground, and the USVI has the wrecks to prove it.

The Virgin Islands also has some interesting geology. These islands are the tops of a submerged mountain range. The USVI is considered a part of the Lesser Antilles being south of the Puerto Rico Trench, the deepest point in the Atlantic. However, Saint Croix is really a part of the Greater Antilles, being separated from the other two islands by the Virgin Island Trench. Water rising from deep trenches are nutrient-rich and helps create conditions where reefs thrive. These reefs, in turn, provide the proper conditions for reef fish to flourish, Which attract large predators from the deep. The USVI has two trenches to feed the reefs, and the deep waters help restrict the movement of the reef fish.

Creating a top dive site list for any area is very subjective, much more so for the US Virgin Islands. Wreck divers can easily justify five wrecks as being the best dive sites in the islands. Drift divers and those who love reefs could do the same. Some of the best wall dives and muck dives in the Caribbean are also found here. So here is a take at five dive sites that stand out.

- **The Wall, St. Croix** – The Salt River Bay National Historic Park and Ecological Preserve have a number of attractions for scuba divers. The Wall is the most famous. This site has a number of different dive sites and is also known as the Salt River Canyon East & West Walls. In ancient times, when sea levels were much lower, A river created a canyon in its path to the oceans. During some of these times, the river had a number of waterfalls. Now called the Salt River Canyon, the walls of the canyon are around a quarter of a mile apart and as much as 500 feet (ca. 152 m) deep. The basin area, before the underwater walls, has shallow reefs that are excellent diving for novice divers. More advanced divers can dive along the wall at depths of their choice. The vertical drop-offs are covered in sponges and sea fans. Humpback whales and some sharks will spend a portion of the year in the canyon. The end of the canyon is a great place to see large pelagics, such as horse-eye jacks, that cruise just offshore and sometimes venture into the canyon as well. This site often ranks among the best wall dives in the world. An added natural attraction is a bioluminescent bay. Here the water glows at night.
- **Frederiksted Pier, St. Croix** – You will find many divers that will tell you, THIS is the best dive site in the Caribbean. It is easy to see their point of view. The Frederiksted Pier is a 1,526-foot long deep water pier. You can enter the water from the shore or from different points along the pier. Once away from the shore, the water ranges from 15 feet (4.57 m) to 40 feet (ca. 12 m) deep. Divers who frequent the dive site will tell each piling is its own adventure. There is no need to walk to the end of the pier for great diving. The site is best known for macro photography and muck diving. However, if that is not your cup of tea, do not worry, you will often find bait balls being targeted by larger fish. Plan two dives here, with the second being a twilight dive. This is a great night dive. Please note, that the pier is closed to diving when a cruise ship is docked.
- **Cartanزار Senior, St. Thomas** – The Cartanza Senora, also known as the Cartanser Senior, is considered the most popular wreck site in St Thomas. Its popularity is a combination of ease to reach, suitable for novice to advanced divers and the protected area it is located. The 190-foot-long ship sits in 20 feet (ca. 6 m) to 60 feet (ca. 18 m) of water in a sheltered cove in the Buck Island National Wildlife Refuge. The cove is referred to as Shipwreck Cove.
- **Eagle Shoals, St John's** – This site can have difficult surface conditions, but when it is calm it is an outstanding dive. The shoals are on St. John's east end between Leduck Island and Ram Head. The site's signature features are arches, tunnels, and caves. The site called "The Cathedral" is a multiple entrance cavern/cave system, covered with sponges and orange cup coral.

- **Cow and Calf Rock, St John** – These two dive sites are often mentioned as one and normally dived on the same two tank dive. They can be dived from both St John and St Thomas. The name comes from the two above the surface rocks that are the center point of the dive. From a distance, these two rocks can be mistaken for a whale and her calf. The calf is the smaller rock and underwater has many shelves and ledges for smaller marine life to hide. Cow (female whale) is the larger rock and has a number of swim-throughs. The most popular is champagne cork which, with the right condition will launch the diver up through the hole. The visibility is always good and the maximum depth is 40 feet (ca. 12 m).

My personal favorites include the WIT Concrete which sits in 100 feet (ca. 30 m) of water. This is a [sister ship to one of my other favorite dive sites](#) in the Philippines. My other favorite dive site in the USVI is not on any dive map. Some friends and I chartered a small crewed sailboat and the captain lead us to a secluded cove where we did some dives with no one else around.