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USVI REALTY

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

USVI REAL ESTATE BUYER'S GUIDE

St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John

A free guide to researching property in St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John: the three islands, property types, the buying process, costs, insurance, the questions to ask and a research checklist.

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This guide is for anyone researching property in St. Thomas, St. Croix or St. John. It walks through the islands, the kinds of property you will see, the general buying process, financing, costs, insurance and the questions worth asking, and it ends with a checklist you can work through property by property.

USVI Realty is an educational resource. We do not represent buyers or sellers, list property, negotiate transactions, or give legal, tax or investment advice. Every fact in this guide comes from a public source listed at the end. Figures are labeled with the date we checked them, and where no official figure exists, we tell you whom to ask. Use what you learn here to prepare for conversations with licensed real estate professionals, attorneys, lenders, inspectors and insurers.

The three islands at a glance

Estimate as of October 2026. Population and housing figures are from the 2020 Census. Land areas are rounded from the Census Bureau's 2025 TIGER/Line files.

	St. Thomas	St. Croix	St. John
Population, 2020 Census	42,261	41,004	3,881
Housing units, 2020 Census	28,142	25,470	3,645
Land area	About 31 sq mi	About 83 sq mi	About 20 sq mi
Census subdistricts	7	9	4
Towns and main communities	Charlotte Amalie	Christiansted, Frederiksted	Cruz Bay, Coral Bay
Getting there	Cyril E. King Airport (STT)	Henry E. Rohlsen Airport (STX)	Ferry or car barge from Red Hook, St. Thomas

St. Thomas is the most populous island. Charlotte Amalie had 8,194 residents in the town itself in 2020, and the Port Authority says Cyril E. King Airport is about two miles west of it. Red Hook, on the East End, is where passenger ferries and car barges leave for St. John.

St. Croix has by far the most land. Its two towns, Christiansted and Frederiksted, counted 1,770 and 528 residents in 2020, while its most populous Census subdistrict, Sion Farm, had 10,332. The Port Authority places Henry E. Rohlsen Airport approximately six miles southwest of Christiansted, and the National Park Service's Christiansted National Historic Site includes Fort Christiansvaern and the Danish Customs House.

St. John is the smallest and least populated of the three. The National Park Service says two-thirds of the island is national park, and there is no airport, so visitors fly into St. Thomas and cross from Red Hook. Its largest communities in the 2020 Census were Cruz Bay, with 2,772 residents, and Coral Bay, with 615.

Estates and how property is identified

Across all three islands, property is identified by estate names, which the Census Bureau says are in common use by residents and in government administration. Estate boundaries are primarily those of the former agricultural plantations that existed when Denmark transferred the islands to the United States in 1917. The Census also notes that its estate boundaries are for statistical purposes and are not legal land descriptions, so the deed and the recorded survey control. See our [guide to estates](#) and our [island guides](#), or compare the two largest islands in [St. Thomas vs. St. Croix](#).

Property types you will come across

Public records already sort property into a few categories. The Lieutenant Governor's 2026 delinquency notice, for example, lists residential, commercial and timeshare properties, and the permit fee formula of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) treats one- and two-family dwellings as residential and multifamily dwellings as commercial. Here is what to look into for each type.

Single-family homes

With a single-family home, every system is yours to check. Ask about the construction type, because a 2023 bulletin from the Lieutenant Governor's office says owners of wooden or mixed frame homes may face non-renewal or be unable to find coverage in the admitted insurance market. Ask about the cistern too: a January 2024 guide from DPNR and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 90 percent of homes in the USVI have active cisterns. Finally, ask whether additions and renovations were permitted and inspected.

Condominiums

A condominium comes with an association, and its decisions affect you. The Lieutenant Governor's office notes that a condominium owner does not have a separate building policy: the policy belongs to the association as a whole and is subject to its board of directors, while the owner can buy a separate contents policy. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) notes that condo or HOA fees are usually paid separately from the monthly mortgage payment. Ask for the association's budget, reserves, insurance and rules before you make an offer.

