

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park

FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030



Executive Summary

This strategic long-range plan 2025-2030 intends to provide a roadmap for the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park's programming, community engagement, fiscal priorities, and organization goals, as well as for the next phase of its partnership with the Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument (the Park). While this plan represents current thinking for the future of programs, projects and standards of engagement, we will remain open to worthy and unexpected opportunities.

Since 1988, Friends has been working to assure our unique terrestrial and marine resources are protected, our Virgin Island's cultural treasures are preserved, and that visitors, youth and community are connected to the Park through volunteerism and education. As a non-profit and the official philanthropic partner of the Park, Friends recognizes that a successful partnership with the Park elevates our shared vision and increases the quality of projects. The Friends inspires philanthropy that enables the Park to meet challenges without financial compromise and secures matching federal grants. This interconnectedness of partnership, thought leadership, and financial support allows the Park to be nimbler and more dynamic as it faces 21st century challenges.

This strategic plan provides clear direction maximizing impact, optimizing resources, and ensuring success in line with the mission and values of the Friends. It was created by engaging staff, leadership, board members, and Park leadership in a professionally facilitated strategic planning process using the SOAR framework (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results). Planning criteria and the identification of clear, achievable objectives were established around four strategic pillars and four guiding strategies. It is our belief that these pillars, strategies, and objectives are meaningful, dynamic, and attainable.

Mission

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park protects and preserves the natural and cultural resources of Virgin Islands National Park while connecting visitors to the Park and the Park to the community.

Vision

Friends' vision for the future is Virgin Islands National Park as a model of resource protection and cultural preservation which is valued by the community around it and all those who experience this unique national treasure.

Values

Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park partners with Virgin Islands National Park to protect, preserve, steward, and strengthen all that is treasured in the Park.

These values include:

- Integrity: Friends strives to operate transparently to be seen as a trustworthy and honest steward of financial resources entrusted to us to carry out our Mission.
- Collaboration: Friends embraces and seeks to partner with individuals, government, NGOs, and businesses who share in our Vision for a healthy and thriving Virgin Islands National Park.
- Entrepreneurial problem-solving: Friends works within NPS guidelines to help find creative solutions to pressing problems faced by the Park and the community.
- Diversity: Friends value the unique diversity of heritage, thoughts and lifestyles that make up our Virgin Islands community and strive for inclusivity in all we do.
- Community: Friends is committed to advocating for all people to feel access and equality within their park, to retain a sense of pride and ownership of their public land, and to feel confident that the best natural and cultural resource protection plans are being followed in Virgin Islands National Park.

Support Request Decision Making Criteria

Each year the Virgin Islands National Park submits a support request to the Friends for review and acceptance.

Supported projects must:

- Align with the Friends' mission and vision
- Add value beyond federal responsibilities
- Provide public benefit
- Exceed what the Park can accomplish independently
- Include donor accountability through monitoring and evaluation
- Have approval from the Park superintendent and Friends' Board

Strategic Long-Range Planning Process

In early 2024, the Friends engaged staff, leadership, board members, and Park leadership in a professionally facilitated strategic planning process using the SOAR framework (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results). Note: Implementation of the 5-year plan was paused due to changes in U.S. Federal administration in January 2025.

The SOAR model, based on Appreciative Inquiry philosophy, uses strategic dialogue to identify what the organization does well and leverage those strengths for growth. Strategic committees aligned around four pillars (Sea, Land, Community and Culture, and Organization) and four guiding strategies (protect and preserve, connect and inspire, strengthen and sustain, explore and consider).

Over seven months, each committee convened to discuss opportunities and aspirations that could result in measurable value and support for the Park. This process identified a distinctive set of priorities leading to this five-year plan.

Strategic Pillars

- Sea
- Land
- Community and Culture
- Organization

Guiding Strategies

- Protect and Preserve: Help maintain the integrity and security of systems and sustain them over time
- Connect and Inspire: Engage diverse and inclusive communities including youth, seniors, residents, ancestors, stakeholders, visitors, persons with disabilities through education and outreach
- Strengthen and Sustain: Enhance existing programs and keep them vital
- Explore and Consider: Remain curious and open to opportunities as they arise

It is our belief that these pillars, strategies, and objectives are meaningful, dynamic, and attainable.

Strategic Pillar: Sea

St. John's waters are essential for food, transport, and recreation, yet face mounting threats from climate change and human population pressure. Storm intensity, coastal degradation, and declining marine biodiversity threaten our ecosystems. Coral reefs and mangroves mitigate climate risks but are themselves highly vulnerable.

With over 60% of St. John under National Park Service stewardship, the Friends plays a vital role in safeguarding our ocean ecosystems through:

- Research, education, and outreach to mitigate human and invasive species impacts
- Partnerships with universities, schools, agencies, NGOs, and the public
- Initiatives that educate, protect, and conserve marine resources

Protect and Preserve. Through partnerships with government, universities, and NGOs, we will expand marine ecosystem research, protection, restoration, and enforcement. We offer facilitation, thought leadership, convening capacity, and fundraising to support:

- Coral reef treatment and restoration
- Invasive lionfish hunting in surrounding waters
- Monitoring and mitigation of other marine invasive species
- Mangrove planting for coastal protection and resiliency
- Research, nest monitoring, and protection of critically endangered sea turtles
- Open exchange through shared data, research, and programming
- Improved inter-organizational communications

Connect and Inspire. Through our network, we will broaden support for marine education and conservation and inspire future environmental stewards by:

- Engaging our 100+ volunteers to support all programming
- Expanding outreach to residents, visitors, youth, businesses, and concessionaires
- Building upon our School Kids in the Park (SKIP) program
- Creating community awareness campaigns about various marine ecosystems and healthy fisheries
- Continuing public seminars
- Partnering with charter operators for on-water education and outreach
- Increasing on and underwater interpretive programming
- Expanding summer marine camp programs

Strengthen and Sustain. With three decades of experience, we will build upon successful programs and share lessons learned to ensure efficacy and efficiency. Sustaining effective programs provides stability and maximizes impact through:

- Supporting the Park bay host system to connect boaters with the Park
- Establishing a marine stewardship plan in partnership with the Park
- Amplifying the overnight mooring fee system
- Supporting marine enforcement capacity and vessel maintenance

Explore and Consider.

