

# virgin islands



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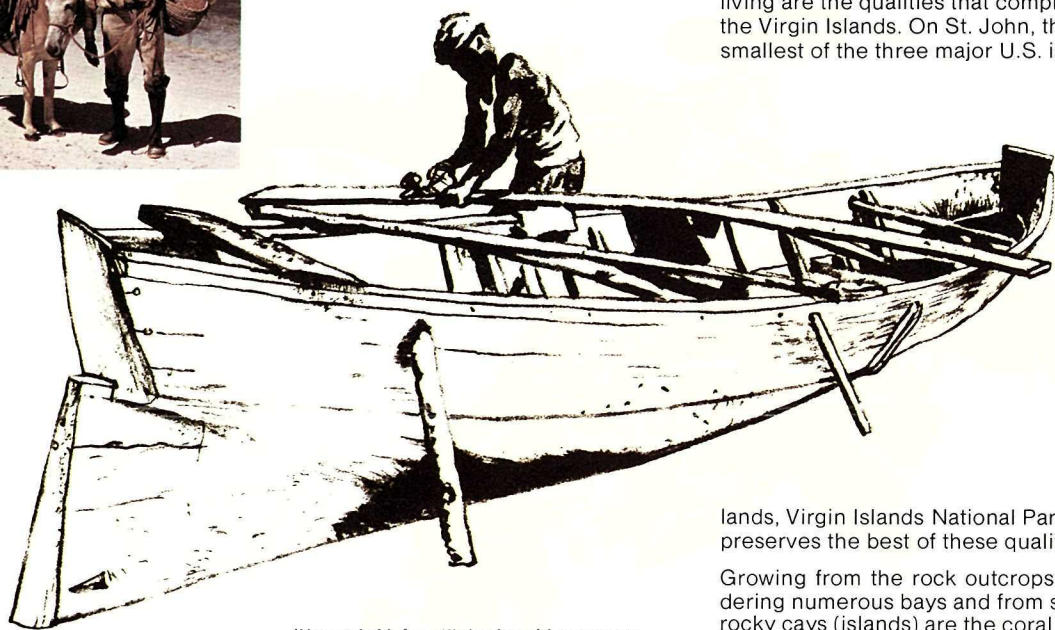


composed of minute fragments of coral. The reefs also protect the beaches from being washed away by winter ground seas (distant storm-generated waves). A relationship has been established here that is enduring but delicate, for the reefs, and in turn the beaches, depend upon close tolerances. The sea must be clear and pollution free, its salinity must stay within close limits (30-36 parts per thousand), and its temperature must always stay between 21° and 27°C (70° and 80°F).

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## Coral Reefs and Canopied Islands

Clear tropical seas, colorful coral reefs, white sand beaches, and the remains of centuries-old sugar plantations—these in combination with warm breezes and a relaxed way of living are the qualities that comprise the Virgin Islands. On St. John, the smallest of the three major U.S. is-



(Upper left) An affinity for old ways can still be seen on the Islands.

(Above) A fishing pirogue is fashioned by hand, its hull a hollowed out tree trunk and its sides made of planking. The bow construction can be traced to a design used centuries ago by the Caribs.

(Left) Elkhorn and fire corals.



## Virgin Islands National Park

The park is located on St. John, the smallest of the three major U.S. Virgin Islands, and includes most of the islands just offshore. The superintendent's address is P.O. Box 7789, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00801. Tel. (809) 775-6238.



Hibiscus blooms year around.

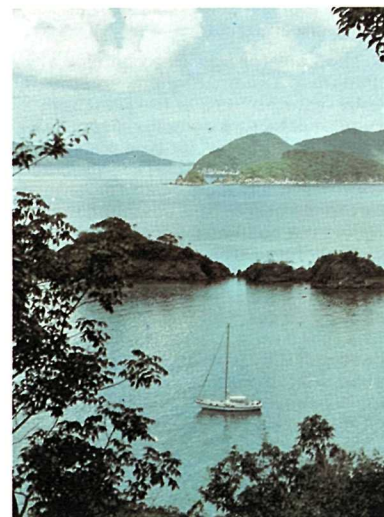
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

lands, Virgin Islands National Park preserves the best of these qualities.

