

St. Croix

A Cultural and Historical Guide to St. Croix



U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism

Christiansted Visitor's Bureau
1505 King Street
Government House
Christiansted, VI 00820
340-773-1404

Welcome Center
Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility
Frederiksted, VI 00841
340-773-0495
340-772-0497

www.visitusvi.com

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The Wonders of ST. CROIX

Your Port of Solace





And the Journey Begins

St. Croix is a land with a story to tell. It is a tale wrought of a diverse and dramatic history. It unfolds in a land of rugged and spectacular beauty, and it's populated with warm and genuine people—a people known as much for their pride in their island as their generous desire to share its secrets. For beyond its long white beaches and exquisitely blue waters lies a treasure trove of art, history, culture and festivities just waiting to be discovered—like historical Estate Mt. Washington featured in the photo.

Located about 40 miles south of St. John and St. Thomas, St. Croix differs from her sister islands not just in location, but also in character. Due to her rich and varied history under the rule of no fewer than seven flags (including Dutch, English, French, Spanish, Knights of Malta, Danish and American), the true nature of St. Croix is one of quiet, cultural and relaxed encounters. The quaint towns of Frederiksted on the west coast and Christiansted on the northeast bring the island's history to life with their historic buildings, cobblestone streets and colorful architecture. St. Croix is also the largest of the three U.S. Virgin Islands with 84 square miles of pristine beaches, rolling hills, seaside bluffs and a tropical rainforest. It offers endless opportunities for hiking, diving, ecotourism and other natural pursuits.

Local Corner

Delta M. Dorsch



Many well-traveled visitors share the belief that you cannot truly know a place until you know its people. This is especially true on St. Croix where the locals, who call themselves “Crucians,” encourage you to make their acquaintance. Perhaps during a stroll down the cobblestone streets of downtown Frederiksted, you’ll hear of ladies like Delta M. Dorsch. Ms. Dorsch is one of the outstanding educators of the Virgin Islands and a Tradition Bearer of the “Anansi” stories, which are a continuation of the African oral tradition. If you’re lucky, perhaps one of these fascinating culture bearers will spin you a tale.

The Wonders of Nature

Travelers that seek to connect with St. Croix understand that she is, in many ways, a living entity. She is born of the history that roots her, bred by the geography that defines her and nourished by the people that have inhabited her shores for centuries. Today, from one end of the island to the other, you'll find your path full of natural wonders that feed the eyes, heart and imagination.

The Baobab tree is native to Africa. The Grove Place baobab is the largest tree in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It has been a political rallying point since plantation laborers gathered there in 1878 during the uprising called the Fireburn. With a circumference of 55 feet, it towers 53 feet into the sky. Stand under it and you can almost hear the heartbeats of the African slaves who smuggled its seeds here.

Estate Butler Bay is the ruins of what was once one of the largest sugar factories on the island of St. Croix. Butler Bay, at one time one of the richest estates in the Danish West Indies, today is home to the remains of the plantation. Tours include historical interpretation of the buildings and the estate, and exploration of the ruins and the grounds. Visitors can review historical records and archives of the plantation in the overseer's cottage on the property.



St. George Village Botanical Garden offers 17 acres of botanical, historical and cultural heritage, all just off the Queen Mary Highway. The botanical collections include more than 1500 native and exotic plant species, all set around the restored ruins of a 19th-century Danish sugar cane plantation.

Buck Island Reef National Monument was established to preserve "one of the finest marine gardens in the Caribbean Sea," and is home to one of the few fully protected marine areas in the national park system. A popular beach and snorkeling area, the 176-acre island and surrounding coral reef ecosystem support a large variety of native flora and fauna, including the hawksbill turtle and brown pelican. You may even see baby sea turtles hatch here.

Salt River Bay is the only documented landing site of Christopher Columbus' voyage in 1493. It is also a living museum. As a tropical ecosystem, it is home to prehistoric and colonial-era archeological sites and ruins. It also boasts some of the largest mango forests in the Virgin Islands and is the best bioluminescence location in the Caribbean. Here you can experience the electric blue glows of living organisms as they paddle through the bay.



The Tide Pools at Annaly Bay are an exceptional spot where the natural beauty of the island comes alive. Nestled on the northwest shore of St. Croix, a challenging two-mile hike leads you to a rocky shoreline and both small and large saltwater baths. All along the trail you'll find good places for snorkeling, sunning on the beach and relaxing in the beauty of nature.

