

# COASTAL

Curriculum | st. croix

*Celebrating the history  
and ecology of the  
U.S. Virgin Islands*

## **Cultural & Environmental Vistas**

Enjoy the rich ecological and historical value of signature bays in the VI

## **Virgin Islands Parks**

Conserve essential coastal and marine habitats and species in Territorial and National Parks

## **Discover Historic Landmarks**

Appreciate the complex and fascinating history of the VI



# Rich Coastal *History*

This Coastal Curriculum Guide celebrates the rich coastal history and ecology of the Virgin Islands.

**T**he history of the Virgin Islands is complex, spanning occupation, exploitation, enslavement, revolt, freedom fighting, and emancipation. Recording and sharing this accurate history is crucial for current and future generations.

The diverse coastal and marine natural resources of the Virgin Islands, including coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, and associated fish and invertebrate species, define the beauty and productivity of our marine environment. These resources face threats from natural and anthropological sources such as climate change and associated impacts and poor water quality from land and marine-based sources of pollution. Ongoing efforts in coral reef and mangrove restoration in the Virgin Islands aim to safeguard

these critical resources. Protecting and stewarding these natural resources is essential, as the sustainability and well-being of present and future Virgin Islanders hinge upon it.

The marine industry in the Virgin Islands is thriving and expanding. We encourage all Virgin Islanders, from professional and recreational mariners, to engage with this coastal information on cultural and natural resources.

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources extends gratitude to the Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association and the Virgin Islands Conservation Society for authoring this guide. Appreciation also goes to the historians, scientists, and mariners of the Virgin Islands whose valuable time, expertise, and local knowledge contributed significantly to its creation.



Two Women Chatting by the Sea, St. Thomas, 1856, Camille Pissarro



# Acknowledgments

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The Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association (VIPCA) unifies, supports and furthers the capabilities of the marine charter industry within the U.S. Virgin Islands by providing compliance guidance, youth training, and one voice to assist in the development of industry standards for the continued growth and strength of the charter industry.



The Virgin Islands Conservation Society (VICS) promotes the conservation and restoration of island ecosystems, sustainable development of islands, and awareness of conservation issues.



Teal Earth Solutions helps organizations achieve their conservation and natural resources management goals.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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### On the cover

The Buck Island Reef National Monument, a protected marine reserve, is home to a rich diversity of marine life, making it a premier destination for snorkeling and diving



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# Frederiksted

## St. Croix

*Frederiksted, often referred to as the “freedom city,” was established by the Danish in 1751 and is today the second-largest town on St. Croix.*

**F**rederiksted, often referred to as the “freedom city,” was established by the Danish in 1751 and is today the second-largest town on St. Croix. It holds a significant place in history as the site where the proclamation abolishing slavery in the Virgin Islands was announced in 1848. The town was rebuilt after it faced destruction during the Labor Riot of 1878, known as Fireburn when formerly enslaved people used fire to protest against the poor working conditions they faced after emancipation. Rebuilt during the Victorian era, its architecture today reflects that period, featuring delicate and intricate gingerbread trim on many buildings. Frederiksted is also home to the Crucian Christmas Carnival, a month-long festival that occurs from December to the first week of January. The carnival village showcases the island’s rich cultural history with its parades, local art, music, and diverse culinary delights.

### Emancipation Park

Emancipation Park is an urban retreat in central Frederiksted featuring benches, a gazebo, and mahogany trees. The park was renamed to honor slave revolt leader General Buddhoe and the 1848 Slave Emancipation, issued by Danish Governor Peter von Scholten. The park



showcases a statue named “Freedom” of a person blowing a conch shell, which has been replicated at other VI locations and in Denmark. “Freedom” commemorates the journey to emancipation. The park also boasts a reproduction of the Liberty Bell, which can be found in every U.S. State and Territory.

### Frederiksted Pier

Frederiksted Pier stands out as the sole port in St. Croix deep enough to accommodate mega cruise ships and can host submarines. Spanning an impressive 1526 feet (approximately a third of a mile), this iconic pier is a popular destination for fishing, snorkeling, scuba diving, and swimming when there are no cruise ships in port. Night dives are popular here, with colorful sea sponges illuminated against the dark ocean, frogfish, and seahorses. The pier has faced destruction twice – first by Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and later by Hurricane Marilyn in 1995. The remnants of the original structure were repurposed and sunk two miles offshore, creating a dive site known as Armageddon. The pier is the gateway to shopping and many restaurants in Frederiksted.





### **Fireburn**

The 1878 St. Croix labor riot, known as Fireburn, started on October 1, “Contract Day,” the only day of the year that laborers were allowed to move to a different plantation or get a new job. It was a festive day with celebrations and drinking. The police attempted to shut it down ruthlessly, and a farm laborer was injured and taken to the hospital. Rumors started that he had been killed. People began to riot and burn the town, driving the police and soldiers to barricade themselves in Fort Frederik. Unable to scale the gates to access the fort, the rioters started fires. Fields, factories, homes, and over three-quarters of the plantations on St Croix were burned. The town of Frederiksted burned to the ground. Consequently, Frederiksted has a Victorian-Era architectural influence due to the extreme rebuild following the 1848 St. Croix Fireburn. Among the leaders of this brave revolt were four women – “Queen Mary” Thomas, “Queen Agnes” Salomon, “Queen Mathilda” McBean, and Susannah Abrahamsen, known as “Bottom Belly.” The “Queens of the Fireburn” were revered women leaders in their communities who rallied laborers across the island, fighting for equality.

### **Marine Fish**

The value of marine fish in the U.S. Virgin Islands can not be understated as they provide ecosystem services and support livelihoods and industries such as tourism, commercial fishing, and recreational fishing. Unique marine fish species are found in the U.S. Virgin Islands; diving or snorkeling off the Frederiksted Pier is a great way to spot them. Various shapes and names of colorful marine fish abound: parrotfish, filefish, triggerfish, frogfish, scorpionfish, trunkfish, porcupinefish, and batfish, to name a few. Recreationally and commercially significant fish species in the U.S. Virgin Islands include tuna, snapper, grouper, and marlin, reflected in the local cuisine. Threats to marine fish species in the U.S. Virgin Islands include habitat degradation, overfishing, marine and land-based sources of pollution, invasive species, climate change, and insufficient enforcement. Conservation efforts include habitat restoration and protection, limiting land and marine-based sources of debris and pollution, research, and enforcement of fishing regulations.

# Fort Frederik

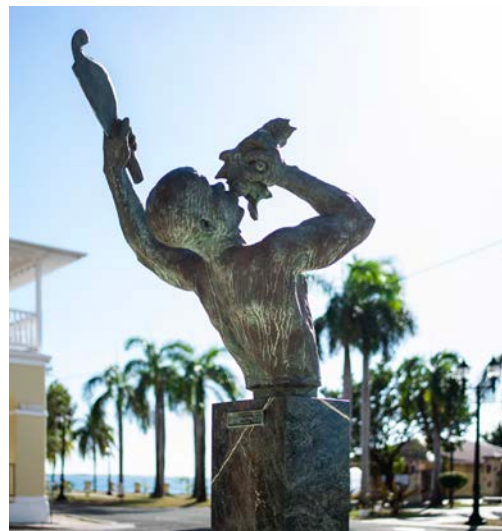
*It played a crucial role in the Emancipation Revolt of 1848 when approximately 8,000 enslaved individuals rioted, surrounding the fort and demanding their freedom.*

**F**ort Frederik's striking red walls are located directly on the shore and can be easily seen from the water. The Danish constructed the fort between 1752 and 1760. In 1776 a canon was shot in the air to commemorate U.S. independence. It played a crucial role in the Emancipation Revolt of 1848 when approximately 8,000 enslaved individuals rioted, surrounding the fort and demanding their freedom. The revolt's success was evident as Governor von Scholten granted emancipation that day, ending 114 years of enslavement. It is one of the few instances where enslaved people revolted and successfully achieved freedom as a result.

Fort Frederik was also the site of the 1878 Labor Riot, known locally as "Fireburn." After slavery was abolished, a labor bill was implemented, which limited the rights of formerly enslaved people and subjected them to harsh working conditions. Plantation owners quickly contrived new regulations, mandating that the recently emancipated workers enter into labor agreements that bound them to the plantations where they worked, subjecting them once more to involuntary servitude. They were denied adequate accommodation, healthcare, education, and livable income. In 1878, four influential women led organized riots protesting against these conditions. Danish colonizers suppressed the

riots and imprisoned the female leaders in Denmark. They became known as "The Four Queens" and later returned to St. Croix to complete their sentences.

Fort Frederik has witnessed significant historical events throughout the years and serves as a reminder of the struggles and triumphs the people of St. Croix endured in their quest for freedom and justice. Its picturesque location on the waterfront and rich historical significance make it a noteworthy destination for visitors eager to explore the island's past and learn about the bravery and resilience of its people.