Exploring new opportunities enhances our mission impact, drives innovation, and promotes continuous improvement. A culture of exploration enables us to learn, evaluate, and improve through:

- Exploring a partnership with UVI and NPS to revitalize VIERS
- Considering restorative aquaculture opportunities
- Assessing a community mangrove propagation program
- Exploring marine exchange programs with other agencies for research and professional development
- Addressing lighting issues: dark sky programming, turtle-friendly lighting, and vessel underwater lighting impacts

Strategic Pillar: Land

Land protection and resource management advances the health and sustainability of the Park for future generations. Priorities include keeping trails accessible and safe, native plant restoration, and supporting archaeology—all while ensuring residents have a hand in their local environment's continued vitality.

Protect and Preserve. Protecting terrestrial assets is essential for biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, cultural heritage, recreation, and climate resilience, ensuring sustainability for natural ecosystems and human communities through:

- Maintaining 27 miles of Park trails through volunteer and student programming
- Supporting Park access, maintenance, and protection of current and additional historic sites (including Hassel Island)
- Collaborating with the Park to advance trail connectivity
- Supporting removal of highly invasive or poisonous plants from public areas or providing caution signage

Connect and Inspire. Connecting people to the Park promotes deeper understanding and appreciation of protecting these ecosystems for future generations by:

- Enhancing outreach to visitors, residents, and students on "leave no trace" principles
- Supporting the walk-up trails program
- Reaching more student groups to stay at the camp
- Supporting Park signage programming
- Increasing seminars for residents on foraging, bush skills, and survival skills
- Elevating access, understanding, and protection of rare plants
- Advancing education on the importance of planting native plants
- Ensuring Park and Friends volunteer programming operates in lockstep with cross-training

Strengthen and Sustain. Strengthening terrestrial assets contributes to long-term sustainability and well-being of the Park and surrounding ecosystems through:

- Supporting and enhancing the Park's native plant and garden initiatives
- Supporting close collaboration of the Park's archaeology, trails, and native plant programs
- Working closely with the Park's volunteer coordinator
- Managing and maintaining all archaeological assets collaboratively
- Enhancing collaboration between Park cultural heritage staff and School Kids in the Park (SKIP)

Explore and Consider. As a nimble organization, we can explore opportunities that safeguard unique biodiversity, ecological resilience, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities for current and future generations by:

- Working with Park concessionaires to support outreach efforts
- Expanding utilization of the camp
- Considering hikes and walks aimed at resident participation
- Supporting sanctioning of the Park's volunteer program as a VIP program for official volunteer credit
- Advancing the Park's archaeology program as a career path
- Exploring a year-round trails maintenance program
- Considering planting fruit trees and creating a community orchard/garden space

Strategic Pillar: Community and Culture

Our St. John community includes youth, residents, students, seniors, ancestors, visitors, businesses, and governmental agencies. By activating these diverse constituencies, we broaden innovation, inclusive decision-making, programmatic outcomes, empathy, resiliency, talent acquisition, and societal progress. Legacy programs like SKIP and Learn to Swim ensure meaningful connections as we advance the spirit of “One Community—One Island.”

Community and Culture current activities-programs include SKIP, Learn to Swim, Scholarships, Cultural Demonstrators, Interpretive Hikes, Folk Life Festival and Culture Days, Earth Day Plant Giveaways, Artist in Residence, Social Media, Newsletters, Impact Reports, Outreach Materials, Seminars, and Events

Protect and Preserve. Leveraging local community strengths and cultural traditions enhances conservation outcomes and deepens connections between people and nature. Collaboration, creativity, education, and inclusivity are essential for sustainable conservation and cultural heritage preservation through:

- Mobilizing and maintaining a strong volunteer cadre
- Providing diverse, meaningful, free community programs
- Maintaining weekly visitor programs at concession sites
- Supporting job skills training that can advance to careers, especially for scholarship recipients
- Using our community network to advance Park connections
- Ensuring store inventory reflects the Park's cultural and natural resources
- Leading events that encourage community participation

Connect and Inspire. Building relationships, creating educational opportunities, and valuing local knowledge and traditions protects the long-term success of our cherished landscape by:

- Supporting a positive Park image through community education
- Providing Spanish interpretation to encourage immigrant participation
- Supporting all-agility, all-ability opportunities in the Park
- Continuing work with island seniors
- Encouraging greater participation from the ancestral West Indian population
- Inspiring second homeowners to advance sustainable island living and responsible tourism

Strengthen and Sustain. Investing in cultural continuity, community cohesion, environmental stewardship, and youth leadership secures long-term sustainability, relevance, and resilience through:

