

Virgin Islands

[Virgin Islands. (Accessed Aug. 11, 2022). British, Danish, Dutch, Spanish and U.S. governed. Wikipedia.]

The **Virgin Islands** (Spanish: *Islas Vírgenes*) are an archipelago in the Caribbean Sea. They are geologically and biogeographically the easternmost part of the Greater Antilles,^[1] the northern islands belonging to the Puerto Rico Trench and St. Croix being a displaced part of the same geologic structure. Politically, the British Virgin Islands have been governed as the western island group of the Leeward Islands, which are the northern part of the Lesser Antilles, and form the border between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The archipelago is separated from the true Lesser Antilles by the Anegada Passage and from the main island of Puerto Rico by the Virgin Passage.

The islands fall into three different political jurisdictions:

- British Virgin Islands, a British overseas territory,
- United States Virgin Islands, an unincorporated territory of the United States,
- Spanish Virgin Islands, the easternmost islands of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, itself an unincorporated territory of the United States.

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Virgin Islands



Spanish Virgin Islands (of Puerto Rico)

United States Virgin Islands

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Puerto Rico

Geography	
Location	Caribbean Sea, Atlantic Ocean
Coordinates	18.2°N 64.8°W﻿ / ﻿
Archipelago	Leeward Islands
United States	
Insular area	United States Virgin Islands
Insular area	Puerto Rico
United Kingdom	
Overseas territory	British Virgin Islands

Etymology

Christopher Columbus named the islands after Saint Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins (Spanish: *Santa Úrsula y las Once Mil Vírgenes*), shortened to the Virgins (*las Vírgenes*). The official name of the British territory is the Virgin Islands, and the official name of the U.S. territory is the Virgin Islands of the United States. In practice, the two island groups are almost universally referred to as the British Virgin Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

History

The Virgin Islands were originally inhabited by the Arawak and Carib, many of whom are thought to have perished during the colonial period due to enslavement, foreign disease, and war brought about by European colonists.^[2]

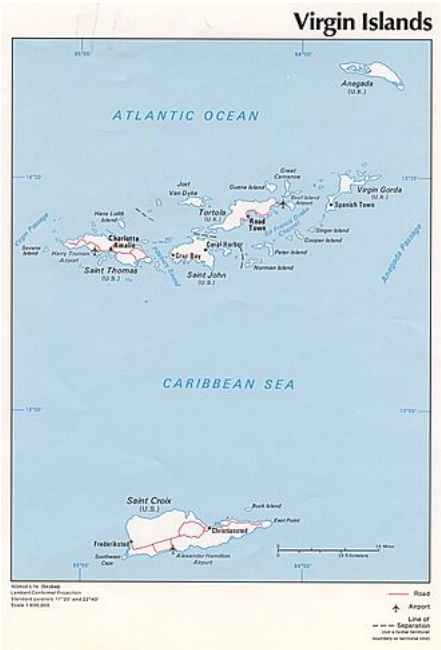
European colonists later settled here and established sugar plantations, at least one tobacco plantation, and purchased people for slavery taken from Africa. The descendants of the enslaved people remain the bulk of the population, sharing a common African-Caribbean heritage with the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean.

Like mainland Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands that belonged to Spain were ceded to the United States in 1898. The United States took possession of the islands after the signing of the armistice that put an end to military operations in the Spanish–American War.

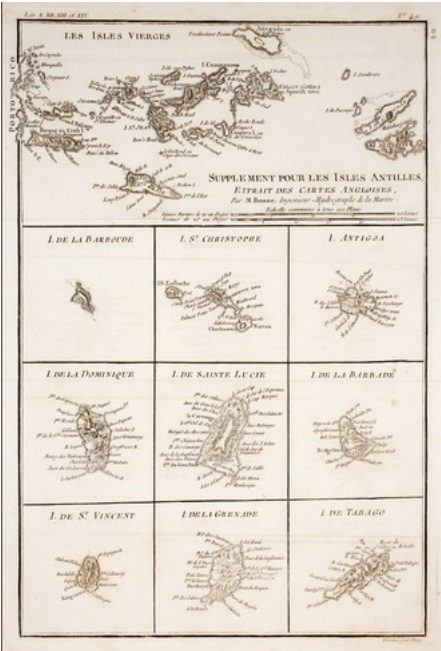
A 1916 treaty between the United States and Denmark (not ratified by the United States until 1917) resulted in Denmark selling the Danish Virgin Islands to the United States for \$25 million in gold.