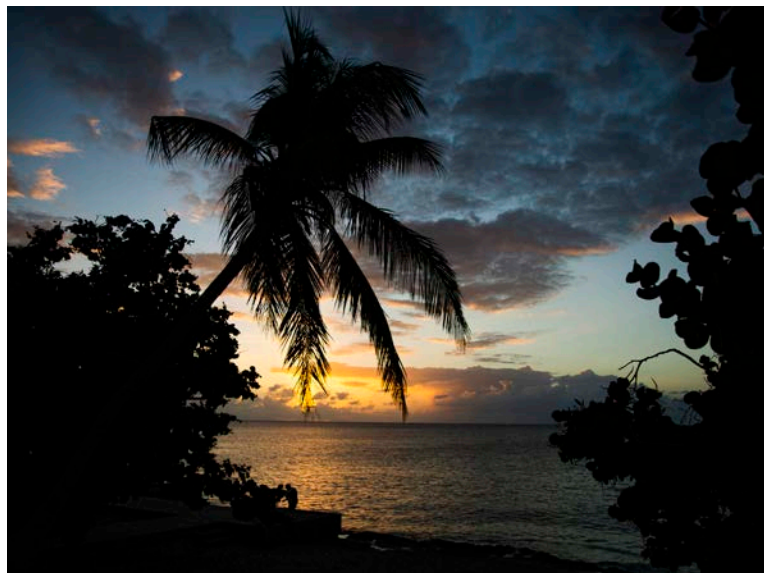






### **Prosperity Bay**

Prosperity Bay, William Beach, commonly known as Rainbow Beach, is known for its stunning sunsets and calm waters, perfect for paddleboarding and kayaking. It features restaurants, watersport rentals, and bathrooms. The beach is primarily sandy but can get slightly rocky on the far sides. It is a popular beach for locals and is often the site of weekend jams.



# Butler Bay

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Butler Bay is a secluded and tranquil beach, offering a remote escape from the crowds often found in more popular spots. The shoreline is known for intriguing rocks and shells, adding to the area's natural charm. There are two Knights of Malta pools at Butler Bay, baths that were hand carved by monks of the Knights of Malta during their reign in the mid-1600s. The highest waterfall on St. Croix is located here. The Butler's Bay Nature Preserve provides a haven for wildlife and visitors seeking a genuine outdoor experience.

There are three shallow shipwrecks in the bay for diving enthusiasts. They include the Suffolk Maid trawler, the Northwind tugboat, and the massive oil barge Virgin Islander. These wrecks have become popular diving spots, allowing divers to explore the intriguing underwater world. Diving is best approached by boat due to the strong currents and the distance from the shore.

Estate Butler's Bay, once known as Bottler's Bay in an attempt to promote agriculture in the area, was once a sugar and rum plantation. Three organizers of the Emancipation Revolt of 1848 were enslaved on the plantation. As such, it was a critical organizing location for emancipation.

The property now houses a villa that integrates the original windmill from the factory into its structure. This unique architectural touch can be found in the villa's "grand salon," bridging the past with the present.

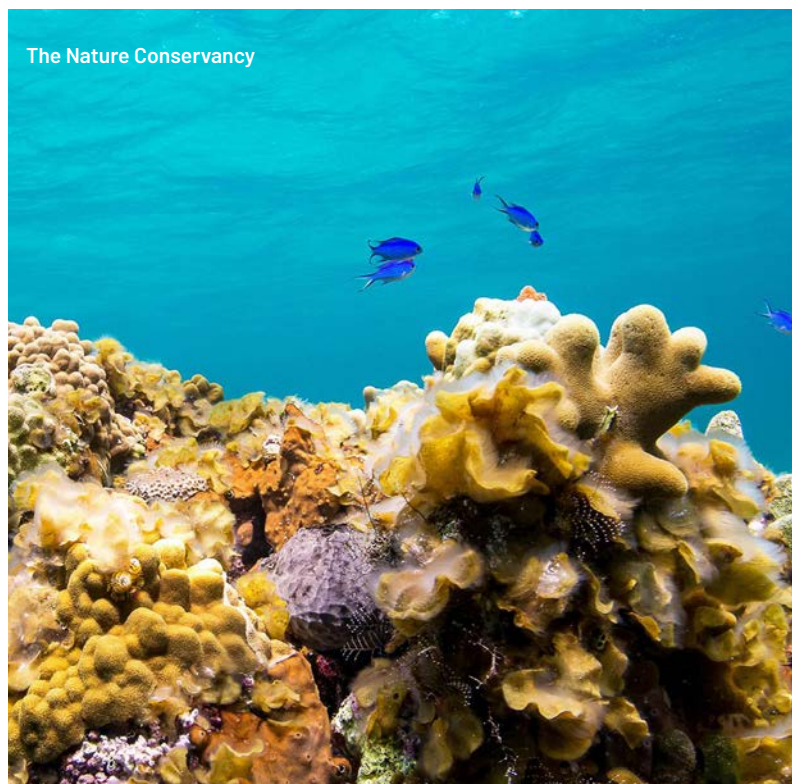
## **Coral Reefs**

Coral reefs in the U.S. Virgin Islands are valued at \$187 Million annually, making them the most economically valuable wildlife feature. Coral reefs provide many services, including biodiversity, fish and invertebrate nourishment and habitat, medicinal value, protection of coastlines, flood protection, creation of sandy beaches, recreation, and tourism. There are 50+ species of stony and soft corals in the U.S. Virgin Islands that need clear water to allow sunlight penetration, stable water temperatures (68° - 90° F), consistent pH levels (8.2 - 8.4 for rapid growth), and good water quality. Threats to coral reefs abound and have resulted in an 80% decline over the last 30+ years. Primary threats include poor water quality that supports algal growth, land and marine-based sources of pollution, unsustainable fishing, stony coral tissue loss disease, and impacts from climate change, including stronger hurricanes, ocean acidification, sea level rise, and increasing ocean temperatures. Conservation priorities include using reef-safe sunscreen, reducing land- and marine-based



pollution sources, education and outreach, increasing enforcement, reducing fishing impacts, and coral restoration.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) began coral restoration work on the island in 2009. Since then, efforts have greatly expanded, with TNC's Coral Innovation Hub officially opening in May of 2022. This new coral aquaculture facility and laboratory, located at Estate Little Princess just west of Christiansted, are dedicated to advancing coral conservation science in the Caribbean and around the globe. Working from this Hub, TNC is conducting large-scale restoration work across nearly 100 acres of reef habitat within the St. Croix East End Marine park, as well as Buck Island Reef National Monument. With new federal funding awards, other institutions are also now conducting coral restoration at Butler Bay on the west coast, and Long Reef just offshore of Christiansted.



# Hams Bluff

## Lighthouse

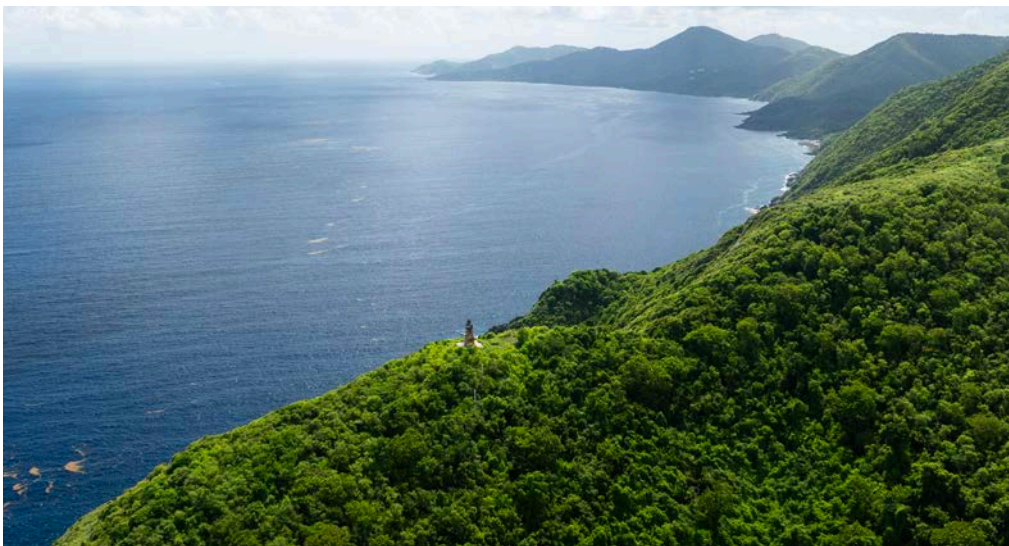
*The Hams Bluff Lighthouse stands as one of the most favored hiking destinations in St. Croix, offering a captivating out-and-back hike of approximately 1.6 miles.*

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he Hams Bluff Lighthouse stands as one of the most favored hiking destinations in St. Croix, offering a captivating out-and-back hike of approximately 1.6 miles. The trek encompasses moderate to steep terrain, promising challenges, and rewarding ocean views for adventurers.