Point Udall, on the east end of the island, makes the perfect place to start, as it is also the easternmost point in the United States. It is marked by a giant sundial called the Millennium Monument, built for the New Year's celebration of 2000. Today, it still marks a stunning place to catch the sunrise.



Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge offers one of the longest stretches of white sandy beach in the Caribbean. Plus, it's home to the endangered leatherback turtle.

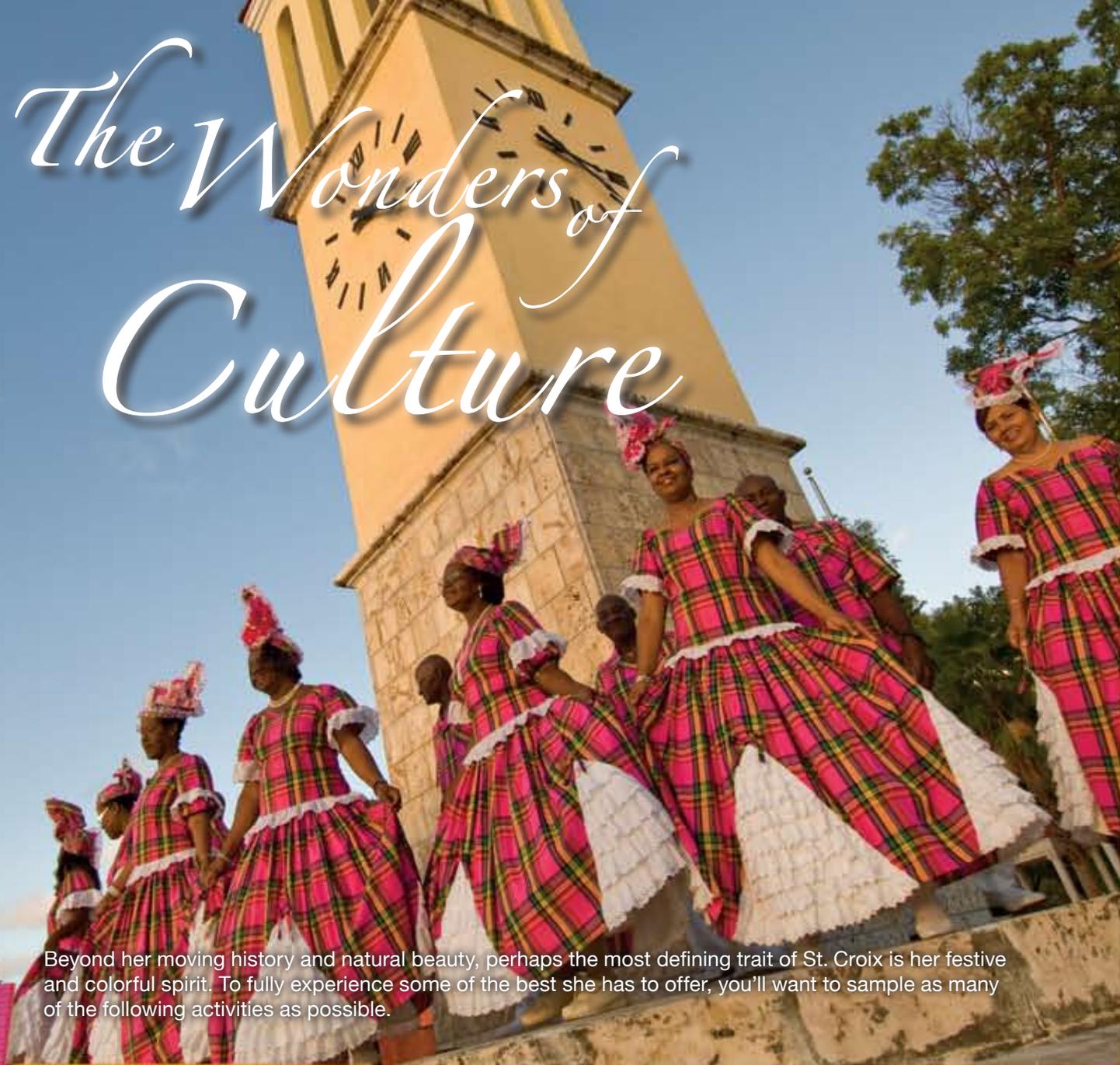
Local Corner

Olasee Davis

If you could gaze at the beauty of the Virgin Islands all day long, you may enjoy meeting Olasee Davis, who has made studying the natural resources of the islands his lifelong pursuit. As a Specialist in the Natural Resources Program at the University of the Virgin Islands, he runs educational programs promoting the awareness of natural resources and the coastal environment. In his spare time, Olasee is an environmental activist, ecologist, naturalist, ethnobotanist, agriculturalist, historian and writer. If you could happen to catch him between his many pursuits, he might just tell you where the best place to spot seas turtles is.