Historical affiliations

The Virgin Islands have been under the sovereignty of several nations and groups throughout history. Below is a table which represents the affiliation of the various islands:



The locations of the US and UK Virgin Islands



Rigobert Bonne: Map of the Virgin Islands, 1780

present day U.S.V.I.			present day British V.I.				present day Spanish V.I. (P.R.)		
St. Thomas	St. John	St. Croix	Tortola	Virgin Gorda	Anegada	Jost Van Dyke	Culebra	Vieques	
New Spain (1493–1625)	New Spain (1493–1671)	New Spain (1493–1625)		New Spain (1493–1648)	New Spain (1493–1628)	New Spain (1493–1648)	New Spain (1493–1750)	New Spain (1493–1580)	New Spain (1493–1580)
Dutch Virgin Islands (1625–1651)		Dutch Virgin Islands (1625–1650)**						Dutch Virgin Islands (1628–1680)	
		British Leeward Islands (1625–1650)**							
		British Leeward Islands (1650)		Dutch Virgin Islands (1648–1672)	Dutch Virgin Islands (1648–1680)				
Danish West Indies (1651–1801)		Puerto Rico (SP) (1650)				Dutch Virgin Islands (1648–1680)	Dutch Virgin Islands (1648–1680)		
		Knights Hospitaller (1651–1664)							
	Danish West Indies (1671–1684)	French West Indies (1664–1733)		British Leeward Islands (1672-1816)	British Leeward Islands (1680-1816)			British Leeward Islands (1680-1816)	British Leeward Islands (1750–1816)
Brandenburg-Prussia (1685–1721)***		British Leeward Islands (1684–1718)				Scottish Darien Company (1698)	Danish West Indies (1698–1811)**		
Danish West Indies (1651–1801)	Danish West Indies (1718–1801)	Danish West Indies (1733–1801)							

<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1801–1802)	<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1801–1802)	<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1801–1802)						<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1698–1811)**
<u>Danish West Indies</u> (1802–1807)	<u>Danish West Indies</u> (1802–1807)	<u>Danish West Indies</u> (1802–1807)						<u>French West Indies</u> (1698–1811)**
<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1807–1815)	<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1807–1815)	<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1807–1815)						<u>Puerto Rico</u> (SP) (1698–1811)***
<u>Danish West Indies</u> (1815–1917)	<u>Danish West Indies</u> (1815–1917)	<u>Danish West Indies</u> (1815–1917)	<u>British Virgin Islands</u> (1816–1833)	<u>British Virgin Islands</u> (1816–1833)	<u>British Virgin Islands</u> (1816–1833)	<u>British Virgin Islands</u> (1816–1833)		<u>Puerto Rico</u> (SP) (1811–1898)
			<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1833–1958)	<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1833–1958)	<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1833–1958)	<u>British Leeward Islands</u> (1833–1958)		
<u>United States Virgin Islands</u> (1917–present)	<u>United States Virgin Islands</u> (1917–present)	<u>United States Virgin Islands</u> (1917–present)	<u>British Virgin Islands</u> (1958–present)	<u>British Virgin Islands</u> (1958–present)	<u>British Virgin Islands</u> (1958–present)	<u>British Virgin Islands</u> (1958–present)	<u>Puerto Rico</u> (US) (1898–present)	<u>Puerto Rico</u> (US) (1898–present)

*Largely under control of pirates

**Coexisting claim

***Leased/shared territory

Demography

The total population of the Virgin Islands is 147,778: 104,901 in the U.S. Virgin Islands, 31,758 in the British, and 11,119 in the Spanish. Roughly three-quarters of islanders are black in the British and U.S. Virgin Islands, while the majority of inhabitants in Culebra and Vieques are Puerto Rican of European descent, with a significant Afro-Puerto Rican community. The main languages are English and Virgin Islands Creole in the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, and Spanish in the Puerto Rican territory. St. Thomas is the most populous island, with St. Croix close behind (51,634 and 50,601, respectively).

Name	Sovereign State	Subdivisions	Area (km ²)	Population (2005 est.)	Population density (per km ²)	Capital
<u>British Virgin Islands</u>	United Kingdom	<u>Districts</u>	153.0	31,758	207.6	<u>Road Town</u>
<u>Spanish Virgin Islands (Puerto Rico)</u>	United States	<u>Barrios</u>	165.1	11,119	67.3	<u>San Juan, PR</u>
<u>United States Virgin Islands</u>	United States	<u>Districts</u>	346.4	104,901	302.8	<u>Charlotte Amalie</u>
Total			664.5	147,778	222.4	

Traffic control

Motor vehicles are driven on the left-hand side of the road in both the British and the U.S. Virgin Islands, although the steering wheels on most cars are located on the left side (as is the norm for drive-on-the-right localities). In the Spanish Virgin Islands, vehicles are driven on the right-hand side of the road.

See also

- Culture of the Virgin Islands
- Danish Virgin Islands
- Dutch Virgin Islands
- Music of the Virgin Islands
- Virgin Islands Creole
- Virgin Islands patch reefs

Citations

- Lazell, Dr James (2005). *Island: Fact and Theory in Nature* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=1aaOGjO63UgC&pg=PA382>). University of California Press. p. 382. ISBN 9780520931596.
- Pereña, Luciano (1992). *Genocidio en América*. Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE. p. 351. ISBN 84-7100-453-4.

General sources

- Colin Thomas, J.; Allard, William Albert; Wolinsky, Cary (February 1981). "Paradise Comes of Age: The U.S. Virgin Islands". *National Geographic*. Vol. 159, no. 2. pp. 225–243.

External links

- BVI.gov: British Virgin Islands government website (<http://www.bvi.gov.vg/>)
- U.S. Office of Insular Affairs: United States Virgin Islands government website (<http://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/virgin-islands>)
- Digital Library of the Caribbean: University of the Virgin Islands information (<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/ufdc/?h=uvi&n=dloc>)

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