Multi-unit buildings

If a building has several units, ask whether it is treated as residential or commercial for permits, taxes, insurance and financing. DPNR's permit fee formula, for example, charges multifamily dwellings at the commercial rate.

Land

Buying land means planning for everything a house would otherwise come with. Ask about the survey, the flood zone, road access and how you would get water and power. If you plan to build, DPNR's Division of Permits issues building, plumbing and electrical permits, and DPNR's Coastal Zone Management division runs programs that include coastal permitting. The DPNR and EPA cistern guide also points to V.I. Code Title 29, Section 308, which sets rules on where cisterns are located and how they overflow.

Timeshares

Timeshare properties appear as their own category in the territory's tax notices. Before you buy one, ask an attorney exactly what the purchase would give you, what the ongoing fees are and what the resale rules say.

The buying process, step by step

Our [complete buying guide](#) covers each step in detail. In brief:

1. **Choose an island and an area.** Visit if you can, and learn the estate and subdistrict names for the places you like.
2. **Line up financing or proof of funds.** The CFPB notes that a preapproval letter is not a guaranteed loan offer, but it gives a seller confidence that you can get financing.
3. **Work with licensed professionals.** Real estate brokers and salespersons are licensed by the Virgin Islands Real Estate Commission, part of the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA), and the Commission's rules require them to carry their pocket cards at all times. DLCA's online License Search lets you look up licensed businesses.
4. **Make an offer and sign a contract.** The Commission's rules say the sales contract must include a full legal description of the property and all terms and conditions, and that a broker holding deposit funds must keep them in an account at a bank authorized to do business in the territory.
5. **Do your due diligence.** Inspection, survey, title search, flood zone, water, power and permits. The CFPB notes that if your contract is contingent on a satisfactory inspection, you have the right to cancel the sale.
6. **Arrange insurance.** Get quotes early, including windstorm and flood coverage.
7. **Close the purchase.** If you borrow, your lender must give you a Closing Disclosure at least three business days before closing. The Recorder of Deeds notes that Act 8542 requires two witnesses for notarized deeds, and its recording requirements call for a Sales Valuation Affidavit stating the actual sales price.
8. **Record the deed.** The Recorder of Deeds, in the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, has an office on St. Croix and an office on St. Thomas that serves St. Thomas and St. John. Original deeds must be submitted directly to the office.
9. **Set up your property tax account.** The Office of the Tax Assessor assesses property and the Office of the Tax Collector collects the tax. If the home will be your primary residence, ask about the homestead tax credit.

Financing considerations

Start the financing conversation before you start touring homes.

- **Preapproval.** A prequalification or preapproval letter shows a lender's general willingness to lend up to a set amount under certain assumptions. The CFPB stresses that neither is a guaranteed loan offer.
- **Comparing offers.** After you apply, the lender must give you a Loan Estimate within three business days. Every lender uses the same standard form, so you can compare offers line by line.
- **Loan limits.** The Federal Housing Finance Agency sets conforming loan limits for mortgages that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac acquire, with higher limits for the USVI under special statutory provisions.

Estimate as of October 2026. For 2026, the baseline conforming loan limit for one-unit properties in the U.S. Virgin Islands is \$1,249,125, compared with \$832,750 in most of the United States.

- **Appraisal.** The CFPB notes that when you borrow money to buy a home, your lender generally requires a form of appraisal.
- **Flood insurance.** FEMA says homes in high-risk flood areas with mortgages from government-backed lenders are required to have flood insurance.
- **Escrow accounts.** The CFPB describes an escrow account as one a mortgage lender sets up to pay certain property-related expenses. The Lieutenant Governor's office notes that you can have your insurance premium escrowed along with your property tax payment, or use premium financing.
- **Force-placed insurance.** If you have a mortgage, the Lieutenant Governor's office advises buying your own homeowners policy, because force-placed coverage may cover only the mortgage balance.
- **Paying cash.** Ask your real estate professional what proof of funds sellers expect, and keep the title search, inspection and insurance on your list. Skipping a loan does not skip the risks.