The Wonders of Culture



Beyond her moving history and natural beauty, perhaps the most defining trait of St. Croix is her festive and colorful spirit. To fully experience some of the best she has to offer, you'll want to sample as many of the following activities as possible.

Quadrille has long been the official dance of the United States Virgin Islands. Originally an old European dance, it was adapted with a Caribbean Afro/European beat in the 18th and 19th centuries and remains popular in the Virgin Islands today. If you're lucky, a scheduled performance with dancers clad in colorful madras may coincide with your visit.

St. Croix Heritage Trail is a self-guided driving tour through a variety of the island's historical sites and natural areas. The trail links many major historic attractions including Whim Plantation Museum, St. George Village Botanical Garden and Christiansted historic sites as well as several plantation ruins. All told, it is a satisfying tour of St. Croix history for even the staunchest history buff.

Outdoor Markets are the trademark of the Caribbean and of St. Croix. For a sampling of local fruits, drinks and vegetables, start your Saturday morning at marketplaces in Frederiksted, Christiansted or La Reine. Or, look for vendor stands and trucks along Queen Mary Highway and Centerline Road.

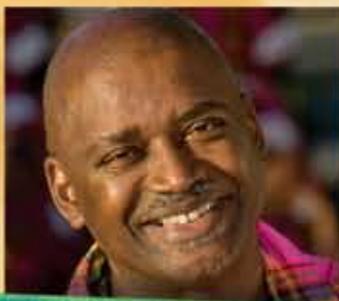
Crucian Christmas Festival
St. Croix at her most joyous. Experience a true Crucian event by celebrating alongside the locals. Start with eating tasty Crucian delights, dance to Caribbean music and then watch a kaleidoscope of vibrant colors as carnival dancers whirl by you in a parade of exotic costumes.



Cruzan Rum has been making its best-selling rum products at its distillery on St. Croix for more than 300 years. See firsthand how rum is made and learn the difference between light and dark rum. Finish up your tour with cool, delicious, complimentary rum drinks.



Agrifest is the largest annual agricultural fair in the Caribbean. The three-day exhibition draws visitors from all over the region and rivals many U.S. state fairs. Experience everything from petting zoos, farmer's markets and calypso shows to traditional cooking demonstrations and replicas of homes from bygone eras.



Local Corner

Bradley E. Christian

If you're intrigued by traditional dance, you'll want to be on the lookout for Bradley E. Christian. A Cultural Specialist, Mr. Christian was taught the art of calling Quadrille by the grand floor master, the late Adam Peterson. Mr. Christian is also President of the esteemed St. Croix Heritage Dancers, a 27-year-old organization whose purpose is to preserve Crucian culture through dance. If you ask, he may even be willing to teach you a few moves.