- Formalizing content for all programs
- Solidifying Culture Days and Folk Life Festival programming
- Supporting modernized and accurate interpretive signage
- Ensuring SKIP programming includes students from St. Thomas schools and all 4th graders
- Expanding the Artist in Residency program
- Strengthening partnerships with other NGOs by providing convening capacity
- Supporting expanded use of the Park Visitor Center and playground area

Explore and Consider. Staying open to new opportunities allows Friends to adapt to evolving needs, emerging challenges, and changing landscapes while protecting biodiversity, preserving cultural heritage, and providing meaningful experiences by:

- Supporting recycling efforts in the Park
- Supporting alternate energy uses
- Advancing more sustainable transportation options
- Encouraging free programming in the Park for residents
- Considering expansion of summer programming

Strategic Pillar: Organization

As a highly functioning organization, we exhibit proficiency through strong governance and leadership, financial accountability, transparency, sustainable fundraising, engagement and membership growth, innovation, capacity building, professional development, and diversity in staff, board, and membership. The long-range plan includes annual audits of strategic pillars, goals, and objectives to monitor effectiveness and modulate as necessary.

Protect and Preserve. Ensuring mission clarity, strategic alignment, strong governance, diverse skilled staff and Board recruitment and retention, and financial management practices protects organizational integrity through:

- Recruiting, retaining, and developing diverse staff, Board, and Advisory Board members aligned with our mission and values, providing professional development, training, and mentorship
- Seeking GuideStar's "Seal of Transparency"
- Implementing a content library for critical documents and calendaring renewal dates and reports
- Developing and maintaining comprehensive risk management and compliance frameworks
- Working closely with Park leadership to develop meaningful annual support requests
- Ensuring insurance coverage accurately reflects needs
- Validating all Park-Friends agreements are current and compliant
- Maintaining open communication with Park leadership
- Calendaring all annual policy and licensing renewals (Certificate of Good Standing, VIDE letter for EDCs, insurance, grants.gov, etc.)

Connect and Inspire. Engaging stakeholders—including Park leadership and staff, Friends staff, Board, Advisory Board, donors, volunteers, and partners—builds stronger relationships, fosters collaboration, and enhances organizational impact. Cultivating strategic partnerships leverages complementary strengths and resources to achieve shared goals through:

- Including financial data in Impact Reports
- Reviewing employment policies, procedures, and benefits through team review and seeking to include mental health support and education

Strengthen and Sustain. Monitoring and evaluating organizational impact regularly assesses effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance. Using institutional knowledge, partner networks, experts, data, and insights informs decisions, improves outcomes, and demonstrates accountability through:

- Streamlining budget to align with the strategic plan and utilizing full cost budgeting where possible
- Creating an organizational scorecard for assessments
- Utilizing empirical evidence to make decisions
- Being open to sunsetting programs or events that no longer serve our mission effectively and efficiently
- Strengthening Board onboarding and enhancing Board policies to include a "give-get" component

Explore and Consider. Embracing adaptive management, learning from experiences, adjusting strategies, and seizing opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement enhances our ability to support and advocate for the Park by:

- Considering cross-border exchanges that offer opportunities to share programmatic best practices
- Advancing federal funding opportunities
- Conducting endowment and asset review
- Pursuing legacy programming
- Adding staff position(s) focused on community and culture

Conclusion

This strategic long-range plan 2025-2030 intends to provide a roadmap for the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park's programming, community engagement, fiscal priorities, and organization as well as for the next phase of its partnership with the Park. While this plan represents current thinking for the future of programs, projects and standards of engagement, we will remain open to the worthy and unexpected opportunities that we can explore together. We acknowledge we are living in a highly dynamic time in our human history and must remain flexible to unanticipated circumstances. We believe the confluence of creativity, passion, community engagement, and resource protection will help us thrive and our spirit of goodwill will help guide our success.

Addendum

- History of Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument
- Economic Profile of St. John, US Virgin Islands (2023)
- Friends of Virgin Islands National Park Impact Report 2025

History of Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument

Located on St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, Virgin Islands National Park was established in 1956 and comprises more than half of the mountainous island's land area. The Park includes most of the north shore and most of the central and southeast portions of the island, including 7,259 acres of terrestrial and shoreline habitat and 5,650 acres of adjacent submerged lands (offshore underwater habitat, added to the park in 1962). The Park also includes 128 acres on Hassel Island in Charlotte Amalie Harbor on St. Thomas, which was added in 1978. In 2001, Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument was established to protect an additional 12,708 acres of submerged lands and associated marine resources around the island. In sum, the National Park Service manages almost 58 percent of the land area of St. John and more than 18,000 acres of offshore underwater habitat.

Virgin Islands National Park and Monument offer protection to coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangroves, and additional marine habitats that support sea turtles, corals, and other marine life. The Park also protects some of the last remaining native tropical dry rain forest in the Caribbean. In 1976, the Park was designated as an International Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), one of the first protected areas in the world to receive this designation. Of the hundreds of UNESCO biosphere reserves worldwide, the Park is one of only 30 reserves containing both marine and terrestrial ecosystems. It provides vital habitat for approximately 130 bird species, 400 reef-associated fish species, 17 whale and dolphin species, 13 reptile species, numerous sponges, and more than 45 stony coral species. Several marine and terrestrial species within the boundaries of the Park and Monument are federally listed as endangered or threatened.