Growing from the rock outcrops bordering numerous bays and from small rocky cays (islands) are the coral reefs. These fringing reefs are a complex community of interacting marine plants and animals. The basic building blocks of reefs are hard corals—including brain, elkhorn, star, finger, and staghorn—and soft corals (gorgonians)—especially sea fans and sea whips. With the corals are a variety of fishes, including parrot, surgeon, angel fishes, grunts, and snappers.

Closely dependent upon the reefs are the sand beaches for which these islands are so well known. Without the growth of the living coral that comprises the reefs, the beaches could not exist, for the sand here is



Trunk Bay.

Plant and animal life on these islands have been altered drastically by man. At higher elevations, in protected valleys, and on northern slopes is the subtropical moist forest, the most extensive forest type on the island of St. John. This forest was cleared for raising sugarcane, but is now returning vigorously. The lower elevations, southern and eastern slopes, and less-exposed coastal sites are primarily subtropical dry forests. Along the southern and eastern shore, continuous easterly trade winds and direct exposure to the sun have created a more desert-like landscape in which dildo, opuntia, and turks head cactus may be present.

## Indians, Pirates, and Planters

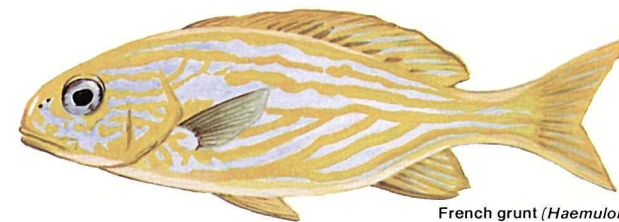
Man has been an inhabitant of these islands for centuries. Long before the birth of Christ, seafaring men using stone tools and bone implements hacked logs into canoes, swam, and fished in the clear waters of the Virgin Islands. Later, tribes of tall black-haired people from South America—farmers, pottery makers, warriors, and rock carvers—drifted with the winds and current through the curving necklace of islands now called the Lesser Antilles.

By the 2nd century A.D., peaceful Arawak villagers were living at Coral Bay, Cruz Bay, and Cinnamon Bay on St. John. In time, seafaring Carib people ranging up through the island chain took their toll of the Arawaks and established scattered outposts in the Virgin Islands. In turn, the Caribs nearly became extinct as European explorers and colonizers appeared in the Caribbean during the 16th and 17th centuries.

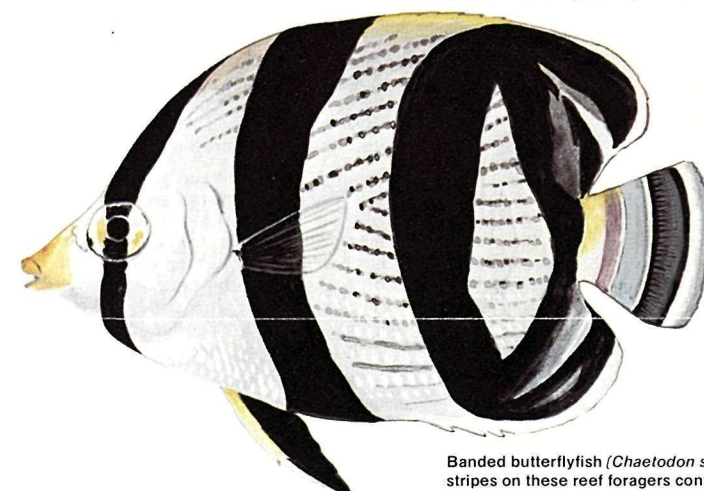
On November 4, 1493, Christopher Columbus, with a fleet of 17 ships, discovered the Lesser Antilles. By mid-November he had found an island he named Santa Cruz or St. Croix. A few leagues northward the Italian explorer then charted a chain of green, mountainous islands that he christened Las Once Mille Virgines—the Virgin Islands. The Spanish claims resulting from Columbus' voyages began two centuries of international wars for supremacy of the West Indies.

