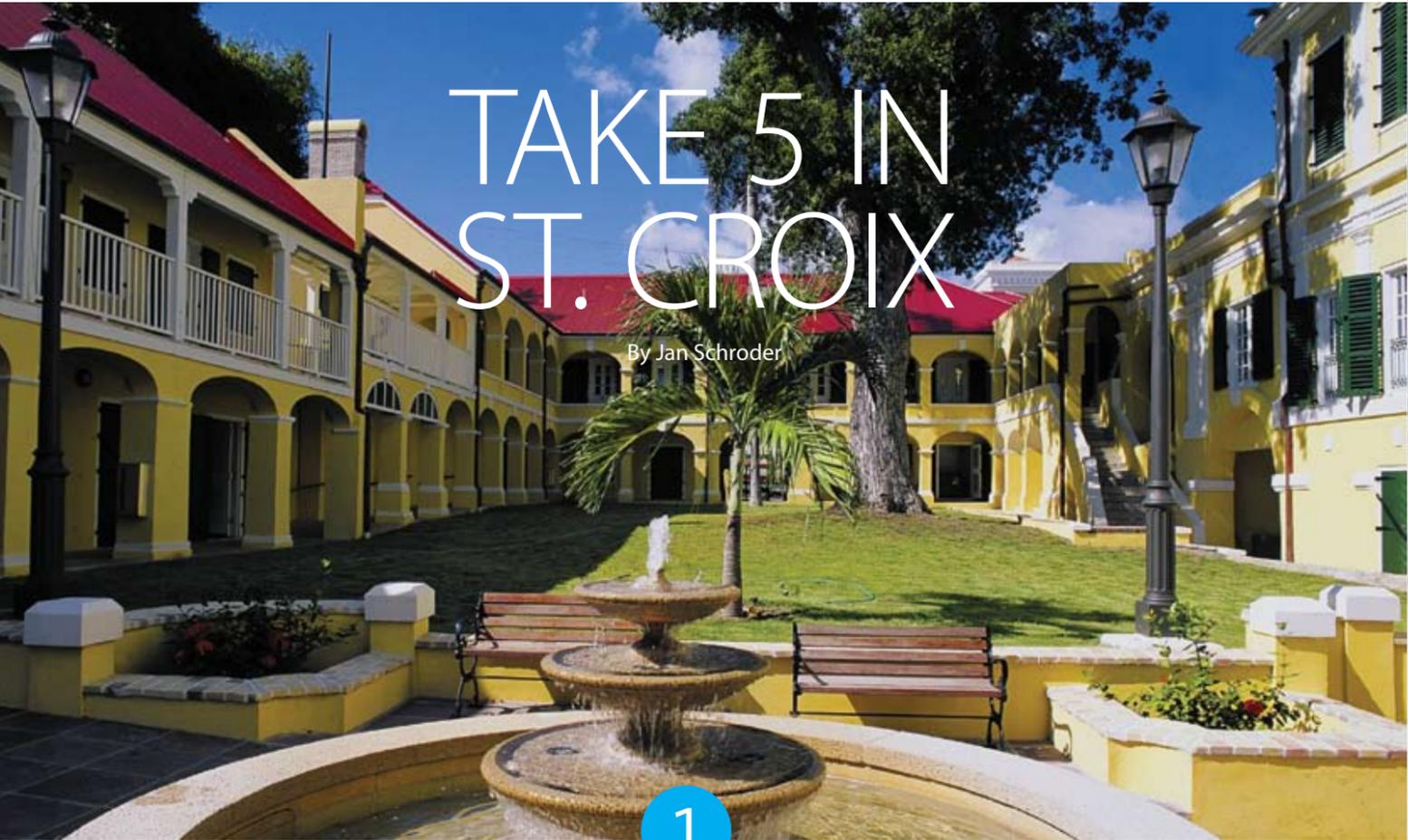


TAKE 5 IN ST. CROIX

By Jan Schroder



As I drained the last fruity bits of my Cruzan Confusion rum cocktail while listening to the Friday night jazz in Frederiksted as the sun slowly set over the Atlantic Ocean, I wondered. Why had I never been to St. Croix before? The largest and most laid-back of the U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Croix is just a 2 ½-hour plane ride from Miami. With no passport, money exchange or customs to deal with, it's an easy island getaway. And with temperatures hovering around 80 degrees year-round, any time is a great time to enjoy the beach and the many water activities available. Here are five suggestions for your visit. Just make sure to leave time for just limin', as the locals say. Just hanging out. And enjoying that Cruzan Confusion.