The Park's cultural resources are abundant and diverse, including prehistoric archeological sites, hundreds of historic structures, offshore shipwrecks, and museum collections that encompass artifacts dating as far back as 840 B.C. The Virgin Islands have been inhabited for at least 3,000 years, beginning with hunter-gatherers of the Archaic Period. Settlement continued throughout prehistory and ended with the development of the Taino culture, the pre-Columbian people who were present when Columbus explored the New World. When Europeans arrived, the Virgin Islands became a melting pot, inhabited by people from around the world who came to make a new life on the islands. These colonial settlements date from the 17th century through the 19th century. Visitors can explore the ruins of hundreds of historic structures to get a sense of this rich history.

Sourced from <https://www.nps.gov/viis/index.htm>

Economic Profile of St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the current economic conditions on St. John, with a focus on data that are relevant for decision makers interested in supporting a healthy and sustainable economy on the island of St. John. As many of the published economic data cover the whole U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) territory or the district combining both the islands of St. Thomas and St. John, research was conducted to identify readily available economic statistics and relevant data specific to St. John.

The economy of St. John relies primarily on tourism, largely driven by visitors to the Virgin Islands National Park (VINP). More than 60 percent of St. John is national park land. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the population of St. John was nearly 3,900, making up less than five percent of the total USVI population. From 2010 to 2020, while the USVI population declined by 18 percent, St. John's population only decreased by seven percent. In 2021, approximately 324,000 visitors to the VINP spent an estimated \$49.3 million in the gateway region (defined as the USVI territory), which supported a total of 565 jobs, \$24.4 million in labor income, \$46.0 million in value added, and had a total cumulative economic output of \$69.6 million (NPS 2022b). In 2022, there were a total of 210 Commercial Use Authorization permit holders and concessionaires operating within the VINP.

Readily available data do not identify the number of visitors to St. John specifically. The tourism indicators published by the V.I. Bureau of Economic Research (VIBER) combine St. Thomas and St. John into one district. While the hurricanes in 2017 resulted in a decrease in visitors to the USVI, the pandemic had a much greater effect on visitation to St. Thomas and St. John in 2020, due to the fact that hotels and rental properties were unable to accept new guests from March 23 through May 31, 2020.¹ Despite an 18-month suspension of cruise ship calls during the COVID-19 pandemic, overall visitation has rebounded with over one million visitors to the St. Thomas/St. John district in the first eight months of 2022, including approximately 497,000 air visitors, and 560,000 cruise visitors. According to a VIBER survey, for the St. Thomas/St. John district, in 2015 on average a cruise visitor spent \$253, while air visitors spent \$1,302 per visitor (VIBER 2015).

Available information indicates there are a total of 1,075 active short-term rental properties on St. John (up from 846 in Q3 2019), 94 percent of which are entire home rentals (Airdna 2022). Given the complete loss of hotel/campground capacity after the 2017 hurricanes, the villa market appears to have grown to meet the demand for overnight accommodations. Anecdotal information suggests that many recent home sales have converted homes from long term residences into short-term rentals.

To supplement available economic data, outreach to St. John businesses was conducted to gain a better understanding of current business conditions on St. John. Because the USVI was one of the few areas open to visitation during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses on St. John generally experienced greater sales and numbers of customers than pre-pandemic levels and even levels seen prior to the 2017 hurricanes. However, during the 2020-21 season, many businesses struggled to find enough employees. Owners found themselves having to work many hours to fill the gaps and/or having to scale back operations. The lack of affordable/available housing was reported as the number one challenge to hiring and retaining the optimal number of employees.

¹ See Governor Bryan's 6th Supplemental Executive Order COVID-19, dated April 29, 2020 (<https://www.vi.gov/executive-orders/>).

Median household income on St. John was \$50,352 in 2020, with 14 percent of families on St. John reporting incomes below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau 2022a).² In 2021, approximately 45 percent of the 1,770 employed civilian population of St. John was employed in the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services sector, while 15 percent were in the retail trade sector, 10 percent were in real estate, rental and leasing sector, and eight percent were in the construction sector (VIBLS 2023).

The island of St. John has seen significant growth in the real estate and construction industries in recent years. In 2017, only 38 homes were sold, with an average price of \$891,763, while in 2021, a total of 117 homes were sold with an average price of \$1,757,642 (St. John MLS 2023). The cost of housing in the USVI is very high compared to U.S. averages for both renting and building residential properties. St. John has a housing shortage driven in part by conversion of long-term rentals into short-term. In a recent opinion piece about the USVI's housing affordability crisis, Mark Wenner, a USVI economist, noted that a standard financial rule of thumb is that rental expense should not exceed 30 percent of gross monthly income.³ Based on the 2020 Census median household income of \$50,352, monthly rent of \$1,260 or less would be considered affordable on St. John for a household earning median income levels.⁴ Currently, rental rates for a two-bedroom apartment on St. John range from \$2,000 to \$3,500. Also contributing to the housing affordability issue is the cost of new construction, which can cost \$400+ per square foot for masonry construction on St. John (Holiday Homes 2023) compared to typical building costs between \$100 to \$200 per square foot for the U.S. mainland (Wenner 2022).

For the current season (2022-23), business is expected to continue to be good, but also to slow somewhat as other destinations have reopened after pandemic-related closures. Lodging businesses also cited increased airfares as a factor leading to lower occupancy expectations. Businesses expect a return to something more like pre-pandemic levels, with a pattern of seasonal highs and lows. Employment issues have eased somewhat, with the businesses who responded to the questionnaire indicating that they would be able to fill most positions. While the pandemic persists, there is economic uncertainty, but St. John appears to be well positioned to continue to thrive, given recent investments in the development of short-term rental villas and marine charter businesses that draw tourists to the island to enjoy the national park.