Against this background, the island of St. John slowly awakened to the visits of occasional freebooters, runaway slaves, castaways, and Dutch timber cutters. In 1717, Denmark took control, initiating a period of prosperity during which slave labor built many sugar and cotton plantations. With the abolition of slavery in 1848, St. John gradually reverted to its former quiet existence.

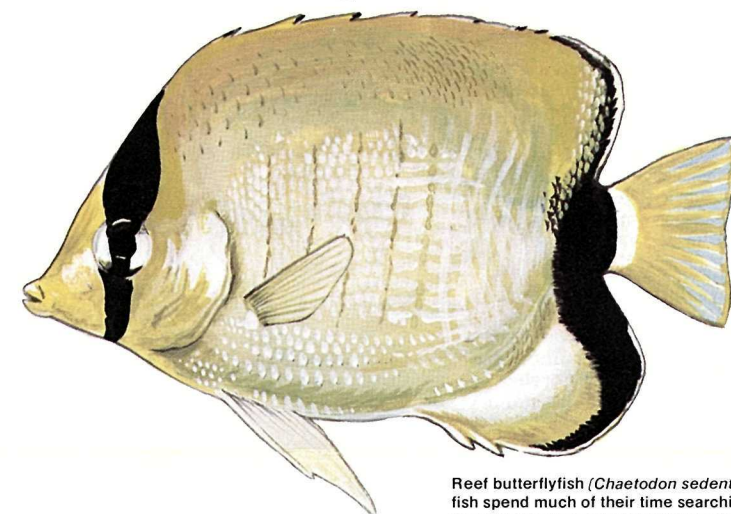
On March 31, 1917, the United States purchased the Virgin Islands from Denmark. The U.S. Navy managed the islands until 1931, when the Territory of the Virgin Islands was created. The Territory is administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior. As a result of Congressional legislation and the donation of lands to the Government by Laurance S. Rockefeller and the Jackson Hole Preserve Corporation, Virgin Islands National Park was established on December 1, 1956.



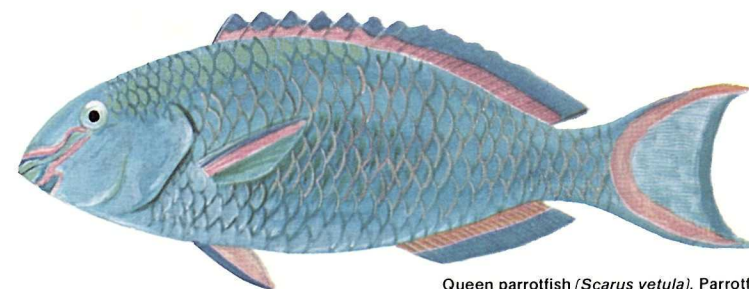
French grunt (*Haemulon flavolineatum*). This common species is often seen in large schools. Grunts utter deep throaty noises.



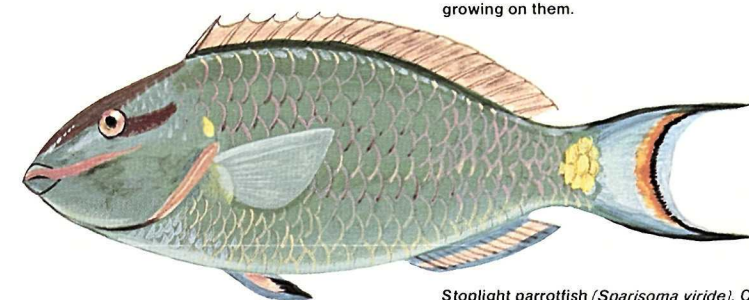
Banded butterflyfish (*Chaetodon striatus*). The stripes on these reef foragers confuse predators.



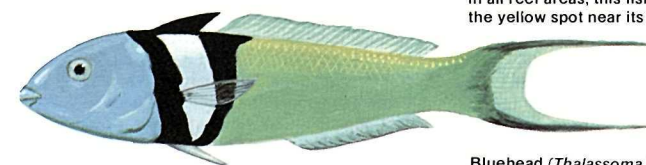
Reef butterflyfish (*Chaetodon sedentarius*). These fish spend much of their time searching the reefs for small plants and invertebrate animals.