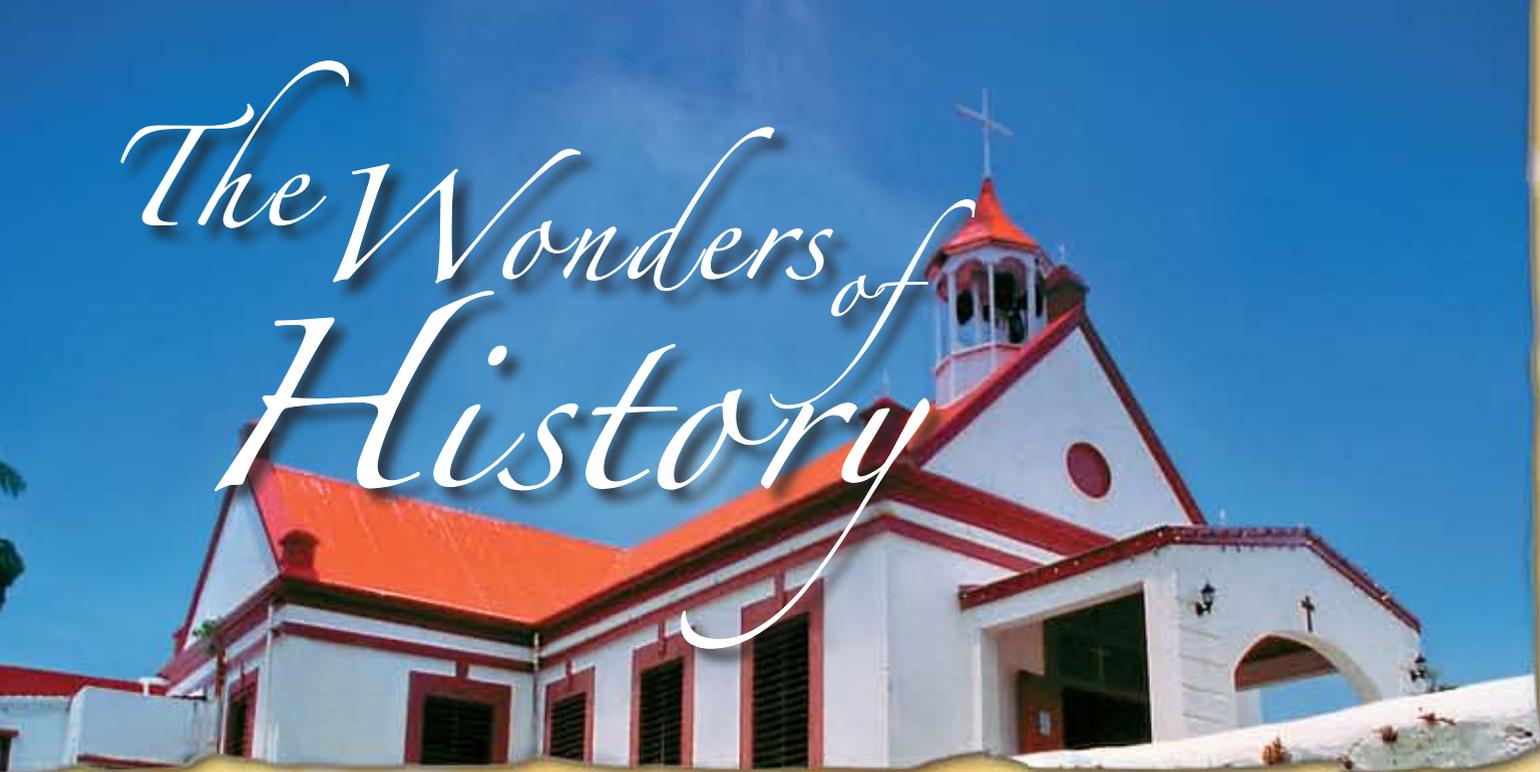


Local Corner

Willard John

At some point in your travels through St. Croix, you will likely hear of Moko Jumbies. If you hear this in a conversation with Willard John, you will discover that this subject is his passion. In fact, Mr. John is founder of the Guardian of Culture Moko Jumbie. As he would be more than happy to tell you, Moko Jumbies are traditional folk characters that dance on stilts. Originally brought from West Africa to the Caribbean, the Moko Jumbie has been a beloved part of Virgin Island culture for many years. Mr. John has researched and demonstrated this art form in a series called Mokolution.

The Wonders of History



The rich history of St. Croix is beautifully evident in her historic buildings, waterfront forts, colorful architecture and picturesque sugar mills. The strength and beauty that resonates in these historic buildings speaks eloquently to St. Croix's past as a prized and oft-fought-over Caribbean gem. It also speaks to her present role as a culturally rich and well-preserved Caribbean beauty.

Government House, on King Street in the heart of Christiansted, is a beautiful example of Danish colonial architecture. The Royal Danish Government purchased the house in 1771, along with a house at the corner, and joined them together in 1826 to become the seat of the Danish West Indies government. Its elegant ballroom was the site of many festive gatherings and is still used for government functions today.



Fort Christiansvaern is one of five remaining Danish forts in the Virgin Islands. The bright yellow color is typical of Danish design. Started in 1738, the fort was later expanded; its present restoration reflects the 1830s period. Furnishings from that era are on display here, as well as an exhibit on local military history. The Old Customs House, with its grand, sweeping staircase, resides on the grassy area next to the fort and houses the National Park Service offices.