Constructed in 1915 under the custody of the Danish government, the lighthouse once

played a vital role in guiding seafarers through the coastal waters. Despite its historical significance, the lighthouse was not preserved, and its operational days ended in the mid-1900s as a hurricane dealt a blow to the solar-powered lights that once illuminated its beacon. Despite its current state, Hams Bluff Lighthouse continues to capture the imagination of hikers and history enthusiasts, standing as a silent keeper of the island's maritime past.



# Maroon Ridge

*Beyond its historical significance, the northwest watershed area of Maroon Ridge is also ecologically important. It boasts the highest concentration of the VI wild orchid.*

**I**n the northwest corner of St. Croix lies Maroon Ridge, known at the time of the Danish as Maronberg, which served as a refuge for escaped enslaved individuals. The dense tropical forest and steep terrain provided unique geographical protection, a natural hideout for those seeking freedom. The term “Maroon” originates from the Spanish language and refers to escaped enslaved people who established independent communities beyond the reach of colonial authorities.

Maroon Ridge often successfully sheltered these escapees and gained a reputation as a place the Danish authorities did not enter. It was the only region on the island that the colonizers intentionally omitted from the first Danish-commissioned map of St. Croix. This omission reflected the colonizers’ deep-seated fear of encountering the community of

formerly enslaved people inhabiting this area. Their ability to remain hidden was a testament to the strength and solidity of the Maroons, who lived there for 200 years.

Beyond its historical significance, the northwest watershed area of Maroon Ridge is also ecologically important. It boasts the highest concentration of the VI wild orchid. It is home to rare and endangered species, such as the Bridled quail-dove, which faced extinction in the 1800s and is now found in specific habitats on St. Croix. Recognizing the historical and ecological value of Maroon Ridge, there is an ongoing local initiative to establish a U.S. Virgin Island Territorial park in this region. The primary goal is to protect the Maroon communities’ historical legacy and the area’s natural vulnerability from potential development. This initiative is a commitment to preserving the rich tapestry of St. Croix’s history and its unique ecological heritage for generations to come.



# Wells Bay

## *Tide Pools*

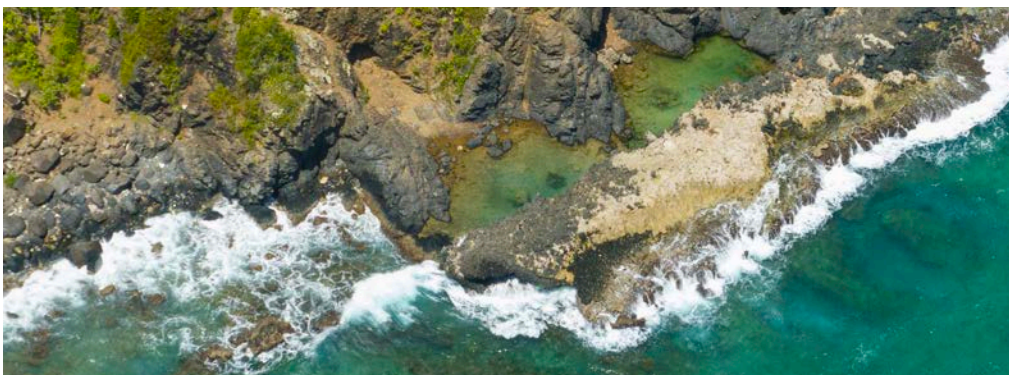
*With its blend of breathtaking natural features and a historical past intertwined with freedom and resilience, Wells Bay Tide Pools stands as a place of awe and reflection.*



Wells Bay Tide Pool, known as Annaly Tidepool, is accessible via the Carambola Trumbull Trail, a challenging 4-mile out-and-back hike commencing at the Carambola Resort.

While not suited for beginners due to the terrain, this trip promises a rewarding experience. Enter the tide pools at your own risk, as conditions may be hazardous. Use extreme caution and check the weather, high waves can take this from a fun and challenging hike to a dangerous one. The allure of the tidepools is accentuated by the frequent occurrence of small waterfalls created by the crashing waves. The tidepools were formed from a reef system embedded on black Caledonia volcanic bedrock, creating an extensive barrier reef network.

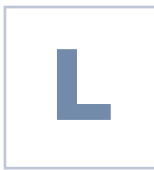
Beyond its natural beauty, Wells Bay Tide Pools harbor a significant historical narrative. There is a sugar mill visible from the water at Wells Bay Estate. This area, including Annaly Bay and the rugged slopes of the island's northwest corner, provided refuge for escaped enslaved individuals seeking freedom. The unforgiving mountainous terrain was a protective cloak for those who sought to evade captivity and eventually leave the island. With its blend of breathtaking natural features and a historical past intertwined with freedom and resilience, Wells Bay Tide Pools stands as a place of awe and reflection.





# Cane Bay

*Cane Bay stands as a multifaceted haven where, above and below the waterline, natural beauty and recreational opportunities combine to create a memorable experience for all who visit.*



Cane Bay offers visitors a diverse array of activities and attractions. Adjacent to the beach are water equipment rental shops, restaurants, and boutiques. The sandy shoreline invites relaxation and enjoyment.

What sets Cane Bay apart is its stunning underwater realm. The Cane Bay Wall is a breathtaking underwater feature; the seafloor plunges from 40 feet to an astounding depth of over 13,200 feet, making it one of the Caribbean's premier dive and snorkel destinations. Artifacts, including swivel cannons and bronze spikes from deck beams have been found in Cane Bay, said to be from the last pirate ship fleeing St. Croix in 1750. After departing from Salt River Bay, the crew learned their Danish allies had betrayed them. The Danish realized they could make more money in the sugar industry and no longer needed to rely on the resale of pirate cargo for profits. This betrayal also prevented conflict with Spain, whose boats were often pillaged by the Danish allied pirates. In an attempt to save their own lives, it is believed the crew ran their ship aground in Cane Bay and abandoned it to escape on land.

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# Salt River Bay

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alt River Bay carries a profound archeological legacy. It was once inhabited by three distinct Amerindian Arawak subgroups, the Igneri, Taino, and Kalinago people, until their tragic demise following European explorers' arrival and subsequent colonization.

The Igneri were known as skilled farmers and fishermen, and the first group descended from Arawak native people to settle in Salt River Bay after migrating from South America in 100 AD. The second group to inhabit Salt River Bay was the Taino, also descended from the Arawak and known for developing a universal language. They migrated to what is now the U.S. Virgin Islands in 700 AD and progressively dominated the existing Taino civilization. This integration was possible due to the Taino's status as a more advanced society and the shared Arawak culture between the two peoples. Both possessed a common belief in a powerful spiritual presence in Salt River Bay and worshiped comparable deities. To honor and appease their various gods, the Taino

engaged in a game where teams used multiple body parts to propel a ball through the air into hoops without using their feet and hands. This competition occurred in a Ceremonial Ball Court, also known as a batey, which served as a recreational and spiritual area for playing the game. The Taino Ball Court of Salt River Bay was trimmed in stones etched with symbols and is the only batey to be discovered in the Lesser Antilles. This game originated in Mesoamerica, present-day central and southern Mexico, and several Central American countries.

In 1425, a final group of Arawak migrated to Salt River Bay. They were known as the Kalina people. Upon arrival, they enslaved the Taino and implemented their political structure, primarily based on warfare performance.



Salt River Bay was also the site where Columbus's second voyage made landfall on November 14, 1493, making it the only place where expedition members came ashore on what is today considered U.S. Territory. Columbus declared the area one of the finest hurricane holes he



had ever witnessed, mainly due to the shelter provided by mangroves and deep pockets of the bay. During their time ashore, looking to resupply their resources, members of the expedition party freed enslaved Taino people, prompting the Kalinago people to attack the Spanish foreigners. This conflict marked the location of the first documented armed resistance by indigenous people to the colonizing European powers and is known as the “Cape of Arrows.” By 1590, all the Kalinago and other indigenous people were gone from St. Croix due to European enslavement, massacre, and diseases. During the Danish occupation of St. Croix, archaeologists transported all unearthed artifacts found at the Salt River Bay site to Copenhagen in 1923, where the majority of them remain.

Today there is a full-service marina and adjacent hotel and restaurant.

### **Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve**

Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve was established by Congress in 1992 to protect the area’s history and delicate ecosystems. Jointly managed by the Territorial Government and the National Park Service, the preserve has the remains of ancient ruins alongside endangered wildlife, offering

a unique glimpse into the past and the present. While the visitor center is currently closed due to the damage from Hurricane Maria, Salt River Bay remains a place of wonder and discovery.