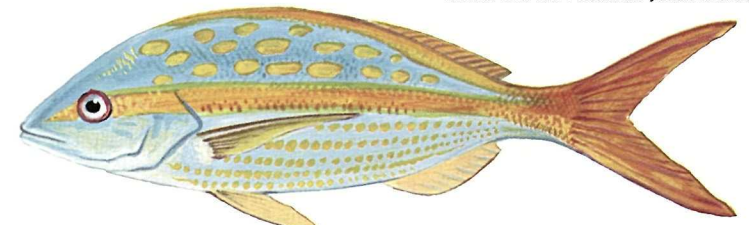
Queen parrotfish (*Scarus vetula*). Parrotfish turn rock and coral into fine sand by grazing the algae growing on them.



Stoplight parrotfish (*Sparisoma viride*). Common in all reef areas, this fish is easily identified by the yellow spot near its tail.



Bluehead (*Thalassoma bifasciatum*). This is the adult male color phase of the usually much smaller and more common yellow wrasse.



Yellowtail snapper (*Ocyurus chrysurus*). These alert, quick fish form swirling schools of flashing yellow when swimming above reefs.

## Planning Your Visit

**Climate.** The yearly temperature averages 26°C (79°F) and varies little between winter and summer. Temperatures rarely exceed 37°C (98°F) or fall below 18°C (65°F). Rainfall averages approximately 100 centimeters (40 inches) per year, coming mostly in brief night showers.

**Information and Activities.** (1) National Park Service sponsored. The Red Hook Contact Station on St. Thomas and the Cruz Bay Visitor Center on St. John provide orientation talks, exhibits, maps, and literature about park features. Guided snorkel trips, hikes, cultural demonstrations, and evening programs are offered throughout the year. A schedule of interpretive activities is posted on the park's bulletin boards and may be obtained at the visitor center in Cruz Bay. Self-guiding walking trails are at Annaberg, Cinnamon Bay, Reef Bay, and Salt Pond Bay. A self-guiding underwater trail (underwater signs for snorkelers) is at Trunk Bay.

(2) On your own. Hiking trails on St. John range from easy walks to difficult climbs, from well maintained to brushy, and short (0.4 kilometer/0.25 mile) to long (9.5 kilometers/6 miles). Bring hiking shoes and cool clothing. Small knapsacks and belt canteens are also handy. Water is not available along hiking trails.

Swimming and snorkeling are excellent at St. John's many fine beaches when weather and sea conditions are good. Lifeguards are on duty periodically at Trunk Bay and Cinnamon Bay. Snorkel equipment can be rented at Trunk and Cinnamon Bays. Ask a lifeguard about the safety features of your equipment. Scuba gear can be rented and serviced on both St. John and St. Thomas.

Saltwater fishing is good all year, and no license is required. Off-the-shore rod and reel fishing is permitted, but not in the vicinity of public swimming or snorkeling beaches. Boats for deep-sea fishing, drift fishing, or shoreline trolling may be chartered on St. John and St. Thomas. Charter sail and power boats with operators are available on St. John, St. Thomas, and nearby British Tortola.

## Getting to and Around the Park

You can fly directly to Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, or via San Juan, or travel by ship. Taxis and buses run between Charlotte Amalie and Red Hook. A ferry operates daily across Pillsbury Sound from Red Hook to Cruz Bay. Water taxi service is available after hours. A special boat for guests at Caneel Bay Plantation runs between the Red Hook Ranger Station and Caneel Bay. Very popular with those who can stay only a day are the package vehicle tours and scenic boat charters that leave from St. Thomas with all transportation arranged. See a travel agent or make arrangements in advance. Taxi service is provided on St. John.

A 24-kilometer (15-mile) tour by auto or taxi over Centerline Road on St. John and back via the North Shore Road includes spectacular scenery and stops at the ruins of Annaberg plantation and at one of the island's many beaches. Also popular are native guided taxi tours through the park. These are operated from Cruz Bay, and a typical tour may take 2½ hours. Make reservations well in advance for rental vehicles; these are available by day or week. A valid state license (U.S. or foreign) is required. Drive slowly; the narrow roads have many sharp curves and steep grades. Top speed is 32 kilometers per hour (20 m.p.h.), and remember to drive on the left!