Fort Frederik is the bright redbrick structure located at the west end of the island in Frederiksted. Originally built to keep pirates away, it was recently declared a National Historic Landmark. Dating from 1760, it is the site of the emancipation of the slaves in 1848 in St. Croix, fifteen years before Lincoln freed the slaves in America. Today it holds a museum and art gallery.



The Steeple Building, built in 1753, was formerly St. Croix's first Lutheran Church. Later the structure was used as a military bakery, community hall, hospital and a school. The museum contains several displays that portray the history of St. Croix and plantation life. Across the street is the onetime Danish West India & Guinea Company Warehouse, built in 1749. A Slavery Museum is planned for this site.



Old Scale House was built in 1856. Located on Christiansted's waterfront, this Danish landmark contains a large scale that was used to weigh sugar in the colonial days. Today, this quaint yellow building is where you can find free information about local national parks and purchase a variety of informative books on St. Croix.



Sugar Mills are the pyramids of the Caribbean. Visitors to St. Croix can't help but notice the dozens of picturesque mills that dot the island's hills. They are called sugar mills because most were built in the 18th century to grind up sugar cane once grown on the many island plantations.

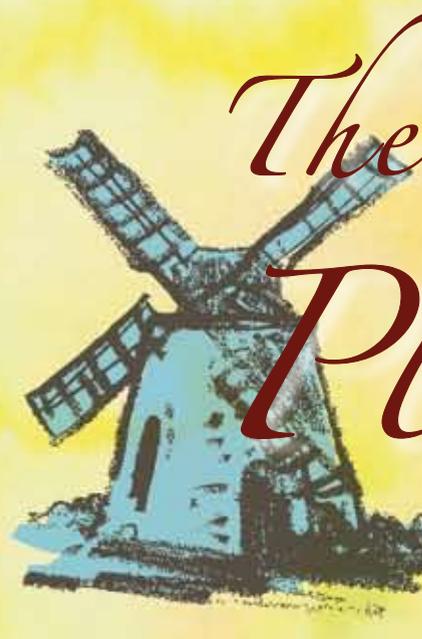


Local Corner

Richard A. Schrader

Richard A. Schrader, Sr., is well known among Virgin Islanders and friends far and wide. But he is always open to meeting new friends as well. If you should run into him on your journey, sit down for a chat. You'll find he can hold sway on a variety of interesting topics because he is known not only for his many years of community service, but also for his newer role as poet, author, historian, lecturer and preserver of oral and recorded Crucian history.





The Wonders of Plantation Estates

The soul of St. Croix is a tangible presence. You can hear it as the echoes of the past still reverberate in the brick of the sugar mill ruins. Feel it still running through the walls of the plantation great houses. And see it in the acres of land that once sustained a completely different way of life which, for many, was a life of enslavement. It is, at once, a powerfully moving and quietly sobering experience.



Estate Little Princess is a 24-acre preserve owned by the Nature Conservancy. It has easy, flat, shaded walking trails winding through the historic ruins of a sugar plantation. This site is being developed as a model site for nonpolluting, sustainable energy technology. A self-guided trail with interpretive signs meanders through the estate ruins and ends at a small beach with a spectacular view of Christiansted Harbor.



Estate Mt. Washington is in the tropical forest. Its current owners discovered sugar mill ruins buried there in 1984 and have since restored the unique animal mill and bell tower and installed authentic wooden grinding machinery. The surrounding property is a designated wildlife sanctuary. A self-guided tour with informative signs is offered.



Estate Whim Museum is the oldest sugar plantation museum in the Virgin Islands. History comes alive as you walk among the original early 18th-century buildings that populate the 12-acre property. The stately great house welcomes you with gracious guides waiting to tell you the stories of the house and of plantation life. The fully restored windmill and sugar factory ruins are also open for you to explore.

Sprat Hall Plantation, the oldest plantation on St. Croix, dates back to 1650 through 1690 when the French occupied the island. This elegant great house and its historic grounds are located along the west end of St. Croix.



Lawaetz Museum at Estate La Grange is adjacent to 15 acres of lush tropical forest. This old Danish West Indian plantation dwelling, along with its gardens and nature trail, gives a fascinating glimpse into the early 20th-century home of a prominent family of Danish ancestry. Through expertly guided tours, visitors learn about rural ways of life during the first half of the 20th century.

