The U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) is comprised of three large islands—St. John, St. Thomas, and St. Croix—and several small islands, all of which are part of the Virgin Islands Archipelago. Politically, the USVI is divided into three counties, St. John, St. Thomas, and St. Croix (Figure 18). St. Croix, the largest (approximately 215 square kilometers) and most populated island supports large industries such as tourism and oil refining. St. Thomas is the territory’s capital and home to the port of Charlotte Amalie. St. John is located approximately four miles east of St. Thomas and is accessible only by boat (as it has no airport). Most of the land on St. John is parkland and undeveloped. Tourism is the largest industry in both St. Thomas and St. John Counties.

The coral reefs found offshore of St. Thomas and St. John are distributed patchily around the islands and are described as fringing and patch formations. A developed barrier reef system surrounds St. Croix on its eastern and southern shores. Further offshore, bank reefs and patch reefs can be found at greater depths (21). The extent of coral reef habitat surrounding USVI is summarized in Table 24 and illustrated in Figure 26.

### Key Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habitat Type</th>
<th>St. Croix</th>
<th>St. Thomas</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depth Curves (sq km)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Meter Line</td>
<td>226.3</td>
<td>117.8</td>
<td>344.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180 Meter Line</td>
<td>373.7</td>
<td>1,691.7</td>
<td>2,065.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapped Coral Habitat (sq km)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral Reef Hardbottom</td>
<td>233.9</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>298.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submerged Vegetation</td>
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<td>88.0</td>
<td>160.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconsolidated Sediment</td>
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<td>11.40</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Delineations</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24. Approximate area (in square kilometers) of coral reef habitat surrounding the USVI.

Source: Rohmann et al., 2005.
Figure 26. Population of USVI by U.S. Census tract adjacent to coral reef habitat. The population markers are shown at the center of each tract and should not be interpreted as exactly where population resides.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; Rohmann et al., 2005.
Table 25 presents the ratio of the area of potential coral reef habitat and mapped coral reef habitat to the number of residents in the study area. When compared to other study areas, USVI has the lowest number of residents per square kilometer of potential coral reef habitat within the 0-180 meter depth curve. However, when considering this fact, the significance of the very large number of visitors to the USVI should be taken into account (see the Highlighted Issue sidebar on page 50).

**Gender**

In 2000, the population was 48% males and 52% females. This ratio was consistent across all counties. Of individuals greater than 15 years of age, 42% were married, 41% had never been married, and approximately 12% had been divorced (35).

**Race/Ethnicity**

In 2000, the population was comprised primarily of black or African American individuals, who made up approximately 76% of the population. The remaining population was white (13%), other (6%), two or more races (3%), and Asian (1%) (35).

**Age**

Thirty-two percent of the total population in 2000 ranged in age from 0-17, followed by the age groups 45-59 (21%), 35-44 (14%), 25-34 (13%), 18-24 (8%), 60-69 (8%), 70-79 (4%), and 80+ (2%). This was generally consistent across the two most populated islands, St. Croix and St. Thomas. On St. John, individuals aged 45-59 outnumbered those aged 0-17 (35).

![An underwater scene off St. John, July 2005. Credit: NOAA CCMA Biogography Team](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habitat Type</th>
<th>Area of Coral Reef Habitat in USVI</th>
<th>Persons Per Sq Km of Potential Coral Reef Habitat in 2008</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depth Curves (sq km)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Meter Line</td>
<td>344.1</td>
<td>325</td>
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<tr>
<td>180 Meter Line</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mapped Coral Habitat (sq km)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Coral Reef Hardbottom</td>
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<td>Submerged Vegetation</td>
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<td>Other Delineations</td>
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<td>15,554</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25. Ratio of the area of potential coral reef habitat and mapped coral reef habitat to population in USVI.

Households
In 2000, the total number of households in the USVI was 40,648. Sixty-six percent of these were family households; of these, 36% were two-person and 25% were three-person households. These percentages were generally the same across all counties. Most non-family households contained only one person (88%) (35).

Language
The primary language spoken in the home was English (68%), followed by Spanish or Spanish Creole (20%), French or French Creole (10%), and other languages (2%) (35).

Place of Birth
Of the total population, 48% were born in the USVI, 34% were born in a foreign country, 14% were born in the United States, and 4% were born in Puerto Rico or another U.S. island area. The county with the highest number of individuals born in the USVI was St. Croix with 23% (35).

Income
In 2000, the average median household income was approximately $26,925 per year. This is shown in Figure 28. Approximately 32% of the population was living below the poverty level (35).
Tourism and recreation can include numerous activities directly affecting coral reef habitat such as snorkeling, scuba diving, boating, fishing, and collecting reef species. Resorts, marinas, and cruise ship operations may indirectly affect coral reef habitat due to increases in oil spills, sedimentation, sewage discharge, nutrient pollution and other effects (46).

The USVI are a popular tourist destination, having an average of over 600,000 land visitors per year from 2000 to 2005, plus in the same time period an average of almost two million cruise ship passenger arrivals per year (34, 44). Additionally, the number of tourist arrivals to St. Thomas and St. John quadrupled between 1970 and 2000 (21). Although St. Thomas and St. John represent some of the best examples to demonstrate a negative impact from tourism on the marine environment, it is extremely difficult to attribute this decline in environmental quality to a specific tourist activity (46).

**Education**

In 2000, 26% of the adult population (25 years of age and over) had a high school diploma. Approximately 18% had some college or an associate’s degree and 17% held a bachelor’s degree or higher. This distribution is broken down by gender in Figure 29. In all education attainment categories, females outnumbered males excluding those that have not received a high school diploma (35).

**Employment**

In 2000, 43% of the civilian population 16 years of age and over were employed. This percentage represents 46,000 people (35). The industries that employed the most people are listed in Table 26.

**Commute to Work**

For the civilian population 16 years of age, 51% worked on the island of St. Thomas, 42% on St. Croix, and 6% on St. John. The primary means of transportation to work were driving alone in a private vehicle (54%).
and carpooling in a private vehicle (24%). These were followed by public transportation (11%), walking (6%), working at home (2%), and other means of transportation (2%) (35).

### Housing and Development

#### Housing Units

There were a total of 50,202 housing units in the USVI in 2000. Of the total housing units, 37% were owner occupied, 44% were renter occupied, and 18% were reported as vacant. St. John County contained the fewest units (5% of the total), while St. Croix and St. Thomas each accounted for about half of the remaining 95% (35).

#### Plumbing Facilities

In 2000, only about 5% of the housing units lacked complete plumbing facilities (35).

#### Source of Water

In 2000, the use of cisterns, tanks, or drums accounted for 52% of the total water source for housing units. Of the total housing units, 46% were connected either to a public water system or to a public water system with cistern supplementation. About 2% of housing units used public standpipes or other unspecified means of water source (35).

### Sewage Disposal

In 2000, just fewer than 52% of housing units had public sewer connections, while 45% were on septic tank or cesspool systems. Just under 4% of units were reported as using other means of sewage disposal. St. John County had the lowest total number of septic tanks/cesspools among the three counties, but it also had the highest percentage (78%) of units on septic tanks/cesspools (35).

### Building Permits

Data for building permits was not readily available for the USVI.

### Tourism

From 2000 to 2005, an average of 604,593 tourists per year (excluding same-day visitors) visited the USVI. Most of the visitors (89%) were from the Americas (34). Furthermore, during this same time period there was an average of 1,916,233 cruise ship passenger arrivals per year (44).