Old customs house, Whistling Cay.

## Regulations

**Fishing.** The use or possession of any type of spearfishing equipment within park boundaries is prohibited. The taking of fishes or any other marine life in any way except with hand-held rod or line is prohibited. All taking of marine life is prohibited in Trunk Bay.

**Boating.** All Coast Guard boating regulations are enforced. The towing of water skis and similar devices by vessels is prohibited (see park map for offshore boundaries).

**Collecting.** The defacing, breaking, or removal of natural features, including underwater growth, and historical features is prohibited. Possession of metal detectors is prohibited.

**Camping.** Cinnamon Bay Campground is the only place where camping is permitted. The campground is closed to non-registered visitors after 9 p.m. Quiet hours are from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Length of stay for campers and boaters within park boundaries is limited to 14 days and nights in any consecutive 12-month period.

**Pets.** Keep pets under physical restraint; they are not permitted on public-use beaches, picnic areas, or in campgrounds.

A list of all park regulations is in the visitor center at Cruz Bay.

## For Your Information

Park rangers can answer your questions. Those questions most often asked are answered below.

The park visitor center at Cruz Bay is open daily from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and can be reached by calling (809) 776-6201.

Churches in Cruz Bay represent Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Moravian, Anglican, Methodist, and Baha'i faiths. The Christian Ministry in the National Parks provides services at Caneel Bay Plantation and Cinnamon Bay Campground.

Vaccinations and inoculations are not required for persons traveling between the Virgin Islands and the U.S. mainland.

Persons returning to the U.S. mainland from the Virgin Islands must go through Customs and Immigration at San Juan, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, or other U.S. ports of entry. An import permit is required for fruits, vegetables, plant cuttings, and seeds.

Much of the land included within the authorized boundaries of the park is still private property. Permission must be received before entering or using these areas.

There are no poisonous snakes on St. John. Insect repellent may be useful because of mosquitoes and sandflies.



## ATLANTIC OCEAN



**DO NOT HIKE ALONE  
DO NOT SWIM ALONE  
OR IN HEAVY SURF**

## Accommodations

Cinnamon Bay Campground, with a beach nearby, is 8 kilometers (5 miles) from Cruz Bay. Accommodations consist of tent sites and cottage units with picnic tables and charcoal grills. Length of stay is limited to 14 days in any consecutive 12-month period. Freshwater is available, but may be rationed during periods of exceptionally dry weather. Laundry facilities are not provided in the camp but are in Cruz Bay. A concessioner-operated camp store has basic food supplies and a small selection of meats, as well as ice, charcoal, and fuel for stoves and lanterns. A wider selection of foods is available in Cruz Bay and on St. Thomas. Tent sites can be rented with or without equipment. Equipment includes tent, cots, bedding linen, cooking utensils, eating utensils, cold and dry storage boxes, and butane stove/light.

Cottage units can be rented with the same equipment as that rented with tents. Cottage and tent site reservations must be made well in advance, but not more than eight months. Write to the concessioner, Cinnamon Bay Campground, St. John, VI 00830, tel. (809) 776-6330, or see a travel agent.

Restaurants are located in the Cruz Bay area, and the concessioner at Trunk Bay offers sandwiches and cool drinks daily. Meals are also available at Cinnamon Bay.

Paved Road	
4-Wheel Drive Road (Unpaved)	
Trail	
Ranger Station	
Campground	
Picnic Area	
Authorized Park Area	
Open To The Public	
Not Open To The Public (Privately Owned)	
Not Federally Owned	



Queen angelfish (juvenile).

## For Your Safety

The Morris F. DeCastro Clinic in Cruz Bay is open Monday-Friday, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; telephone 776-6222. A nurse and doctor are on 24-hour call daily; you can reach them by telephoning the Dept. of Public Safety, 776-6262, or a park ranger, 776-6451 or 776-6605.

So that you have a safe and pleasant experience . . .

- while driving
  - Drive on the left side of the road.
  - Shift to low gear on steep grades.
  - Sound horn at blind curves—and keep left!