Questions to ask each lender: Do you lend on this island and on this property type? What insurance will you require before closing? When will you order the appraisal? Which charges on the Loan Estimate can change before closing?

Closing costs and professional fees to research

The CFPB notes that buyers generally pay the costs of their purchase, though the seller may pay some depending on the contract or the law. Typical costs include appraisal fees, tax service fees, title insurance, government taxes and prepaid items such as property taxes, homeowners insurance and interest. Here is what to research in the USVI, with official figures where a government office publishes one.

- **Stamp tax on the deed.** A 2002 decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit quoted the Virgin Islands Code provision imposing a stamp tax on the transfer of title to real property. We found no current rate schedule published by the territorial government. Ask the Recorder of Deeds or your attorney.
- **Recording fees.** We found no current fee schedule on the Recorder of Deeds web page. Ask the Recorder what fees apply to your deed and mortgage.
- **Tax clearance letter.** The Office of the Tax Collector takes requests at its St. John, St. Thomas and Sunny Isle (St. Croix) offices.
- **Attorney fees.** The Real Estate Commission's rules say a broker or salesperson should recommend that each purchaser retain an attorney to pass upon the marketability of the title. Ask for a written fee quote.
- **Title insurance.** The CFPB notes that most lenders require a lender's title insurance policy, while an owner's policy protects you. Ask your attorney or title company to quote both.
- **Inspection, survey and appraisal.** No official rates exist. Get written quotes from a home inspector, a licensed land surveyor and, through your lender, an appraiser.
- **Cistern cleaning and water testing.** The DPNR and EPA guide treats routine water quality testing as the owner's cost. Get quotes before closing.
- **Renovation permits.** DPNR publishes a formula for permit fees.

Estimate as of October 2026. The Office of the Tax Collector lists the tax clearance letter fee as \$25.00. DPNR's permit fee formula is 0.5 percent of total construction cost for residential projects and 1 percent for commercial projects, including multifamily dwellings.

After closing, budget for annual real property tax. We did not find current real property tax rates published by the territorial government, so ask the Tax Assessor which class and rate apply.

Estimate as of October 2026. The Tax Assessor's published requirements list a general homestead credit of \$400 for an owner's primary residence, plus one other credit for those who qualify (\$500 senior, \$500 disability or \$650 veteran), and a minimum tax of \$180 for all homestead credits.

Our guide to [the costs of buying](#) includes a full table of these items and whom to ask about each.

Property insurance considerations

The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30, according to NOAA's National Hurricane Center, which puts the peak on September 10. Insurance is a buying decision, not an afterthought, and the Lieutenant Governor's office, which regulates insurance in the territory, offers clear guidance.

Homeowners and windstorm coverage

- You cannot buy a homeowners insurance policy once a storm has been declared.
- Do not exclude windstorm coverage.
- Buy coverage for at least 80 percent of your home's replacement cost value. To find that value, the office suggests hiring an appraiser and making sure the appraisal includes replacement cost value.
- Buy homeowners insurance even if you own the home outright.
- Review your policies every year with your agent.

The market is tight. A July 2023 bulletin from the same office says some insurers have left the territory, those that remain are limited in how much coverage they can write, and owners of wooden or mixed frame homes may face non-renewal or be unable to find coverage in the admitted market. It advises buyers to contact an insurance producer about insurers licensed in the territory and about surplus lines coverage.

Flood coverage

FEMA notes that most homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage. FEMA lists the Territory of the Virgin Islands as a participating community in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), and there is typically a 30-day waiting period before a new NFIP policy takes effect. If your lender says you must buy flood insurance and you want to appeal, the Lieutenant Governor's flood brochure says to contact DPNR for a review.

Estimate as of October 2026. NFIP coverage limits published by FEMA and by the Lieutenant Governor's office are up to \$250,000 for a home's structure and up to \$100,000 for its contents.