### **Bioluminescence**

St. Croix boasts two bioluminescent bays, Salt River Bay and Altona Lagoon. There are only 14 known persistent biobays globally. This rare phenomenon is caused by an abundance of naturally occurring microorganisms called dinoflagellates. Bioluminescence is the result of a chemical reaction that produces light occurring inside an organism. Deep sea creatures, some plankton, fireflies, and glow worms exhibit this unique behavior. When kayaking through the bio bays, the movement of the kayak and paddle through the water makes the dinoflagellates light up. The presence of red mangrove trees as well as specific parameters are necessary for bioluminescence: prolonged water retention time, nutrient availability, shallow basin bathymetry, and limited tidal range. Avoid wearing sunscreen and introducing pollutants to these waters to preserve this unique phenomenon.

# Christiansted

## St. Croix

Christiansted, the largest town on St. Croix, has a rich history dating back to its establishment in 1735. Built on the former French Village of Bassin, the town derives its name from King Christian VI of Denmark.

**C**hristiansted, the largest town on St. Croix, has a rich history dating back to its establishment in 1735. Built on the former French Village of Bassin, the town derives

its name from King Christian VI of Denmark, from the days of Danish colonial occupation. One of the town's most striking features is its architecture, characterized by stone buildings in varying pastels with red tile roofs that can be seen from the water. What makes Christiansted's architecture genuinely unique is the African influence. Much of the construction labor was done by enslaved Africans, making it one of the only towns in the world with buildings of African-Danish influence.

### Christiansted National Historic Site

Christiansted is home to the Christiansted National Historic Site, established in 1952 as the first unit of the National Park Service in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Covering over seven acres, this park tells captivating stories of the Danish economy, ways of life, and the intricate



interactions between people from Europe, Africa, the West Indies, and North America during the Danish era of occupation of the Virgin Islands (1734-1917).

### Fort Christianvaern

At the heart of Christiansted stands Fort Christiansvaern, a Danish colonial fortification with a commanding yellow presence at the entrance to Christiansted harbor. Its primary purpose was to protect shipping from foreign attacks, privateers, and pirates. The fort played multifaceted roles, including enforcing customs duties, housing prisoners, and quartering Danish troops responsible for the island's internal security. Construction began in 1738 and was mostly completed by 1749, with enslaved Africans and conscripted Danish soldiers providing the labor. Notably, the fort has remained remarkably protected, making it one of the best-preserved colonial forts in the Caribbean. It's also the oldest structure in Christiansted, with a uniquely peaceful history as its cannons and guns have never been fired in armed conflict. Over time, the fort served various purposes, including as an island courthouse, prison, and a place for religious services.



### **Steeple Building**

Originally constructed on the remains of a French building, the Steeple Building, also known as The Church of Our Lord God of Sabaoth, was the first established Lutheran church in Christiansted. Construction commenced in 1750, and the steeple was added in 1794. The building's history is notable for its inclusivity, as it allowed numerous religious organizations, including those with members of African descent, to rent the space for their services. In 1831, the building shifted from religious to secular use, serving as a military bakery, warehouse, community hall, hospital, elementary school, and now a museum. The National Park Service has meticulously restored the building, replicating the original church pews and pulpit while restoring the clock tower using parts from Fort Frederik's sister clock.

### **Scale House & Customs House**

The Scale House, situated on the wharf, played a crucial role in inspecting and weighing imports and exports to and from St. Croix, overseeing the flow of goods into and out of Christiansted. The first floor housed an office and a 19th-century scale, while the second floor accommodated Danish soldiers. The Customs House, constructed on a former sugar and slave trading site in 1840, was employed by the Danish colonial government to collect customs revenues, duties, and taxes. Positioned strategically between the wharf, Scale House, and Danish West India & Guinea Company Warehouse, it played a central role in supporting trade transactions throughout the colony. Later, it served as the U.S. Virgin Islands' first public library from 1926-1972, and after restoration following Hurricane Omar in 2008, it now houses management offices for the park. These buildings collectively reflect the town's economic and administrative history.



# Protestant Cay

*Today, a hotel and resort inhabit the cay, providing a modern contrast to its historical narrative.*

**T**he history of Protestant Cay, a cay within Christiansted Harbor, is intricately intertwined with its name. Legend states that during the Catholic French colonial control of St. Croix from 1650 to 1696, the Catholic population outnumbered the Protestants. This significant religious imbalance resulted in a practice where only Catholics were permitted burial on the main island of St. Croix. Protestants and individuals of other faiths were laid

to rest on the aptly named Protestant Cay. The Danish constructed Fort Sophia Frederika, named after a princess in their royal house, in the 1780s on the eastern point of the cay and used it to watch for smuggling vessels.

The cay is easily accessible via a brief 5-minute voyage running from downtown Christiansted and is also home to the endemic St. Croix Ground Lizard. Today, a hotel and resort inhabit the cay, providing a modern contrast to its historical narrative.





# Gallows Bay

*Gallows Bay, situated just off Christiansted, is a hub of commerce and activity that has evolved from its origins as a fishing village.*

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allows Bay, situated just off Christiansted, is a hub of commerce and activity that has evolved from its origins as a fishing village. Here, visitors and residents can find

a variety of amenities, including restaurants, a post office, and other essential services. The area encompasses five streets: Hospital, Lagoon, Lobster, Garden, and Green, each contributing to the vibrant character of the bay.

Traditional fishing practices still thrive in Gallows Bay, a testament to its historical significance as a fishing center. At one point, it was estimated that one-third of St. Croix's fishing activity occurred here. The bay's transformation from a fishing village to a commercial hotspot peaked around 1794, featuring wharfs, docks, and warehouses. Gallows Bay incurred

significant damage during the 1867 Virgin Island Tsunami, where the waves destroyed twenty homes and beached many boats, harming the area's fishing and commercial capacity.

The intriguing name of Gallows Bay is rooted in its history as a site for punishing severe crimes. Notably, three locations of gallows were established here due to the swampy nature of the bay's terrain. Death at the gallows was the penalty for crimes such as treason, murder, and marronage (escaping slavery). However, the gallows were abolished in 1848 with the removal of capital punishment, marking a significant shift in the bay's historical legacy. Today, Gallows Bay is a dynamic blend of its rich past and present-day vitality, offering a unique insight into the island's history and modern life.







# Altona Lagoon

*The ecological value of the Lagoon includes outstanding mangroves, fish nurseries, bird habitats, and bioluminescence.*

**T**

he area adjacent to the entrance of Altona Lagoon boasts a public park, dock, walking trails, playground, and fitness area. The ecological value of the Lagoon includes

outstanding mangroves, fish nurseries, bird habitats, and bioluminescence.

Fort Louise Augusta, located on the point to the east of Altona Lagoon, was built as a battery by the British. Expanded on and renamed by various powers, including the French, who called it Fort St. Jean, the Danish renamed it after a princess in the Danish royal house. Over time, barracks were added in the late 1700s and a lighthouse station was established in the mid-1800s, though the light has been inactive since the 1930s. St. Croix's first radio station was later housed in the barracks, making a significant impact on the lives of Crucians.

## **Martel Bay**

The entrance of Altona Lagoon is nestled in Martel Bay, known for its history and natural beauty. The bay is known for the enchanting Mermaid Beach as its main shoreline attraction. Martel Bay holds a story dating back to 1653 when Charles Martel, a knight of Malta, constructed the first French Great House along its shores. This building's purpose shifted when Danish assumed control in 1733, transforming it into a sugar mill before transitioning to cotton production. Over the years, Martel Bay has witnessed various endeavors,

from cattle raising to its eventual transformation into a hotel in 1947. Today, it is a charming and historically rich destination where the echoes of the past merge with the modern comforts of the present-day hotel.

## **Beauregard Bay**

Also located outside Altona Lagoon, Beauregard Bay is much larger than Martel. It is home to Grotto Beach, the bay's prominent stretch of shoreline. However, access to the beach can be challenging due to a substantial reef that partially blocks the way. Visitors often find the most accessible entry point through the adjacent hotel, providing a path to explore the bay's serene waters and enchanting surroundings.



# Green Cay

*Green Cay is a testament to conservation efforts in the Virgin Islands, with the Green Cay National Wildlife Refuge established in 1977*

**G**

Green Cay is a testament to conservation efforts in the Virgin Islands, with the Green Cay National Wildlife Refuge established in 1977. Encompassing 14 acres, and home to a pre-Columbian site, this island refuge is a sanctuary for the St. Croix Ground Lizard, a highly endangered species. The White Crown Pigeon was plentiful on Green Cay in the 1970s. The refuge is not open to the public, as its primary aim is to protect and preserve this vulnerable lizard population and its habitat.