² To determine poverty status, the Census Bureau uses thresholds (income cutoffs) that vary by family size and the number of family members under 18 years old. For example, the 2020 poverty threshold for a four-person family with two children under 18 is \$26,246 (U.S. Census Bureau 2020).

³ Affordable housing is generally defined as housing on which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs, including utilities (HUD 2023).

⁴ Based on 2020 Census median household income of \$50,352 for St. John, this equates to a monthly income of \$4,196. Thirty percent of this monthly income would equal a monthly rent of approximately \$1,260.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the current economic conditions on St. John, with a focus on data that are relevant for decision makers interested in supporting a healthy and sustainable economy on the island of St. John. As many of the published economic data cover the whole U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) territory or the district combining both the islands of St. Thomas and St. John, research was conducted to identify readily available economic statistics and relevant data specific to St. John. The available data are summarized in this report, in order to provide context for decision makers and the public, and to foster an understanding of current economic conditions on the island. The goal of this study is to gather relevant available information into one place, to identify where St. John specific information is not available, and to fill those gaps using anecdotal evidence from local business owners and operators.

Desktop research was initially conducted to identify data readily available on the internet from federal and USVI government agencies including the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Park Service (NPS), Virgin Islands Bureau of Economic Research (VIBER), USVI Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), USVI Bureau of Labor Statistics (VIBLS), and the USVI Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DCLA). Where data were not available online, additional outreach was conducted in the form of phone calls and emails to various agencies and other relevant organizations (e.g., Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association).

The report is divided into sections providing information related to various aspects of the St. John economy, as follows:

- Economic Contribution of the Virgin Islands National Park (VINP)
- Tourism Trends
- Population and Demographics
- Business Establishments
- Employment
- Real Estate, Housing and Construction
- Charter Industry
- Business Outlook – Anecdotal Observations

Economic Contribution of the Virgin Islands National Park

With more than 60 percent of the island of St. John comprised of Virgin Islands National Park (VINP) land, the island economy is heavily reliant on spending by visitors to the national park. A map of St. John and the VINP is shown in Figure 1. Trip-related spending on lodging, meals and transportation generates and supports substantial economic activity on St. John. This section presents information from the NPS regarding the number of visitors to the VINP, the effects of VINP visitor spending on the regional economy, as well as information on VINP employment, and the number of businesses operating in the park.

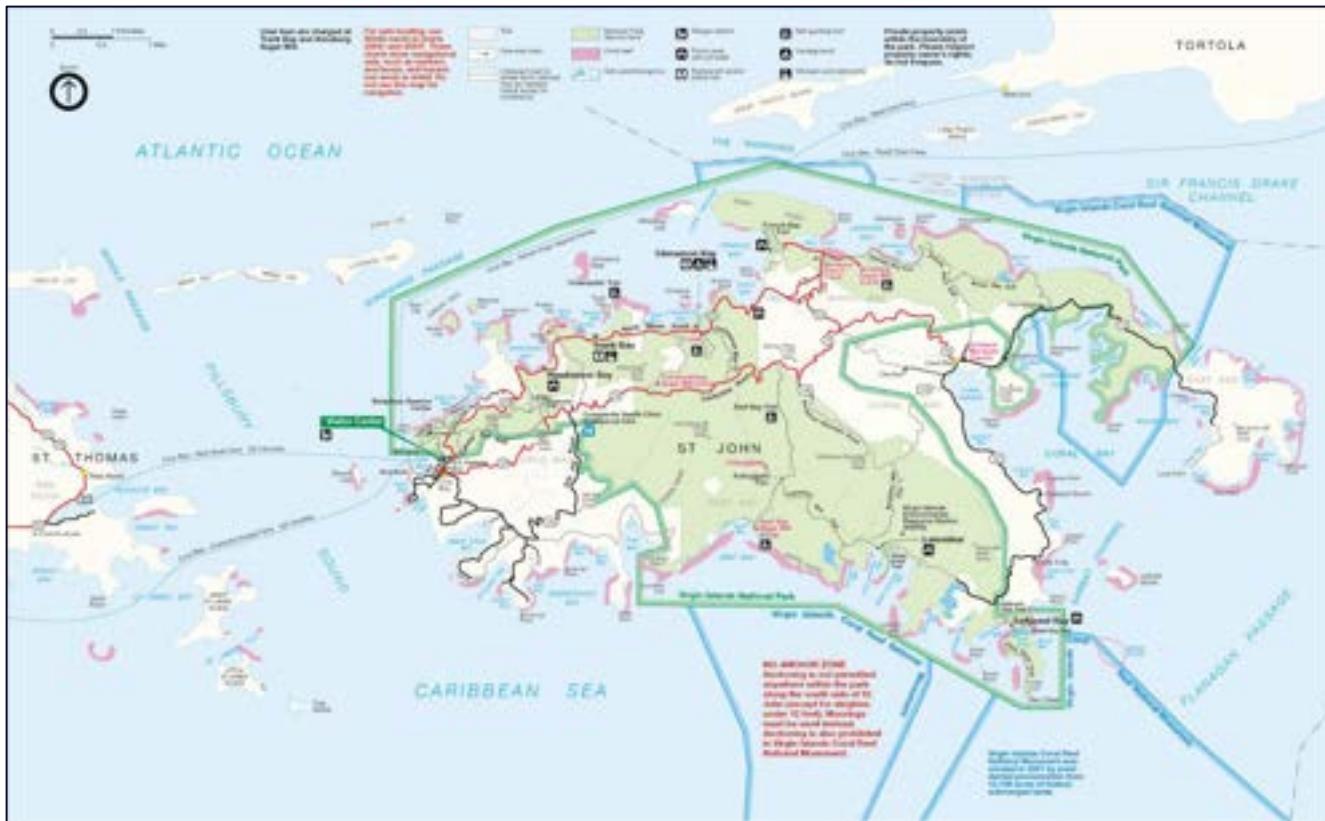


Figure 1. Map of St. John and Virgin Islands National Park

Source: NPS 2023.