Protecting yourself as a policyholder

- The Division of Banking, Insurance and Financial Regulation points consumers to an online lookup, run through the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, of companies licensed to do insurance business in the territory.
- The office offers a Home Inventory Checklist at ltg.gov.vi and recommends photographing your belongings before a storm.
- Public adjusters are licensed by the Commissioner of Insurance.

Estimate as of October 2026. The Lieutenant Governor's office says a public adjuster may not charge a fee above 5 percent of the insurance proceeds recovered, citing Bulletin No. 2017-06.

Questions to ask before you make an offer

About the property

- How old is the home, what is it built of and when was the roof last replaced?
- Were all additions and renovations permitted and inspected by DPNR?
- Is there a current survey, and does it match what you see on the ground?
- Is the property in a high-risk area on FEMA's flood maps?

Water, power and access

- Is the home on a cistern, public water or both? When was the cistern last drained, cleaned and disinfected?
- What do the recent water and power bills look like?
- What backup power is in place?
- How do you reach the property by road, and what is that road like after heavy rain?

Insurance

- What would homeowners insurance, including windstorm, cost for this specific home?
- Will an insurer licensed in the territory write the policy, or would it be surplus lines coverage?
- Does the home need flood insurance, and how long would a new policy take to start?

Title, taxes and records

- Has your attorney reviewed the recorded title history and confirmed the title is marketable?
- Are the property taxes current, and is the parcel on the Lieutenant Governor's delinquency list?
- What is the current stamp tax, which value is it based on and who pays it under the contract?
- Would the property qualify for a homestead credit if you make it your primary residence?

Condominiums and associations

- What are the dues, what do they cover and how large are the reserves?
- Are any special assessments planned?
- What does the association's master policy cover, and what is the deductible?
- What are the rules on renting, pets and renovations?

Your team

- Has every agent you are working with shown you a current license and pocket card?
- Whom does each professional represent, and how are they paid?
- Who will hold your deposit, and when is it refundable?

Your property research checklist

Before you start looking

- ☐ Read the island guides and decide which islands to visit
- ☐ Learn the estate and subdistrict names for the areas you like
- ☐ Get a preapproval letter or gather proof of funds
- ☐ Find a USVI real estate attorney you can call with questions
- ☐ Check any real estate professional's license with DLCA

Before you make an offer

- ☐ Ask for recent utility bills and details on the cistern
- ☐ Look up the property on FEMA's Flood Map Service Center
- ☐ Get an early insurance quote, including windstorm and flood
- ☐ For a condominium, request the association's budget, reserves, master policy and rules
- ☐ Ask whether past work on the property was permitted and inspected

Once you are under contract

- ☐ Confirm who holds your deposit and the deadlines in your contract
- ☐ Schedule the home inspection and attend it
- ☐ Have the cistern inspected, and arrange cleaning and water testing if needed
- ☐ Order a survey, or have your attorney review the existing one
- ☐ Have your attorney or title company run the title search and quote title insurance
- ☐ Confirm the property taxes are current
- ☐ Bind homeowners, windstorm and, if needed, flood coverage

Before and at closing

- ☐ Compare your Closing Disclosure with your Loan Estimate
- ☐ Confirm who pays the stamp tax and recording fees
- ☐ Plan for two witnesses if you sign the deed before a notary
- ☐ Check that the Sales Valuation Affidavit states the actual sales price

After closing

- ☐ Get a recorded copy of your deed from your attorney
- ☐ Set up your property tax account with the Tax Assessor and Tax Collector
- ☐ Apply for a homestead credit if the home is your primary residence
- ☐ Complete a home inventory and photograph your belongings

- ☐ Put cistern inspection and cleaning on your maintenance calendar

When you are ready to go deeper, start with [Buying Property in the USVI: A Complete Guide](#) and [Can U.S. Citizens Buy Property in the USVI?](#), and browse all of our [guides](#).

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