

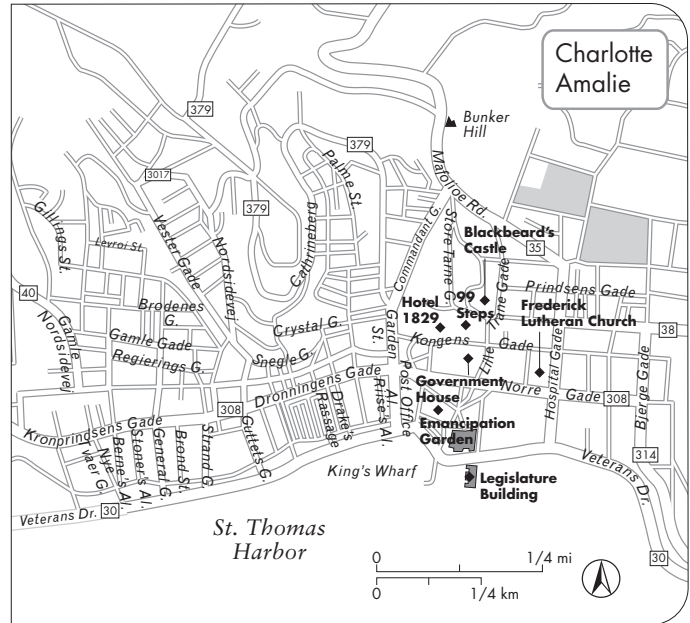


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CLOSE UP: CHARLOTTE AMALIE, ST. THOMAS

As you arrive in St. Thomas, one of your first sights is the town of Charlotte Amalie, an idyllic-looking village that spreads from the busy waterfront into the lower hills. Although other islands in the U.S. Virgin Islands developed plantation economies, St. Thomas cultivated its naturally perfect harbor, and it became a thriving seaport soon after it was settled by the Danish in the 1600s. Today, Charlotte Amalie is one of the most active cruise ports of call in the world—and one of the most beautiful.



SIGHTS

Charlotte Amalie. St. Thomas's major burg is a hilly, overdeveloped shopping town. There are plenty of interesting historic sights, though, and much of the town is quite pretty—so while you're shopping, take the time to see at least a few. For a great view of the town and the harbor, begin at the Spanish-style Hotel 1829, on Government Hill. A few yards farther up the road to the east is the base of the 99 Steps, a staircase "street" built by the Danes in the 1700s. Go up the steps and continue to the right to Blackbeard's Castle, originally Fort Skjtsborg. The massive five-story watchtower was built in 1679.

Built in 1867, **Government House**, a neoclassical white brick-and-wood structure, houses the offices for the governor of the Virgin Islands. ☒ *Government Hill.*

The pastoral-looking lime-green exterior of the **Legislature Building** conceals the vociferous political wrangling of the Virgin Islands Senate going on inside. ☒ *Waterfront Hwy., across from Fort Christian.*

Built to honor the freeing of slaves in 1848, **Emancipation Garden** was the site of a 150th anniversary celebration of emancipation. A bronze bust of a freed slave blowing a sym-

bolic conch shell commemorates this anniversary. ☒ *Between Tolbod Gade and Fort Christian.*

Frederick Lutheran Church has a massive mahogany altar, and its pews—each with its own door—were once rented to families of the congregation. Lutheranism is the state religion of Denmark, and when the territory was without a minister, the governor—who had his own elevated pew—filled in. ☒ *Norre Gade.*

Coral World Ocean Park. (\$) Coral World has an offshore underwater observatory that houses the Predator Tank, one of the world's largest coral-reef tanks, and an aquarium with more than 20 portholes providing close-ups of Caribbean sea life. The park also has several outdoor pools where you can touch starfish, pet a baby shark, feed stingrays, and view endangered sea turtles. ☒ *Coki Point, turn north off Rte. 38 at sign, Estate Frydendal.*

Drake's Seat. Sir Francis Drake was supposed to have kept watch over his fleet and looked for enemy ships from this vantage point. The panorama is especially breathtaking (and romantic) at dusk. ☒ *Rte. 40, Estate Zufriedenheit.*

Mountain Top. Stop here for a banana daiquiri and spectacular views from the observation deck more than 1,500 feet

above sea level. Shops sell everything from Caribbean art to nautical antiques, ship models, and T-shirts. ☒ *Head north off Rte. 33, look for signs.*

Paradise Point Tramway. (\$) Fly skyward in a gondola to Paradise Point, an overlook with breathtaking views of Charlotte Amalie and the harbor. There are several shops, a bar, restaurant, and a wedding gazebo; kids enjoy the tropical bird show held daily at 10:30 AM and 1:30 PM. ☒ *Rte. 30 across from Havensight Mall, Charlotte Amalie.*

Tillett Gardens. East of Charlotte Amalie, Tillett Gardens is an oasis of artistic endeavor. The late Jim Tillett and then-wife Rhoda converted this old Danish farm into an artists' retreat in 1959. Today you can watch artisans produce silk-screen fabrics, pottery, candles, watercolors, jewelry, and other handicrafts. ☒ *Rte. 38.*

SHOPPING

The prime shopping area in **Charlotte Amalie** is between Post Office and Market squares; it consists of three parallel streets that run east–west (Waterfront Highway, Main Street, and Back Street) and the alleyways that connect them. Particularly attractive are the historic **A. H. Riise Alley**, **Royal Dane Mall**, **Palm Passage**, and pastel-painted **International Plaza**—quaint alleys between Main Street and the Waterfront.