1. SHOP IN CHRISTIANSTED Once the capital of the Danish West Indies as St. Croix was previously known, Christiansted maintains the Danish architecture characterized by colonnades and arches, some dating back to 1733 when Denmark bought the island from the French. The arches over the sidewalks add to the charm of the city and also protect you from the sun or rain while you stroll around the shops on King, Company and Strand streets. You can't leave the island without your own version of the Cruzan hook bracelet. While you'll see many variations, Sonya Lore designed the original in 1962. Visit Sonya's shop, Sonya Ltd., where variations of the bracelets are still handmade in silver and gold. It's quite a conversation piece and people who've visited St. Croix always comment on my silver one. Take a break with some delicious raw food such as cashew hummus, a smoothie or vegetarian wrap at the charming Lalita Courtyard and Studio. Get a massage or reflexology treatment at the adjoining Kalima Center if time allows.

2. STAY AT DIVI CARINA BAY BEACH RESORT When I stood on my balcony at Divi, I felt I could almost reach down and scoop up a handful of the sparkling white sand. Each of the 195 rooms at St. Croix's only all-inclusive resort has a view of the 1,000-foot beach with the lush hillside rising to the left. Water sports are big here: kayaking and snorkeling are available and the resort boasts a PADI five-star dive center where guests can get their certification during their stay. There are four dining venues on the property with themed buffets four times a week, a free kids' club, a mini golf course and a driving range. Divi has the only casino in the U.S. Virgin Islands and it looked so elegant I had to go check it out one night, although I'm not much of a gambler. I managed to lose a grand total of about \$3. The resort's all-inclusive policy includes alcohol so I was able to drown my sorrow over my gambling losses with yet another variation of the Cruzan Confusion, made with the famous Cruzan rum. www.divicarina.com

3. VISIT A SUGAR PLANTATION St. Croix was once one of the biggest sugar producing islands in the Caribbean and the landscape is still filled with ruins of plantations with names such as Mt. Misery, Mary's Fancy and Wheel of Fortune. The last sugar factory closed in 1966. But a visit to [Estate Whim Plantation Museum](#) near Frederiksted offers a peek at what life was like on a sugar plantation in the 1800s. The framed census in the front room of the oval-shaped great house with its list of the Free and Unfree along with the moral character of the Unfree is a grim reminder that the success of the sugar trade was due to the labor performed by generations of slaves that had been imported by the Danish to the island. The 11-acre grounds include the remains of a windmill used for grinding sugarcane and other outbuildings such as the tiny watch house, built in 1791, where guards stood watch over the fields at night and where small children were kept during the day while their mothers worked. www.stcroixlandmarks.com

4. DINE AT LOCAL FAVORITES We loved [Bluewater Terrace](#), owned by couple Lori Hubbard and Paul Giordano so much, we had dinner there twice. After enjoying the wahoo with asparagus and polenta cake, I simply had to return when I heard they served the best fried chicken on the island, a recipe Lori perfected when she sold it on the weekends with her roommates in college. For an idyllic beach

setting, have lunch at [The Mermaid](#) in the historic [Buccaneer](#), family run since the 17th century. Get Weston Huggins, a bartender who has been mixing cocktails there for more than 50 years, to make his own version of Cruzan Confusion. The beach is public, so you may wish to linger in a lounge chair under the palm trees after lunch. The Northern Italian food was affordable and fantastic and the atmosphere lively at [Tutto Bene](#). You'll see plenty of locals waiting in line for the family-owned [La Reine's Chicken Shack](#), where for \$5 you can enjoy a plate of ½ chicken and Johnny cakes, a local Caribbean staple made of fried dough.

5. SNORKEL AROUND BUCK ISLAND I swam as fast as I could to follow the giant school of blue fish as they purposefully made their way through the warm, gently undulating waters surrounding Buck Island. I was on the snorkeling trail of this underwater national monument near the island, two-thirds of which is surrounded by the Elkhorn-Coral barrier reef, making snorkeling a little trickier but so much more rewarding. We had sailed over the 1.5 miles from St. Croix with Big Beard's Adventure Tours and spent the first part of the day lounging on the stark white beaches while I enjoyed watching young boys do running flips into the crystal blue water. *Travelgirl tip: The 176-acre island is uninhabited and as a national park capacity is limited so be sure to book with a charter company early.* www.nps.gov/buis

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