



Environment and
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada

Country Profile: The British Virgin Islands



1. PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

The British Virgin Islands (BVI), officially the Virgin Islands, are located in the northeast Caribbean at 18.5°N and 64.5°W. As part of the Virgin Islands archipelago, the BVI form a British Overseas Territory. They comprise four (4) main islands, namely Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Anegada and Jost Van Dyke, alongside over 50 smaller islands and cays of which 11 are inhabited. The population is 29,151 (according to a 2009 census) of which 23,500 live on Tortola, on which the capital, Road Town, is situated. Tortola is approximately 20 km long and 5 km wide. As a popular island escape as well as tax haven, the BVI are amongst the highest prosperous territories in the Caribbean (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Virgin_Islands; <http://www.bvitourism.com/island-facts>).



Figure 1 Map of the British Virgin Islands. (Credit: Wiki Commons)

The average annual rainfall total is 1150 mm, with the wet season spanning May to November each year, with more than 100 mm per month between September and November. Temperatures are fairly constant throughout the year averaging around 27.5°C (data from neighbouring U.S. Virgin Islands – <http://rcc.cimh.edu.bb/>). Most islands are volcanic, with the exception of Anegada, rendering soils potentially fertile. However, the rugged topography prevents major agricultural practice. Anegada, a coral island, is nutrient poor soil and brackish groundwater supports mostly salt tolerant vegetation.

2. CLIMATOLOGY

The British Virgin Islands Airports Authority Ltd (BVIAAL) is the national authoritative body for meteorological purposes. However, it was not assessed how many meteorological stations the Authority

maintains and uses for climate monitoring. Hence, only second-source data from Intellicast are used to construct an estimated temperature and rainfall climatology as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Approximate climatology of Virgin Gorda on Grand Cayman

	Tmin	Tmax	Record Tmin	Record Tmax	Precipitation totals
January	21.1	28.9	14.4	33.3	69.3
February	20.6	28.9	15.0	35.0	52.6
March	21.1	28.9	12.8	36.1	46.0
April	22.2	29.4	14.4	32.8	85.1
May	23.3	30.6	18.3	35.6	106.2
June	24.4	31.1	17.2	36.7	60.2
July	24.4	31.7	20.0	37.2	81.3
August	24.4	31.7	20.6	36.7	105.9
September	23.9	31.7	20.6	36.1	152.9
October	23.3	31.7	18.3	36.7	126.2
November	22.8	30.6	18.3	36.1	163.1
December	21.7	29.4	17.2	35.0	91.9
Year	22.8	30.4	12.8	37.2	1140.7

Source: adapted from Intellicast (<http://www.intellicast.com/Local/History.aspx?location=VIXX0004>)

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

The "four pillars" of the economy are tourism, financial services, agriculture and fishing. Politically, tourism is the more important of the four, as it employs a greater number of people within the Territory, and a larger proportion of the businesses in the tourist industry are locally owned, as are a number of the highly tourism-dependent sole traders (for example, taxi drivers and street vendors). Economically however, financial services associated with the territory's status as an offshore financial centre are by far the more important. 51.8% of the Government's revenue comes directly from licence fees for offshore companies, and considerable further sums are raised directly or indirectly from payroll taxes relating to salaries paid within the trust industry sector (which tend to be higher on average than those paid in the tourism sector). View more about the Economy of the territory, on the Economy of the Virgin Islands page. (<http://www.bvi.gov.vg/content/about-territory>)

4. KEY NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR NEEDS

A 2015-2016 survey of user climate information needs in the Caribbean captured responses from 3 sectoral users representing the agriculture and disaster risk management sectors. No BVI representatives participated in the interviews nor focus group discussions in 2016. This very small sample reflects the limitations of the territory's size, population economy and its potential market for the delivery and use of climate services. This very small sample size may signal that a targeted future research intervention is needed to address this critical data gap.

Users report that they obtain their seasonal climate forecasts information from a variety of sources including the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology and government agencies and departments. Climate information, in particular the SPI was reported to help the agricultural sector representative in advising farmers on the type of crops to plant at a given time of the year.

5. RANGE OF CLIMATE SERVICES

The British Virgin Islands Airports Authority Ltd (BVIAAL) is the only NMHS in the provider sample that did not rate its climate services capability. However, as of November 2015, the BVIAAL reports that it delivers climate information that is tailored, packaged and delivered to meet the specific user needs but this is based solely upon request. No data is available regarding specific organisations with which the BVIAAL interacts. The organization does not tailor any of the 7 regional climate products for the national context, nor has the country convened a National Climate Outlook Forum. The level of interaction between the BVIAAL and users of climate information has been reported to be low and feedback is not routinely collected from users.

BVIAAL recommendations for improving its climate services capability include:

1. The establishment of a Meteorological/ Climate department; and
2. Well qualified and better trained staff on all aspects of climate.

6. REFERENCES

Tax Justice Network. 2015. Narrative Report on Cayman Islands. Financial Secrecy Index.

Web Sites

<http://rcc.cimh.edu.bb>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Virgin_Islands

<http://www.bvitourism.com/island-facts>

<http://www.bvi.gov.vg/content/about-territory>

<http://www.intellicast.com/Local/History.aspx?location=VIXX0004>