Vendors Plaza, on the waterfront side of Emancipation Gardens in Charlotte Amalie, is a central location for vendors selling handmade jewelry; straw baskets and handbags; T-shirts; fabrics; African artifacts; and local fruits.

Havensight Mall, next to the cruise-ship dock, may not be as charming as downtown Charlotte Amalie, but it does have more than 60 shops. The shops at **Port of \$ale**, which adjoins the Havensight, sell discount goods.

A. H. Riise Liquors (☒ *37 Main St., at Riise's Alley, Charlotte Amalie* ☒ *Havensight Mall, Bldg. I, Rte. 30, Charlotte Amalie*) offers a large selection of tobacco (including imported cigars), as well as cordials, wines, and rare vintage Armagnacs, cognacs, ports, and Madeiras. It also stocks fruits in brandy and barware from England. The wine selection is large at warehouse-style **Al Cohen's Discount Liquor** (☒ *Rte. 30 across from Havensight Mall, Charlotte Amalie*).

Caribbean Marketplace (☒ *Havensight Mall, Rte. 30, Charlotte Amalie*) is a great place to buy handicrafts from the Caribbean and elsewhere. **Down Island Traders** (☒ *Waterfront Hwy. at Post Office Alley, Charlotte Amalie*) carries handicrafts from throughout the Caribbean.

Little Switzerland (☒ *5 Dronningens Gade, across from Emancipation Garden, Charlotte Amalie* ☒ *3B Main St., Charlotte Amalie* ☒ *Havensight Mall, Bldg. II, Rte. 30, Charlotte Amalie*) carries name-brand crystal and china; porcelain figurines; gemstone globes; and many other affordable collectibles. Men, women, and children will find something to

choose from at **Local Color** (☒ *Royal Dane Mall, at Waterfront, Charlotte Amalie*), among brand-name wear. There are also tropically oriented accessories like big-brimmed straw hats, bold-color bags, and casual jewelry. More than 40 local artists create the handcrafted items for sale at **Native Arts & Crafts Cooperative** (☒ *Tolbod Gade, across from Emancipation Garden and next to visitor center, Charlotte Amalie*). Here you'll find African-style jewelry, quilts, calabash bowls, dolls, carved-wood figures, woven baskets, straw brooms, note cards, and cookbooks.

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

Beaches. All beaches in the USVI are public, but occasionally you'll need to stroll through a resort to reach the sand. **Coki Beach**, next to Coral World (turn north off Route 38), is the island's best snorkeling spot. Colorful beachside shops rent water-sports equipment. Some also sell snack foods, cold drinks, and even fish food (dry dog food). On Route 35, **Magens Bay** is usually lively because of its spectacular crescent of white sand, more than ½ mi (¾ km) long, and its calm waters, which are protected by two peninsulas. It's often listed among the world's most beautiful beaches. The bottom is flat and sandy, so this is a place for sunning and swimming rather than snorkeling. There's also a bar, snack bar, and bathhouses with toilets and saltwater showers. Close to Charlotte Amalie, pretty **Morning Star Beach** is where many young locals bodysurf or play volleyball. Snorkeling is good near the rocks when the current doesn't affect visibility. There's a fine view of St. John and other islands from **Sapphire Beach**. The snorkeling is excellent at the reef to the right, or east, near Pettyklip Point. The constant breeze makes this a great spot for windsurfing. The condo resort at **Secret Harbor** doesn't detract from the attractiveness of the cove-like beach. Not only is this East End spot pretty, it also has superb snorkeling—head out to the left, near the rocks.

Diving. There are several interesting reefs within easy reach of Charlotte Amalie. Popular dive sites also include the wrecks of the *Cartanser, Sr* and the *General Rogers*.

Fishing. Fishing here is synonymous with blue marlin angling. If you're not into marlin fishing, try hooking sailfish in the winter, dolphinfish come spring, and wahoo in the fall. To really find the trip that will best suit you, walk down the docks at either American Yacht Harbor or Sapphire Beach Marina in the late afternoon and chat with the captains and crews.

Golf. The **Mahogany Run Golf Course** (☒ *Rte. 42, Estate Lovelund*) attracts golfers for its spectacular view of the British Virgin Islands and the challenging 3-hole Devil's Triangle on this Tom and George Fazio–designed par-70, 18-hole course. Greens and half-cart fees for 18 holes are \$130. There's a fully stocked pro shop, snack bar, and open-air club house. The course is open daily and there are frequently informal weekend tournaments. It's the only course on St. Thomas but one of the Caribbean's best.