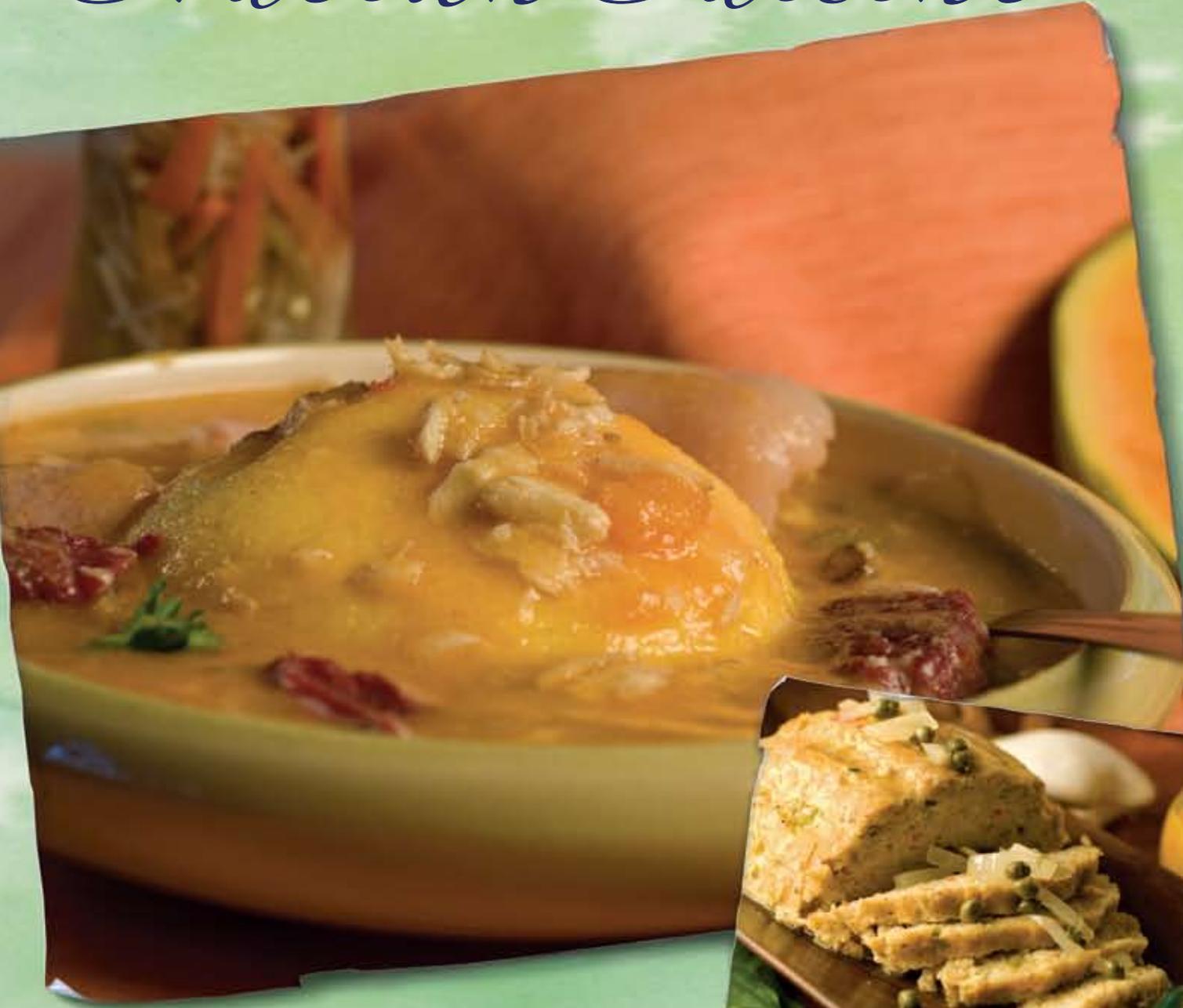
Victoria House is a charming house on Strand Street that was built in 1803. It was destroyed in the Fireburn of 1878, and rebuilt with the addition of the top floor. In 1989, Hurricane Hugo destroyed the beautiful latticework that gave the structure its strikingly elegant look.



Estate Grange is Alexander Hamilton's boyhood home. Hamilton, who spent the formative years of his boyhood on St. Croix, went on to become one of America's founders and was the first Secretary of the Treasury. Estate Grange is the 115-acre property that was owned by his aunt and uncle. The home was built in 1753, and Hamilton lived there with his mother and brother from age 8 to 16. While there, he began writing for the local newspaper, developing skills he later used as author of *The Federalist Papers*.



