



St Croix

POP 53,200

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

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- » Waves at Cane Bay (p128)
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Why Go?

St Croix (pronounced *Saint Croy*) is the Virgins' big boy, and it sports an exceptional topography spanning mountains, a spooky rainforest and a fertile coastal plain that, once upon a time, earned it the nickname 'Garden of the Antilles' for its sugarcane-growing prowess.

Today divers and drinkers appreciate St Croix's charms. The former submerge to view the wall along the island's north shore. It drops at a 60-degree slope to a 12,000ft depth, offering a true look into 'the deep.' There's nothing quite like it anywhere in the world. Underwater enthusiasts also don mask and flippers to explore Buck Island Marine Sanctuary, an 18,800-acre coral reef system with an abundance of marine life. Landlubbers take solace sipping through the heady Cruzan Rum Factory and taking their pick of 18th-century windmills, plantations and forts to poke around.

When to Go

Mid-December through April is the dry and sunny high season, when prices and crowds hit their peak. The island has a busy social calendar year-round. There's Agri-Fest in mid-February, which is like a big state fair and draws families from around the islands; the Half-Ironman Triathlon in May; the sticky-sweet Mango Melee in June; and the Christmas Fiesta, gifting concerts and pageants from December through early January. The quarterly Jump Ups (street carnivals) are a prime time to be on the island for some spontaneous cultural fun.

History

When Christopher Columbus arrived at Salt River Bay in November 1493 and named the island ‘Santa Cruz,’ the indigenous community he encountered was a mix of warrior Caribs and Taíno. The Spanish, English, French and Dutch took turns battling over the island in the ensuing years. The Danes took control in 1734 and remained so for the next two centuries.

By 1792 the island had 197 plantations and 22,000 slaves; 18,000 worked in the fields. The white population still numbered fewer than 3000. Describing this epoch in island history, the poet Philip Freneau wrote, ‘If you have tears prepare to shed them now... no class of mankind in the known world undergo so complete servitude...’ Meanwhile, sugarcane production soared to more than 40 million pounds of sugar per year. Windmills and oxen mills dotted the landscape.

When England’s Parliament abolished slavery in 1834, the freeing of slaves in the British Caribbean colonies provoked cries for freedom in the Danish islands. The 1848 slave rebellion followed, leading to freedom for all slaves on St Croix and the other Danish Virgin Islands.

After the US bought the islands in 1917, it tried to revive St Croix’s sugarcane plantations by importing laborers and merchants from Puerto Rico. A Puerto Rican community took root around Frederiksted, but the tired one-crop economy withered. Enter tax incentives and the Hovensa oil refinery, which is now one of the world’s largest processors.

In 1989 Hurricane Hugo damaged or destroyed about 90% of island structures and left more than one-third of the population homeless. Since then, St Croix has weathered attacks from equally vicious Hurricanes Marilyn (1995) and Lenny (1999).



St Croix Highlights

- 1 Sip microbrews and explore the cannon-covered fort in the historic district of **Christiansted** (p112)
- 2 Dive the wall and peer into the deep at **Cane Bay** (p118)
- 3 Sail to **Buck Island** for a day of snorkeling, hiking and barbecuing (p123)
- 4 Relive the sugarcane days at the **Estate Whim Plantation Museum** (p132)
- 5 Hike to the wild East End beaches from **Point Udall**, the easternmost point in the USA (p123)
- 6 See where Columbus landed, then kayak the bioluminescent water at **Salt River Bay** (p126)
- 7 Drink the Virgin Islands’ favorite attitude adjuster at its source at the **Cruzan Rum Distillery** (p133)
- 8 Cycle or horseback ride on the lush rainforest trails around **Frederiksted** (p129)