In an attempt to control the rat population infesting sugar plantations around the island, Asian mongooses were introduced to St. Croix in 1884. Unfortunately, the mongoose destroyed the Ground Lizard population and the rats, leading to a complete disappearance of Ground Lizards from the main island. The Ground Lizard is categorized as one of the rarest lizards in the world. They were only found on Green and Protestant Cay until efforts were successfully made to reintroduce the species on Ruth Cay and Buck Island. The population grew from around 300 lizards to 2,000 between all four islands.

### **Endemic & Invasive Species**

Endemic species like the St. Croix Ground Lizard are native to an area and adapt and evolve over millennia to their local environments. When a new predatory species is introduced, like mongoose, pigs or dogs, these endemic

species do not have any avoidance or defense mechanisms. The St. Croix Ground Lizard, the Virgin Islands Tree Boa, and St. Croix Agave are examples of species endemic to the U.S. Virgin Islands that are threatened by invasive species. A new invasive fish species to the Caribbean, the red lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) which is native to the Pacific, is wreaking havoc on native fish populations. There are ways to join conservation efforts to combat invasive species. Volunteers can join local organizations in bird surveys and reporting the location of lionfish. Fishers and divers can join lionfish derbies and hunts to reduce invasive lionfish numbers. Ordering lionfish at a local establishment encourages restaurants to offer lionfish on the menu!



# Southgate Coastal Reserve

*Southgate Coastal Reserve is for nature enthusiasts and those seeking education and recreation*

**E**

Established in 2000, the Southgate Coastal Reserve is for nature enthusiasts and those seeking education and recreation. Managed by the St. Croix Environmental Association, the reserve offers a range of opportunities, including open-access trails, benches and picnic tables. Learn about the area and its flora and fauna from educational signage and bird-watching tours guided by experts. A designated bird blind provides the perfect vantage point for observing the vibrant avian life that thrives within its boundaries. Spanning a sprawling 100 acres, the reserve embraces diverse ecosystems, from the coastal salt pond to the flourishing mangrove forest, beach forest, and upland grassland.

The reserve's significance extends beyond its varied landscapes, as it serves as a critical nesting ground for Hawksbill, Leatherback,

and Green Sea Turtles. These remarkable creatures, classified as threatened or endangered, find solace and a safe space to lay their eggs along the beach berm of the reserve, contributing to sea turtle conservation efforts

## **Birds of Southgate**

Southgate Pond and surrounding wetlands provide habitat for 100+ resident and migrant bird and duck species, several of which are classified as threatened or endangered. A fraction of the birds that call the reserve home include Bananaquits, Ospreys, Blue Herons, Snowy and Great Egrets, Pelicans, Least Terns, White-cheeked Pintails, and Stilt Sandpipers. Conservation efforts are underway to conduct bird counts and assess and restore coastal wetlands and habitats around the U.S. Virgin Islands. Visit Southgate to enjoy, observe, and learn about birds and local conservation efforts!



Yellow Warbler



# Buck Island

*Buck Island, initially established as the ‘Buck Island National Reef Monument’ in 1948, is a testament to conservation efforts in the U.S. Virgin Islands.*

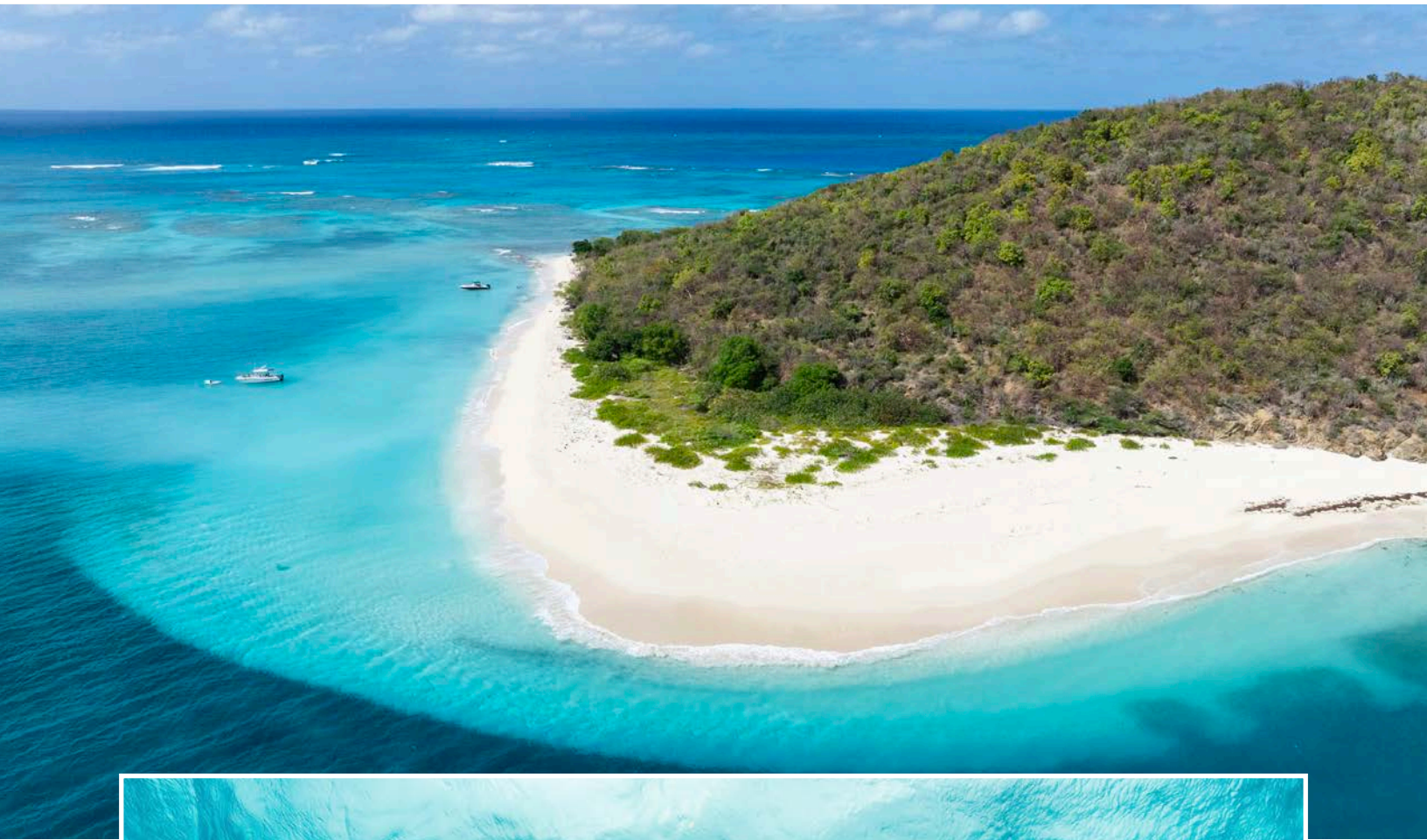
**B**uck Island, initially established as the ‘Buck Island National Reef Monument’ in 1948, is a testament to conservation efforts in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Encompassing more than 19,000+ acres, this protected area includes the island and the surrounding underwater habitat. It is a haven for endangered plants and diverse wildlife, notably as a nesting site for Brown Pelicans and the threatened Least Terns bird. A sea turtle monitoring program is run by the National Park Service. Bestowed with the prestigious U.S. National Monument designation, Buck Island and its encompassing underwater landscape have earned recognition as “one of the finest marine gardens in the Caribbean Sea.”

A landmark expansion occurred in 2001 when President Clinton extended the protected area to incorporate the reef encircling Buck Island. This move elevated the site to one of the few fully safeguarded marine environments within the U.S. National Park System. Local companies offer day charters to Buck Island. Two 18th Century slaver ships, Mary and General Abercrombie, sank off the coast of Buck Island. An underwater snorkeling trail awaits on the eastern reef with informative plaques, offering insights into the marine flora and fauna. Unfortunately, the once healthy coral on this underwater trail has been compromised by over-visitation and coral-damaging

sunscreens that contain oxybenzone. A hiking trail connects the two beaches. Buck Island showcases the profound harmony between conservation, education, and appreciation for the unparalleled marine wonder it encapsulates.



Brown Pelican



# Teague Bay

*Shallow waters invite snorkeling; the bay caters to wind and kite surfers. Ample parking is available with limited crowds.*

**T**

Teague Bay is home to the St. Croix Yacht Club which offers services and shoreline restaurant dining. Sandy areas provide relaxation with some occasional seaweed. A

barrier reef protects the long stretch of beach from rough waters. Shallow waters invite snorkeling; the bay caters to wind and kite surfers. Ample parking is available with limited crowds. Teague Bay is located within the St. Croix East End Marine Park.

The West Indies Lab was a successful conservation research institution located adjacent to Teague Bay. In 1970, Farleigh Dickinson Jr. donated around 200 acres of property to create a marine research and education center. Dickenson was a twentieth-century visionary, New York State Senator, and co-founder of the Fairleigh Dickinson University. Given his enthusiasm for ecology and scientific research, the West Indies Lab opened in 1972 and excelled in marine research and education for almost two decades before shutting down following Hurricane Hugo.





