Virgin Islands History
A Brief History of the U.S. Virgin Islands

Historians document that the first inhabitants, the Ciboneys, arrived on the islands during what is considered the Pre-Ceramic Culture. Arawaks were the next to arrive, establishing sites on St. John and St. Croix around 100 AD. Probably the best-known inhabitants, and those to arrive next, were the fierce Caribs and the more peaceful Tainos. Evidence of their time in the islands has been unearthed in recent years, and includes stone griddles, zemis (small carvings depicting the faces of their gods) and petroglyphs which are rock carvings visible on St. John’s Reef Bay Trail.

The Caribs had taken control of St. Croix, then called Ay Ay, when Christopher Columbus sailed into Salt River on his second voyage in 1493, claiming the islands for Spain. The battle between the Indians and Columbus is considered the first insurgence in the New World. After renaming the island Santa Cruz, Columbus headed north where he spotted a chain of islands. He proclaimed they would be called Las Once Mil Virgenes (11,000 virgins) in honor of Ursula, martyred by the Huns for refusing to marry a pagan prince.

The demise of the islands’ first residents, the Indians, was evident when the first Europeans after Columbus arrived in the late 1500s. Many countries expressed interest in the islands in the 1600s, including Holland, France, England, Spain, Denmark and the Knights of Malta. But it was the Danes who established the first settlement on St. Thomas in 1672, expanding to St. John in 1694. St. Croix was added to the Danish West India Company in 1733, and plantations soon sprung up all over the islands.

A treaty with the Dutch of Brandenburg in 1685 established St. Thomas as a slave-trading post. More than 200,000 slaves, primarily from Africa’s west coast, were forcibly shipped to the islands for the backbreaking work of harvesting cane, cotton and indigo. St. John and St. Croix maintained a plantation economy, while St. Thomas developed as a trade center. Stripped of their dignity and freedom and fed up with the harsh conditions, in 1733 slaves attacked St. John’s Fort Frederiksvaern in Coral Bay, crippling operations for six months. In 1792 Denmark announced the cessation of the trade in humans. Freedom was not granted to slaves until 1848, when Moses “Buddhoe” Gottlieb led a revolution on St. Croix, 17 years before emancipation in the United States.

The U.S. Virgin Islands is a paradise with so much more to offer than the traditional beach vacation. Visitors wishing to immerse themselves in a profound cultural experience can enjoy historical tours, culinary encounters, artisan fairs, parades, storytelling and other special presentations. Walking tours on St. Thomas and St. Croix feature the diverse architecture, evidence of nations that colonized the islands in the 17th and 18th centuries. If you’re feeling energetic, walk one of the many street steps, the most famous being the 99 steps on St. Thomas, a common way of getting to higher ground.

Your cultural journey continues with a look at the life and creations of artisans and crafters who earned a living creating functional and decorative pieces. Restored greathouses now serving as museums, like Haagenson House on St. Thomas and Whim Museum on St. Croix, preserve this past, displaying masterfully created mahogany pieces, delicate linens and original art. Local craft cooperatives, art galleries and artist colonies present the works of today’s tradition-bearers.

Annaberg Plantation ruins in St. John’s National Park offers daily cultural demonstrations, including cooking the old-fashioned way – on a coal pot over an open flame.
Emerge yourself into our Culture and experience your own Virgin Islands Nice when you use your spending credits at any of the following properties:

**ST. CROIX**
Adventures in Diving STX
Big Beard’s Adventure Tours
Budget Rent A Car of St. Croix
Bush Tribe
Cane Bay Dive Shop
Captain Morgan Visitors Center
Caribbean Adventure Tours
Caribbean Sea Adventures
Centerline Car Rentals
Cruclian Heritage and Nature Tourism Tours (CHANT)
Diageo USVI Dive Experience
Kite St. Croix
Lyric Sails
N2 The Blue
Olympic Rent A Car
Paul & Jill Equestrian Stables
Reef 2 Peak
Rhythms at Rainbow Beach
Seaborne Airlines
Snuba of St. Croix
St. Croix Safari Tours
St. Croix Ultimate Bluewater Adventures
Sweet Bottom Dive Center
Tamarind Reef Resort Beach Shack
Virgin Kayak Tours
Virgin Islands Food Tour
West End Water Sports
Whim Museum

**ST. THOMAS**
Active Island Guided Running/Power Walking Tours
Admiralty Dive Center
A&J Tours
All-In-One Scooters Rental
Ali Thomas Taxi Services, 347-489-8433
Anchor Dive Center
Art Explorium – AmyGibbsFineArt.com
Aqua Action Dive Center
Aqua Marine
Bali Bound Day Sails & Catamaran – Sugar Bay Resort & Spa
Banana Boat Watersports
Bikini Yacht Charters
Blue Paradise Charters
Bolongo Bay Heavenly Days Catamaran
Budget Rent A Car
Captain Nautica Excursions
Guided Tours & Boat Rental
Caribbean Tour Services
The Cat
Coki Beach Dive Club
Coral World Ocean Park
Discount Car Rental
Flying Fish Aviation
Fun Water Tours
Great Exploration Tours
Hakuna Matata Charters
Historical Trust Walking Tour, www.stthomashistoricaltrust.org
It Could Be Worse Disable Services
JST Taxi, 340-677-0631
Mo Service With A Smile, 340-473-9921
Native Son Ferry, Inc.
Night Kayak, LLC
Paradise Rental Car
Phantasea Tropical Botanical Garden
Phipps Taxi Service, 340-514-5962
Plantation Crown & Hawk Botanical Garden
Presidential Taxi Services & Tours, 340-473-6550
Prestige Taxi VI, 340-643-7002
Red Hook Dive Center
Resort Adventure Centers
Rumbaba Charters
Seaborne Airlines
Screaming Eagle
Simon Larsen Historical Walking Tour, 340-998-0582
St. Johns Fragrance Company
St. Thomas Adventure Tours
St. Thomas Diving Club
St. Thomas Food Tours
St. Thomas Jet Riders
St Thomas Sailing Center
Sun Seekers Beach Rentals - Coki Beach
Tree Limin’ Extreme, LLC

**ST. JOHN**
Cinnamon Bay Watersports
Concordia Eco Resort
Cruz Bay Watersports
St. John Boat Tours
Tropic Tours
Virgin Islands Eco Tours

**HASSLE ISLAND**
Virgin Islands Eco Tours
Historical Trust Hassle Island Tour, www.stthomashistoricaltrust.org

**Tropic Tours**
VI Power Excursion Rafts, LLC.

**V.I. Local Fashion, American Yacht Harbor**
Virgin Islands Children’s Museum
Virgin Islands Eco Tours
Virgin Islands Power Excursion Rafts
Virgin Kayak
Wahoo Boat Charters

**This listing is subject to change**
*Only ONE spending credit per purchase, no cash back will be issued for unused portions of the spending credits.

Share your experience with us!
/visitusvi
/usvitourism
#USVInice

Updated 3.27.17