The Wonders of Crucian Cuisine



Maufè is an indigenous local soup that is a combination of salt meat, fish, fresh tomatoes and local herbs. It's nicknamed "two fungi" because fungi made from cornmeal are added—some sprinkled on top as well as some added to the mixture as a thickener.

Guava, Coconut and Pineapple Tarts are baked desserts artistically made in the shape of a turnover or 9" pie with intricately woven dough on the top. Tasty local fruits such as guavas, coconuts, pineapples, and in the Christmas season, guavaberries are used to complement the sugary dough.

Vienna Cake is a layered cake with several layers of preserves. A Crucian Vienna cake should have at least one layer of green lime and guavaberry preserve. Brandy is used to moisten the layers.

Kallaloo is a soup made of bushes, spinach and okra. The Crucian version uses greens that grow wild on the island like papalolo, Whitey Mary, pulsey, bata-bata and bower bush. Seafood and salt meat add flavor. It is garnished with a ball of cornmeal fungi.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup flour
- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1 to 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 cup hot milk
- 1 tablespoon shortening

JOHNNYCAKES



Preparation:

Mix the dry ingredients, then stir in the remaining ingredients. Drop or pour on a hot, greased griddle or drop in iron skillet and fry to golden brown on both sides. Serve with butter and syrup as for pancakes, or serve as a bread with butter.



Danish Fish Pudding is a traditional Danish West Indian entrée. Fish is seasoned with local herbs and placed into a mold. When cooled, it forms into a loaf. A delicious olive/capers sauce is added.

Red Grout is a molded dessert, which traces back to the Danish 'Rødgrød.' Guava fruit is boiled with sugar, and tapioca is added for a gelled firmness. Danes use fresh cream over it, while Crucians prefer canned milk flavored with sugar and vanilla.



Local Corner

Elizabeth "Betty" Lynch



An expert in Crucian cuisine, Betty Lynch knows how to tantalize your taste buds. Born on St. Croix, Betty always had great interest in watching her mother prepare meals. She later took a Culinary Arts course at Christiansted High School taught by Mrs. Olivia Hinds Henry. Betty credits these influences as helping to make her one of the better cooks on St. Croix. Betty has won (or made honorable mention) in many cooking competitions including Festival Village, Agricultural Food Fair, Harbor Night and "A Taste of St. Croix." A stop by Betty's outdoor kitchen for some of her famed conch in butter sauce would be a memorable one indeed.

Crucian culture is a Creole or multiethnic culture reflecting African, Danish, Dutch and French traditions spiced with Spanish, American and even Arabic influences. And nowhere is this potpourri of varied influences more deliciously evident than in the local cuisine.

The Wonders Never Cease

The many discoveries you can make on St. Croix form a list without end. Here are a few more you may want to experience before you leave. Or, perhaps when you return.

Crucian art. St. Croix is home to many talented local artists. St. Croix's many galleries showcase bright pottery, spectacular watercolors, colorful glassware, metalwork, furniture, sculpture, jewelry—including the famed Crucian hook bracelet—and a wide variety of paintings, prints, photography and maps.

History of Jewelry Making. For more than 30 years, St. Croix's traditional hook bracelet has been recognized as a symbol of true love (or the wearer's search for it, depending on which way the hook faces). There is also a history of Crucian designers finding inspiration not only in their hearts, but also in their beautiful surroundings, from water to earth to sky.

Jazz. On the third Friday of each month, you can catch "Sunset Jazz" performed by local musicians playing along the Frederiksted Waterfront from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. Families young and old gather to share in their own unique Crucian twist on jazz and the spectacular sunset over glistening waters.



The Wonder of Memories

In the end, what you discover about St. Croix is something you can take with you. You leave with the understanding that Crucian culture is a wonderfully complex tapestry of beautifully intertwined ancestries, histories and natural beauty, and that it encompasses a wealth of original music, art, food and tradition. Most importantly, you discover that at its heart is a warm, friendly and uniquely cultured people.



Local Corner

Stanley Jacobs

If you've heard of Quelbe, the official music of the Virgin Islands, then you've heard of Stanley Jacobs. And if you haven't heard of either yet, chances are you will before your trip is through. Mr. Jacobs is the musician leader of the world-renowned Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights band. If you are a music lover, strike up a conversation with Stanley. You may even walk away with an autograph.