# East End Marine Park

*The St. Croix East End Marine Park (EEMP) is a multi-use Marine Protected Area (MPA), managed by the Coastal Zone Management Division of the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources.*

T

he St. Croix East End Marine Park (EEMP) is a multi-use Marine Protected Area (MPA), managed by the Coastal Zone Management Division of the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Established in 2003 to protect the largest island barrier reef system in the Caribbean, the mission of the EEMP is to manage the natural, cultural, and environmental resources within the boundaries of the Park. The EEMP envelops the eastern end of St. Croix from Green Cay on the north shore to Great Pond Bay on the south and includes 60 square miles of water along 17 miles of shoreline.

Marine protected areas are essential for fisheries management in today's world, where ocean habitats and species are subject to various threats. Closed areas provide safe havens for juvenile and adult fish, using those habitats for all or part of their life cycle. Fish and invertebrates moving from closed areas provide replenishment to fished areas elsewhere.

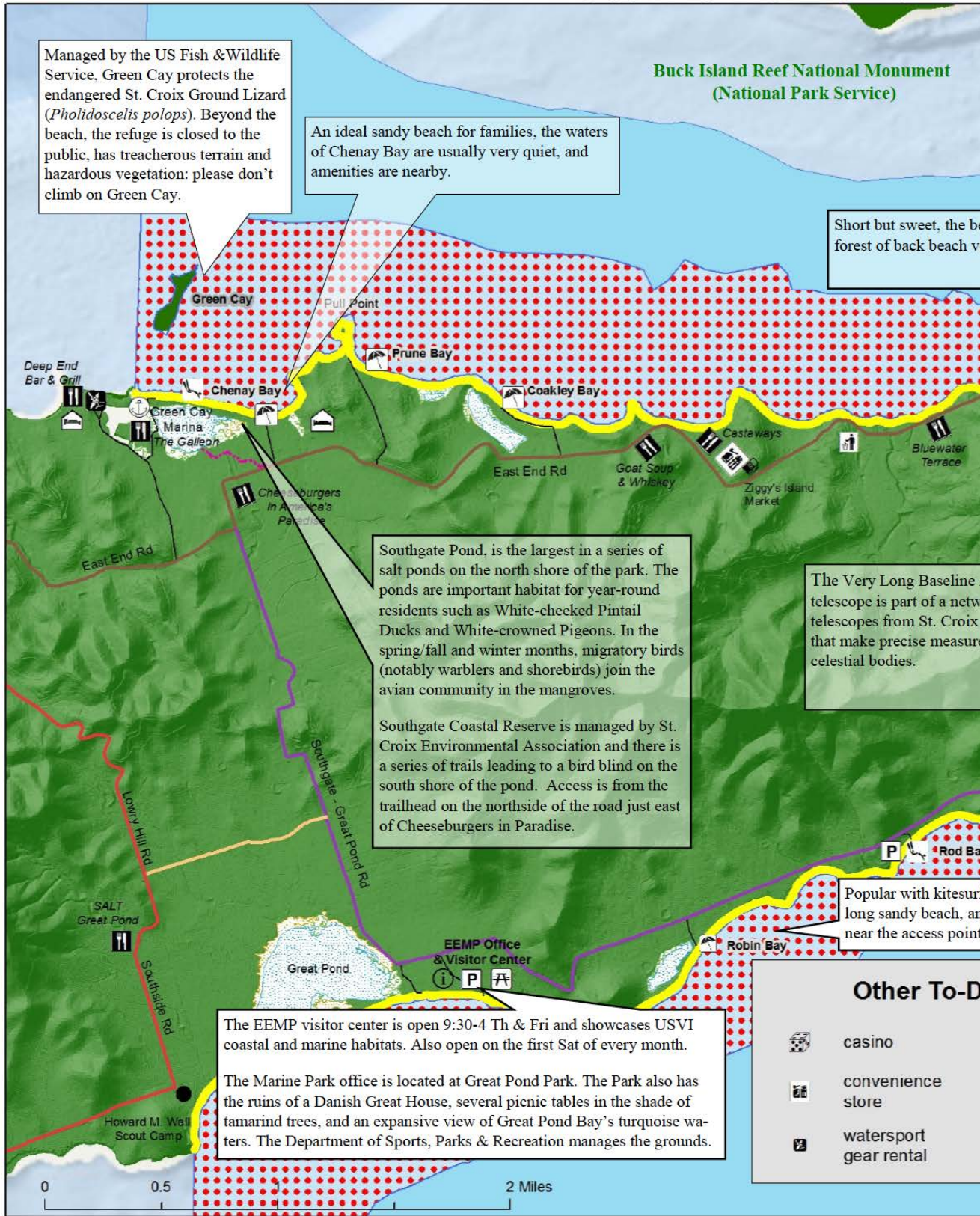
The Park works with stakeholders large and small to ensure their actions and activities comply with existing laws and regulations and have a low impact on our marine environment and shoreline habitats. Note that spearfishing and harvesting of lobster, conch, whelks, and octopus are strictly prohibited year-round

throughout the marine park, regardless of season. Fishing from a vessel is also prohibited and only allowed within the "open zones" of the parks boundaries.

The friendly East End Marine Park staff and office provide education and outreach opportunities to the community. To learn more and get involved, stop by the office to view cool exhibits, check the schedule for fun events, or join a community beach clean-up.



# East End Marine Park



# Recreational Map

Cramer's Park has lifeguards on duty Wed-Sun as well as amenities such as picnic tables, restrooms and pavilions.

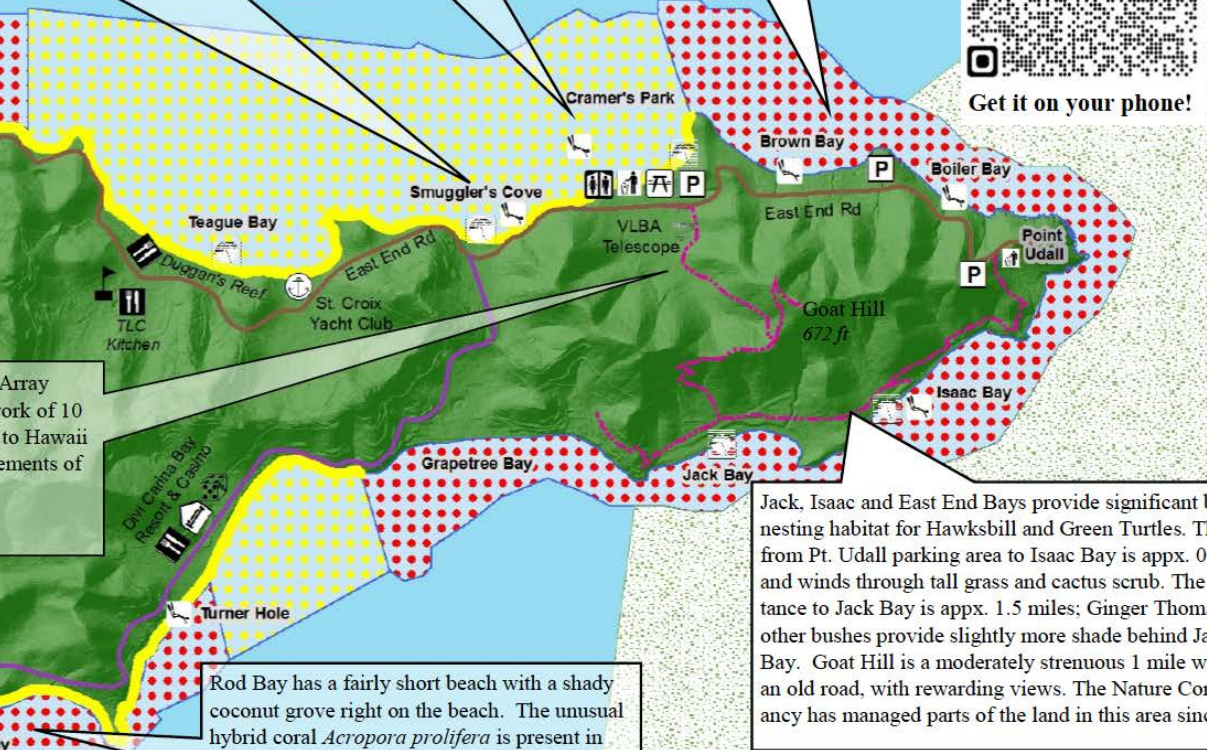
If you are an advanced snorkeler, check with the Park about touring our coral nursery!

Boiler and Brown Bays can be accessed from the same dirt parking lot. Both have some good snorkeling, but can be challenging, particularly in rough seas. Brown Bay can also have a strong current which may carry you to the west so be aware of your surroundings at all times. Be alert for sea urchins on entry and exit.