Park Visitation

For the five years prior to the 2017 hurricanes (2012 -2016), the average of annual recreation visits was approximately 440,000. While still much lower than historical and pre-hurricane visitation levels, VINP visitation nearly doubled from 168,000 in 2020 to 324,000 annual recreation visits in 2021 (see Table 1). It is important to note that current NPS visitation figures appear to be based on a methodology for counting visitors that has not been updated since January 2003 (NPS 2003). Given the changes affecting the park since that time (closure of Maho Bay Campground and Caneel Bay Resort, and the effects of the 2017 hurricanes and the COVID-19 pandemic), this method is outdated and the accuracy of these figures is uncertain. Based on a review of the methodology, current estimates likely undercount visitors to the VINP; however, the magnitude of this discrepancy is unknown.⁵

⁵ For example, the instructions for determining the number of recreation visitors by boat include “dividing the number of boats counted (from ranger logs) by the number of counts made. The average number of boats per count is multiplied by the number of days in the reporting month. The estimated number of boats is increased by 25 percent to account for boats missed (before and after hours). The total boat count is multiplied by the PPB [persons per boat] multiplier of five. Ninety percent of these visitors are recreation use” (NPS 2003). It is not clear how often ranger counts are occurring, or whether the assumption of five persons per boat remains a reasonable assumption.

Table 1. Annual Park Visitation

Year	Total Annual Recreation Visitors	Difference from prior year	Percent change from prior year
2012	483,341		
2013	438,601	-44,740	-9%
2014	426,930	-11,671	-3%
2015	438,372	11,442	3%
2016	411,343	-27,029	-6%
2017	304,408	-106,935	-26%
2018	112,287	-192,121	-63%
2019	133,398	21,111	19%
2020	167,540	34,142	26%
2021	323,999	156,459	93%
10-Year Total	3,240,219		
10-Year Average	324,022		
Pre-Storm Average (2012-2016)	439,717		
Post-Storm Average (2018-2021)	184,306		

Source: NPS 2022a.
 Note: NPS visitation figures are based on a reporting methodology that has not been updated since January 2003 (See: VINP Visitor Use Reporting and Counting Procedures at <https://irma.nps.gov/STATS/FileDownload/32869>). Given the changes affecting the park since that time (closure of Maho Bay Campground, Caneel Bay Resort, and effects of the 2017 hurricanes and the COVID-19 pandemic), the accuracy of these figures is uncertain, and the figures likely underestimate visitation.

For further historical context, visitation by decade is presented in Table 2. Visitation in prior decades has been much higher than in the most recent decade, with 10-year average visitation above 600,000 in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, as compared to an average of 368,000 in the 2010 decade. This drop in visitation likely reflects the effects of recession caused by the financial crisis in 2008, and the hurricanes which hit the island in 2017.

Table 2. Average Annual Recreation Visitors

Decade	Average Annual Recreation Visitors
1980s	688,509
1990s	617,650
2000s	662,675
2010s	368,457

Source: NPS 2022a.

Economic Contribution of VINP

A recent study by the NPS (Cullinane Thomas et al. 2022) looked at the economic contribution of park visitors to the regional economy in 2021. For purposes of this analysis the region is defined as the entire territory of the USVI. Economic contributions are estimated by multiplying total visitor spending by regional economic multipliers.⁶ Total visitor spending includes spending by both local visitors and non-local visitors who travel to VINP from outside the region.⁷ In 2021, approximately 324,000 visitors spent an estimated \$49.3 million in the gateway region, which supported a total of 565 jobs, \$24.4 million in labor income, \$46.0 million in value added, and had a total cumulative economic output of \$69.6 million (see text box for explanation of each of these categories) (NPS 2022b).

Economic contributions of the Virgin Islands National Park include the following regional economic effects in 2021:

- ❖ **565 Jobs.** Measured as annualized full and part time jobs (e.g., total full-time equivalent jobs per year) supported by NPS visitor spending.
- ❖ **\$24.4 million in Labor Income.** Includes employee wages, salaries and payroll benefits, as well as the incomes of proprietors that are supported by NPS visitor spending.
- ❖ **\$46.0 million in Value Added.** Measured as the contribution of NPS visitor spending to the Gross Domestic Product of a regional economy. Value added is equal to the difference between the amount an industry sells a product for and the production cost of the product.
- ❖ **\$69.6 million in Economic Output.** Measured as the total estimated value of the production of goods and services supported by NPS visitor spending. Economic output is the sum of all intermediate sales (business to business) and final demand (sales to consumers and exports).

(Source: Cullinane Thomas et al. 2022 and NPS 2022b)

As illustrated in Figure 2, in 2021 the lodging sector had the highest direct visitor spending, with \$14.6 million directly contributed to this sector in the region, followed by the restaurant sector with \$12.2 million, then the transportation sector with \$7.5 million and the retail sector with \$6.5 million.