- while snorkeling and swimming
  - Use lifeguard-posted beaches.
  - Avoid heavy surf.
  - Never go out alone.
  - Become thoroughly familiar with the use of snorkeling equipment before striking out for deep water.
  - Know your abilities.

- Learn to identify and avoid spiny urchins and fire coral.

- while hiking
  - Avoid long or strenuous hikes in the heat of the day (10 a.m. to 3 p.m.).
  - Take along drinking water.
  - Avoid eating strange fruits.
  - Stay on the trails—do not shortcut.
  - Do not climb around or over ruins.
  - Wear sturdy hiking shoes or boots.
  - Tell someone of your plans and do not hike alone.



Guided snorkeling, Trunk Bay.

## Points of Interest

**1** Cruz Bay, the administrative seat of St. John, has a few food stores and gift shops. Stop at the park headquarters and visitor center there for park orientation and publications.

**2** Trunk Bay has one of the best beaches in the world and offers an underwater nature trail for snorkelers. Lifeguards are on duty daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Facilities include changing rooms, toilets, pay telephones, a picnic area, and snack bar.

**3** Cinnamon Bay, the location of Cinnamon Bay Camp, has a camp store and cafeteria. Lifeguard services are provided from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. A 1.6-kilometer (1-mile) self-guiding nature trail is located across from the camp entrance.

**4** The Leinster Bay area contains a mangrove swamp, reef flat, and the partially restored ruins of the Annaberg sugar mill factory complex. From seaward, this complex, located above Leinster Bay on St. John's rugged north shore, is reminiscent of an ancient European castle. The beautiful, thick-walled old buildings, constructed of cleverly fitted stone, native coral, and yellow and red Danish ballast brick, were familiar to the 18th and early 19th century Danes, Dutchmen, and slaves who toiled here. Under the hot Caribbean sun they worked endlessly to produce crude brown sugar, rich dark molasses, and strong rum for export to North America and Europe.

**5** Coral Bay, the site of the first established sugar plantation on St. John, was first settled in 1717. The site was selected because of its well-protected harbor.

**6** Salt Pond Bay and nearby Lameshur Bay are generally calm during the winter ground seas that make snorkeling and swimming hazardous on the North Shore beaches. A side trail leads to a salt pond, then to the rugged, wind-swept, coral rubble beach at Drunk Bay. Another trail winds through a growth of barrel cactus called turk's head to Ram Head, with its magnificent views of St. John's southshore and the British Virgin Islands. **WARNING.** Ram Head has a steep cliff. Do not approach the edge. Keep children under control.

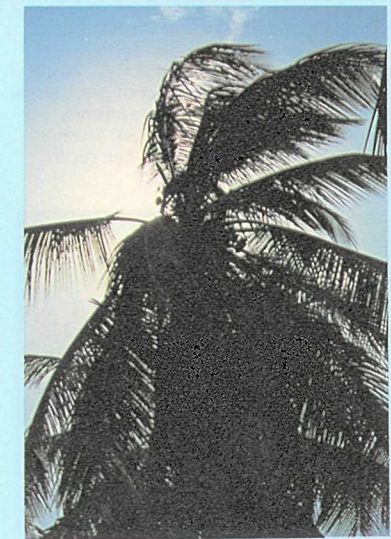
**7** Four-wheel drive vehicles are required for the drive to Lameshur Bay. A picnic area, toilets, ranger station, and research station are located in this area, once known for its bay oil, lime juice, and cattle production. Several interesting hiking trails connect Lameshur Bay with Reef Bay, Europa Bay, Yawzi Point, and the Bordeaux Mountain Road.

**8** Reef Bay Valley contains mysterious petroglyphs (rock carvings), some of which are attributed to West African origin and others to Taino Indians. Also within the valley are ruins of the Reef Bay Estate house and steampowered sugar mill ruins, the last to operate on the island.

Reef Bay is accessible from Centerline Road by a shady, 5-kilometer (2.6-mile) downhill hiking trail that traverses a unique subtropical moist forest to dry forest area of St. John. Toilets and litter barrels are conveniently located at the end of the Reef Bay Trail.



Annaberg Plantation, St. John.



Coconut palms blowing in the trade winds.