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## **St. Thomas**

### **Discover an island that pulses with energy.**

St. Thomas is our most cosmopolitan island, yet it still retains the distinctive atmosphere of a secluded Caribbean paradise. For families or couples, St. Thomas is packed with millions of opportunities for smiles and surprise.

Though it's only 32 square miles in size, St. Thomas has a million miles worth of things to do. Go shopping and sailing, snorkeling and sightseeing, or diving and dining. Enjoy the island's world-renowned golf course, picture-perfect beaches and spectacular nightlife. Take the Skyride 700 feet above the city or climb the famous 99 Steps of Charlotte Amalie for an incomparable view of the Caribbean. And if you're interested in culture and history, don't miss seeing the second-oldest synagogue in the Western Hemisphere, the 1680-built Fort Christian or the childhood home of Camille Pissarro, one of the best-known French Impressionists.

Whether indulging in some of the world's prettiest beaches, re-discovering history at museums, forts or historic houses, admiring stunning panoramic views via a hike, bike or sky tram, playing a round of golf, making a splash in the invigorating turquoise blue waters, or visiting duty-free shops, St. Thomas has much to enjoy! Attractions in St. Thomas appeal to both those seeking adventure and those looking for peaceful relaxation. It's your experience; customize it to your preferences!

Diving in St. Thomas is easy and accessible, and offers an array of experiences for everyone. And because the U.S. Virgin Islands is a territory of the United States, you'll enjoy the added safety of diving within U.S. waters. This means that all dive boats are inspected by the U.S. Coast Guard and captains are USCG-certified.

More than 500 species of fish, 40 types of coral and hundreds of invertebrates inhabit the water. Vibrant blue tang, silvery horse-eye jacks, queen triggerfish, spiny Caribbean lobster, spotted eagle rays, Creole wrasses, and cleaner gobies are just a sampling of the marine life populating the underwater terrain. As the sun sets, octopuses, sea horses and moray eels make their appearance. Hawksbill, green, and leatherback turtles, call the USVI home and can be seen on many a dive. Lucky vacationers may even witness turtles hatching at one of the many turtle-nesting grounds.

Most dive operators teach a full range of PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) and NAUI (National Association of Underwater Instructors) courses from beginner scuba to instructor training. Specialty courses such as underwater photography, peak buoyancy, wreck, drift and boat diving are also available through many operators. Training for those with physical disabilities is available at several dive outlets.

St. Thomas is surrounded by some of the Caribbean's healthiest reefs, and it offers more than a dozen shipwrecks. Here are a few of the local dive operators' favorite sites:



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### **Navy Barges**

The twin barges originally housed men's quarters during WWII. After the war, they were demolished and sunk, creating the ideal habitat for marine life. Trumpetfish, big angelfish, feather dusters and Christmas tree worms hang topside, while squirrelfish, bigeyes and channel clinging crabs hide out in the crawl spaces.

### **Wit Shoal II**

Situated southwest of the St. Thomas airport, this former Navy tank-landing ship sunk in 1985. Now a thriving artificial reef, the ship is home to yellowtail snapper, barracuda and grouper which patrol its five decks. Brilliant orange cup coral and sea fans are among the amazing coral communities.

### **Cow & Calf**

Located off the southeast coast of St. Thomas, the two largest rocks that break the surface are said to look like whales—a cow and her calf. Cow & Calf boasts dramatic ledges, wide canyons and large caves.

### **Tunnels of Thatch**

The black rock arches and lava tubes are indicative of the volcanic origin of the islands. The tunnels are a part of Thatch Cay, an island northwest of St. Thomas. Bright cup corals and sponges are visible from the moment of entry. Divers wind their way through a series of tunnels, past big boulders and gorgonian patches actually swimming though the island. Butterflyfish, parrotfish and trumpetfish spend their days in the gorgonians, while tarpon pursue schools of silversides. Moray eels and spiny lobsters are regular residents of the reef.

### **Coki Beach**

Adjacent to the popular Coral World Ocean Park, Coki Beach is home to two fringing reefs located 50 yards offshore and separated by a sandy flat. Beginner and advanced divers enter the pool-like conditions to find bar jacks, grunts, yellow headed jawfish and cleaner shrimp. An occasional stingray or turtle can be seen passing by.

### **St. Thomas Diving Facts**

- The average water temperature is around 82° F (29° C) in the summer and 80° F (26° C) in the winter. Most visitors are comfortable in shorty-style wetsuits year-round.
- Visibility generally ranges from 60 to 100 feet, but it can occasionally be higher or lower depending on weather conditions.
- A recompression chamber is available on St. Thomas in case of dive emergencies