⁶ For purposes of the analysis, due to data limitations, the island economy of the State of Hawaii is used as a surrogate economic region for the USVI for determining economic multipliers.

⁷ Visitor spending estimates and patterns are based on a study conducted in the VINP in March 2004; spending figures have been inflated to 2020 dollars. Surveys were conducted at nine locations in the park, including Trunk Bay, Annaberg Sugar Mill, Boats on moorings, Cruz Bay Visitor Center, Hawksnest Bay, Cinnamon Bay, Maho Bay, Salt Pond Bay, and Francis Bay. See Israel (2004) for more detail on the visitor spending survey effort.

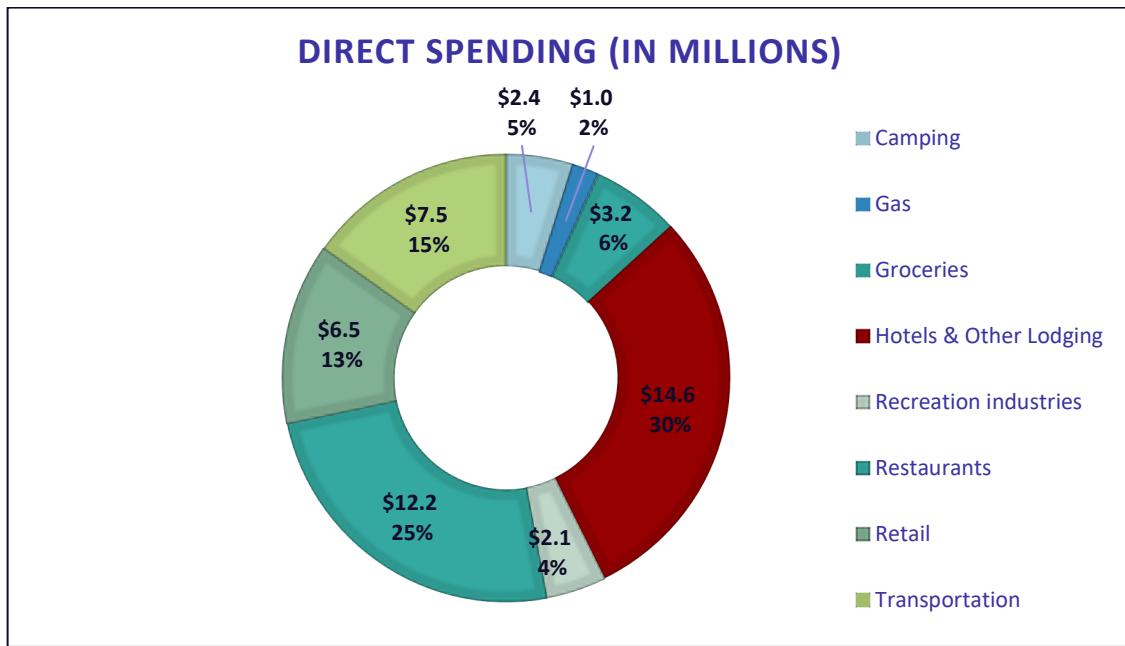


Figure 2. VINP Direct Visitor Spending in 2021

Source: NPS 2022b.

Park Operations

In addition to visitor spending, park employment, operations and construction contribute to the regional economy. For fiscal year (FY) 2021, the NPS reports a total of 35 full time equivalent employees and a budget of \$5.3 million; the FY2023 budget request is \$6.3 million (NPS 2022c).

In 2022, there were a total of 210 Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) permit holders and concessionaires operating within the VINP (see Table 3). These CUA permits represent businesses that are supported by the existence of the VINP. For many CUA permit holders, operations in the park may make up a significant portion of their business. NPS policies do not allow for disclosure of CUA permit holder's revenues, and information on the number of clients served by CUA permit holders is not available from NPS.

Table 3. Summary of Commercial Use Authorizations and Concessions in VINP

Type of Business	Number of Operators
Day Sail Excursions	111
Wedding/Event Planners	9
Photography	7
Guided Excursions	11
Taxi/Tours	70
Trunk Bay Watersports Rentals	1
Concessions Operations at Cinnamon/Trunk Areas	1
Total	210

Source: Email Communication from VINP Staff, October 14, 2022.

At the time of writing, the VINP had not provided requested information on the number, use and fees collected from the moorings in the VINP.

Tourism Trends

Readily available data do not identify the number of visitors to St. John specifically. The annual and monthly tourism indicators published by the VIBER combine St. Thomas and St. John into one district as the airport and the cruise ship docks serving both islands are all located on St. Thomas. As shown in the graph in Figure 3, while the hurricanes in 2017 resulted in a decrease in visitors, the pandemic has had a much greater effect on visitation to St. Thomas/St. John in 2020, due to the fact that hotels and rental properties were unable to accept new guests from March 23 through May 31, 2020.⁸ In addition, cruise ship calls were halted for 18 months (March 2020 through August 2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic, and are not expected to return to pre-pandemic level until 2024 according to the USVI Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boshulte (Major 2022). In 2021, visitation rebounded substantially, with a total of 866,113 visitors to St. Thomas/St. John, three-quarters of which arrived by air. Visitation in 2022 is poised to surpass these numbers, with over a million visitors to St. Thomas/St. John year-to-date through August 2022. Air visitation has increased over the past two years, while cruise ship calls and visitation decreased from 2020 to 2021, due to a halt in cruise ship visits. Hotel occupancy for the St. Thomas/St. John district also improved in 2022, increasing from 65.6 percent in 2021 to 71.8 percent in 2022 year-to date through August 2022 (VIBER 2022).