Beach at Smuggler's Cove has a small vegetation.



Get it on your phone!



Array of 10 to Hawaii elements of

Jack, Isaac and East End Bays provide significant beach nesting habitat for Hawksbill and Green Turtles. The hike from Pt. Udall parking area to Isaac Bay is appx. 0.5 mile, and winds through tall grass and cactus scrub. The distance to Jack Bay is appx. 1.5 miles; Ginger Thomas and other bushes provide slightly more shade behind Jack Bay. Goat Hill is a moderately strenuous 1 mile walk up an old road, with rewarding views. The Nature Conservancy has managed parts of the land in this area since 1999.

Rod Bay has a fairly short beach with a shady coconut grove right on the beach. The unusual hybrid coral *Acropora prolifera* is present in the waters of Rod Bay.

ers, Robin Bay has a small salt pond

## Park Regulatory Zones

- Shoreline Line Fishing
- No Take
- Recreation
- Open
- Sea Turtle Preserve

## Natural Highlights

- recommended snorkeling site
- recommended beach
- hiking trail
- salt pond

- golf
- hotel
- marina

Esri, DeLorme, GEBCO, NOAA NGDC, and other contributors

# Cotton Garden Bay

*Positioned along the northern shoreline of St. Croix, within the St. Croix East End Marine Park, Cotton Garden Bay and Cramer's Park present a family-friendly destination*

**P**ositioned along the northern shoreline of St. Croix, within the St. Croix East End Marine Park, Cotton Garden Bay and Cramer's Park present a family-friendly destination. The public park, named after Governor Lawrence Cramer, offers camping, restrooms, grills, picnic tables, and a peaceful environment for residents and tourists alike. Cotton Garden

Bay and Cramer's Park with gentle, shallow waters offer a welcoming haven for all.

Next to the park is an observing station, one of ten making up the Very Long Baseline Array telescope network. This dish antenna works to collect radio waves from cosmic objects and, when combined with the other nine observing stations, makes the nation's most advanced telescope.



# Point Udall

*The westernmost point of the United States, located in Guam, is also named Point Udall, after Stewart's brother Morris Udall.*

**P**

oint Udall offers a unique experience, as it is the easternmost tip of the United States. Located within the St. Croix East End Marine Park, Point Udall is named after

Stewart Udall, former United States Secretary of the Interior under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Interestingly, the westernmost point of the United States, located in Guam, is also named Point Udall, after Stewart's brother Morris Udall.

The Millenium Monument, a remarkable sundial, was erected above Point Udall for the New Year's celebration in 2000.



# Jack & Isaac Bay Preserve

*Great opportunities for snorkeling and swimming enthusiasts, inviting them to explore the underwater wonders amidst the protected surroundings.*

**T**

he Jack and Isaac Bay Preserve, established in 1999 by The Nature Conservancy, spans 300 acres of diverse landscapes, including forested hills and sandy beaches. The Nature Conservancy has been protecting endemic endangered plant species, removing invasive plants and mongoose, and monitoring and protecting sea turtles nesting in these bays for many years.

Accessible from the parking lot at Point Udall or the west side of Jacks Bay, a hiking trail leads into the preserve and along the pristine shores of Isaac Bay and Jack Bay. These remote beaches, reachable by foot and located within the protected waters of the STXEEMP, provide great opportunities for snorkeling and swimming enthusiasts, inviting them to explore the underwater wonders amidst the protected surroundings.





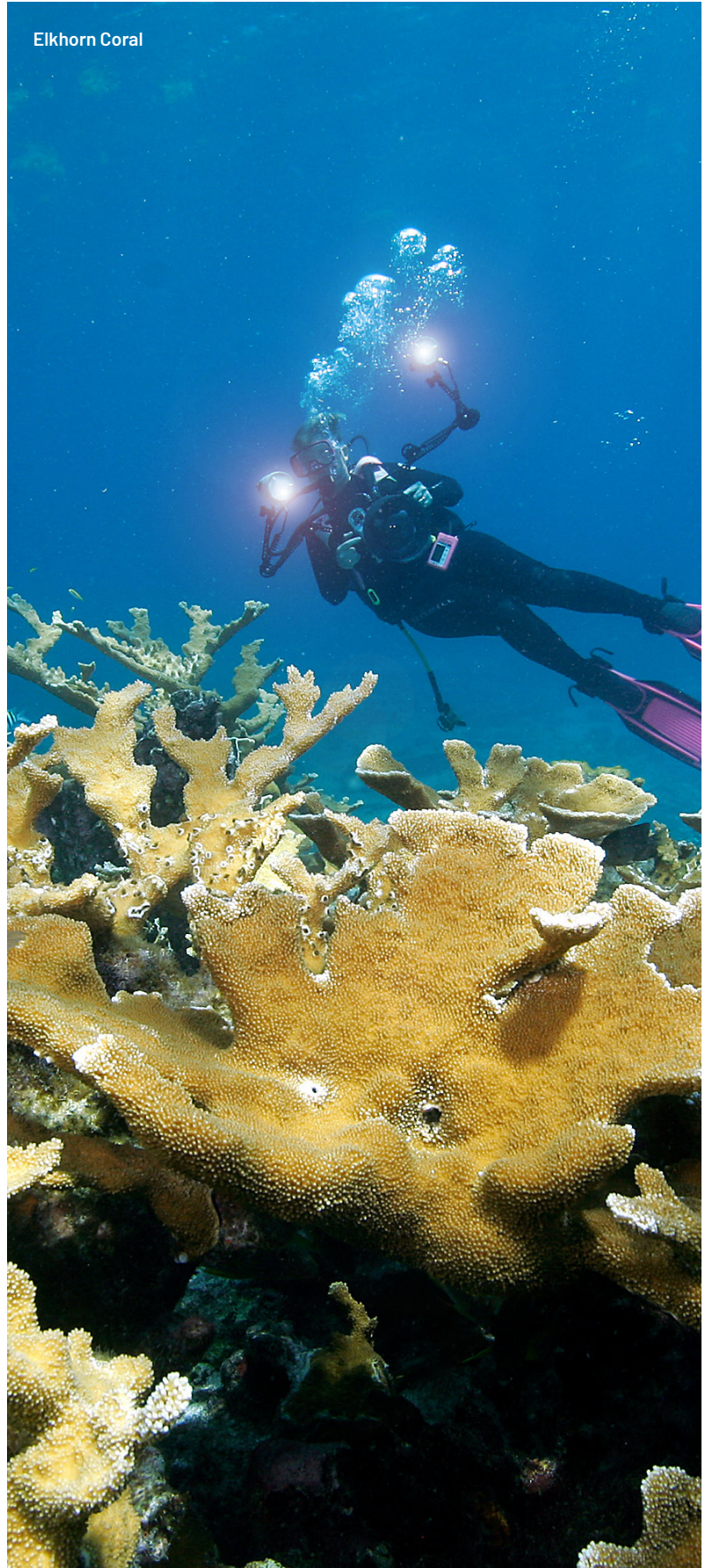
Green Turtle

### Green and Hawksbill Sea Turtles

The critically endangered Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and endangered Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) forage in the waters and nest on the sandy beaches in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Named for the shape of their curved, pointed beaks, Hawksbills are more reef-associated than other species of sea turtles, feeding on sponges and other invertebrates growing on coral reefs. Greens are distinct amongst sea turtles for several reasons: Greens are the largest hard-shelled sea turtles and are herbivores, feeding mostly on seagrasses and algae, a diet that gives their fat a greenish color, the origin of their name. Threats to sea turtles include artificial lighting, erosion, erosion control, sand mining, beach nourishment, development, recreational equipment and driving on the beach, disturbance while nesting, predators such as mongoose, pollution, collisions with boats, hunting, egg harvesting, and incidental capture in fishing gear (bycatch). A success story exists on St. Croix - after TNC established the Jack and Issac Bay preserve and launched its sea turtle protection and monitoring initiative. The number of green sea turtle nesting females rose significantly by removing threats and allowing the population to recover.



Hawksbill Turtle



Elkhorn Coral

# Great Pond Bay

*The Great Salt Pond has traditionally been a vital habitat for numerous marine species, offering a space for feeding, resting, reproduction, and maturation.*

**T**he Great Salt Pond has traditionally been a vital habitat for numerous marine species, offering a space for feeding, resting, reproduction, and maturation. This mangrove-rich area provided shelter and nurturing conditions for reef fish within the protective embrace of the mangrove trees' roots and shade.

Crucians have historically utilized Great Salt Pond as a fishing, crabbing, and salt-gathering location. There is also an existing collection of rocks that formed a pre-Columbian fish pond.

Unfortunately, the Great Salt Pond faces considerable challenges. Great Pond was once a healthy wetland area comprising a mangrove

lagoon near the mouth, a shallow basin near the center, and mudflats surrounded by coastal vegetation. The mangroves experienced a significant die-off beginning in 2015, potentially due to drought, and Hurricane Maria's impact exacerbated the damage. The mangrove-lined channel, which once supplied the pond with its saltwater input, has also closed up due to sand accumulation and the buildup of other organic debris. Mangroves are famously tolerant of variable conditions, but a leading hypothesis is that the extreme drought in 2015 stressed these trees to the breaking point.

Efforts are underway by DPNR and UVI to further study these changes and understand the hydrology of this culturally and ecologically significant salt pond.





# Krause Lagoon

*Krause Lagoon was once the site of the largest mangrove wetland in the US Virgin Islands.*

**T**

he French initially named Krause Lagoon Point du Pais-Perdu during their occupation of St. Croix in 1650. Translated, this means lost-land point, referring to the

blurred point at which land becomes sea due to the presence of mangrove roots reaching beyond the shore and into the ocean.

Krause Lagoon was once the site of the largest mangrove wetland in the US Virgin Islands. This area underwent drastic development during the early 1960s when it was dredged and partially filled to pave the way for the south shore industrial port, including an oil refinery and an aluminum plant. This process was heavily subsidized and supported by the Virgin Islands government as part of a push for an economic transition from an agricultural

economy to an industrial one. At the time, many Crucians relied on agrarian work, resulting in many local farmers protesting the systematic economic change that would put them out of work.

This transformation also had significant ecological consequences, affecting the natural habitat of the area and causing disruption to the local ecosystem. The Lagoon was once a sanctuary for various bird species, particularly the White-Crowned Pigeon, locally known as the Blue Pigeon; this region hosted abundant breeding grounds pre-industrialization. The recent decline in the numbers of the White-Crowned Pigeon has led to their classification as an endangered species, highlighting the importance of preserving and restoring the delicate balance of this now-altered environment.



# Sandy Point

*There are many activities to do at Sandy Point; fishing is offered every Thursday when the beach is open, and observation is available via the bird blind.*

**F**eaturing the longest continuous beach (3km) in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Sandy Point is known for its peaceful and protected shores. There is no reef here, making the nearby beachfront water deep and sandy, ideal for nesting sea turtles; however, beach access and anchoring are limited. In its renowned history, Sandy Point was a temporary Maroon refuge. Sandy Point was also the chosen location for the final beach scene of the film *Shawshank Redemption*. There are many activities to do at Sandy Point; fishing is offered every Thursday when the beach is open, and observation is available via the bird blind.

## **Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge**

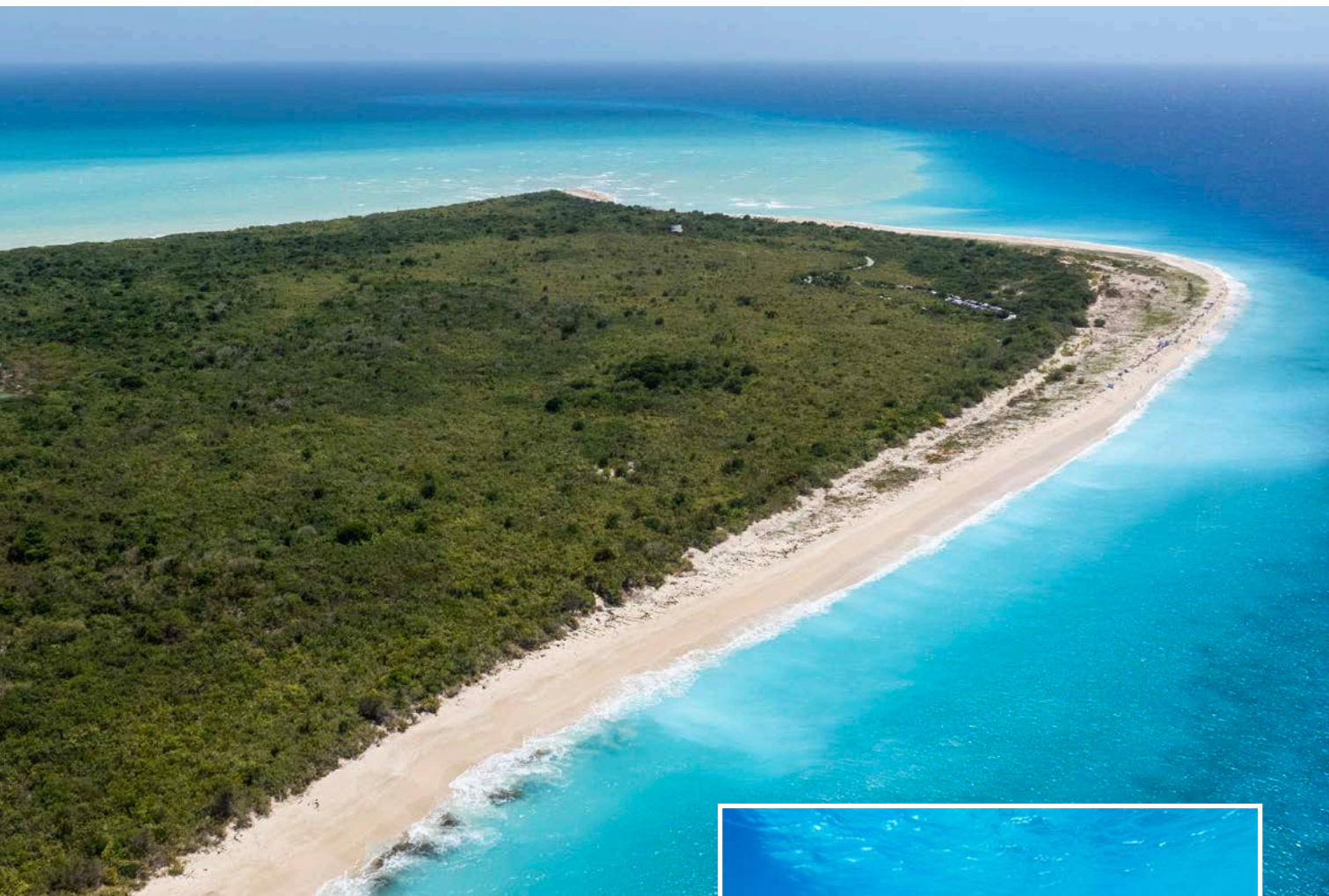
The Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge, founded in 1984 and totaling 383 acres, is home to federally and locally endangered plant species, hosts a bird blind, and is a critical nesting site for endangered sea turtles. Volunteers annually participate in guided educational sea turtle nesting and hatching programs, learning more about the Leatherback Turtles' habitat and how to protect it. Due to the environmental vulnerability of the area, there are restrictions regarding beach access and anchoring. The refuge is only open to the public on weekends and completely closed annually from the start of April to the end of August to avoid disturbing nesting turtles. The

goals of these efforts include protecting and monitoring sea turtles through a turtle watch and including the community in the conservation of the turtles and habitats.

## **Aklis Pre-Historic Archaeological Site**

The Aklis Site dates back to 200 - 400 A.D. and has yielded artifacts, including tools made from conch shells and bone, pottery, and ceramic bowls. In 1997, research was conducted at the Aklis, following Hurricane Hugo in 1989, in which strong waves exposed artifact concentrations, prompting protective measures of the site by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. The subsequent study of the unearthed area focused on analyzing traits of the found ceramics. To better categorize the area's cultural phases, the attributes of the Aklis ceramics were compared to other known styles in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.





### Leatherback Sea Turtle

Named for its tough, rubbery skin, the federally endangered Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is the largest of the sea turtles. Leatherbacks are deep divers, recorded at nearly 4,000 feet, and highly migratory, capable of migrating over 4800 km. Found seasonally in the U.S. Virgin Islands, most leatherback nesting occurs between April and June on Sandy Point. Unfortunately, the nesting season has shrunk as the population dwindles. The beach is located adjacent to the marine shelf edge, enabling the leatherbacks to avoid predators by swimming in deep water directly up to the beach. Feeding primarily on gelatinous organisms, such as jellyfish, turtles are also subject to ingesting plastic debris. Additional threats to sea turtles include artificial lighting, erosion, erosion control, sand mining, beach nourishment, development, recreational equipment and driving on the beach, disturbance while nesting, predators such as mongoose, pollution, collisions with boats, hunting, egg harvesting, and incidental capture in fishing gear (bycatch). Conservation priorities include habitat protection, sea turtle monitoring, research, enforcement, limiting plastic marine debris, and outreach to the community.



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# 2024 Coastal Curriculum Guide

an Ecological and Historical Guide to the U.S. Virgin Islands

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources utilizes a number of permitting processes to protect the assets of the Virgin Islands. With the help of our community, together we can ensure an island rich in natural and cultural resources for generations to come.



[www.dpnr.vi.gov](http://www.dpnr.vi.gov)