St. John has a thriving villa rental market. Available information indicate there are a total of 1,075 active short-term rental properties (up from 846 in Q3 2019), 94 percent of which are entire home rentals. Approximately one-third of these are 1-bedroom homes or studios, 29 percent are two-bedroom and 37 percent are three or more bedrooms (Airdna 2022). Given the loss of hotel/campground capacity after the 2017 hurricanes, the villa market appears to have grown to meet to demand.

“We [the USVI] received roughly 12 to 15 percent of our normal cruise capacity in 2021 and this year we’re at somewhere between 25 and 30 percent of where we normally are,’ said Joseph Boschulte, the U.S. Virgin Islands’ tourism commissioner.... Boschulte predicts major cruise lines will sail at 60 percent of capacity by the end of this year and through 2023. ‘So 2024 is when we expect to be back to where we were pre-COVID’.... Meanwhile, Boschulte said that the U.S. Virgin Islands has rebounded strongly in terms of air service. ‘Our airlift into the territory throughout the pandemic has been historic,’ he said. ‘In 2021 we actually set the record for the most airlift passengers to come into the territory. So we’re doing extremely well.’”

- TravelPulse website April 2022 (Major 2022)

⁸ See Governor Bryan’s 6th Supplemental Executive Order COVID-19, dated April 29, 2020 (<https://www.vi.gov/executive-orders/>).

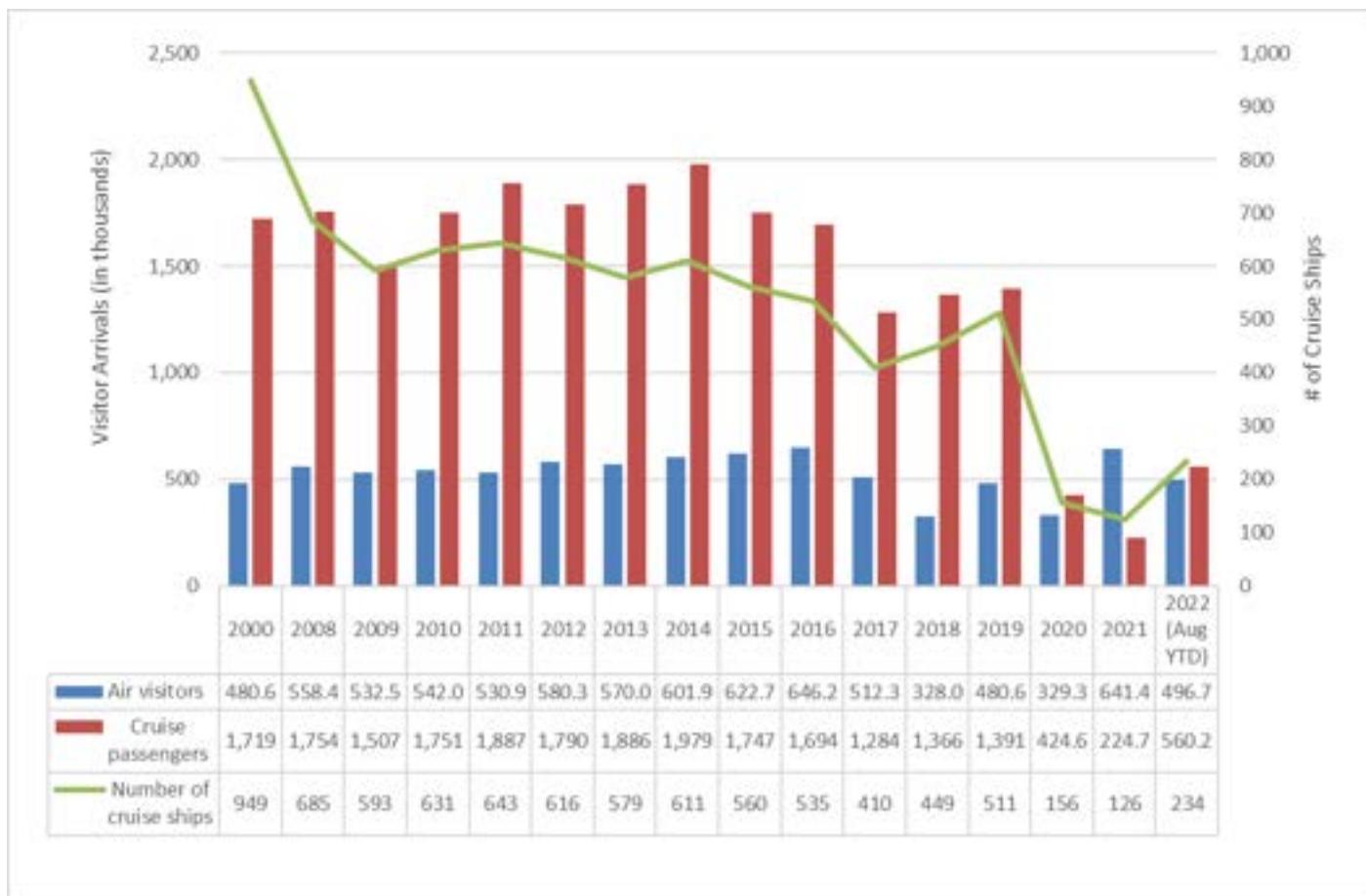


Figure 3. Visitor Arrivals St. Thomas/St. John for 2000 and 2008 – 2022

Source: VIBER 2022.

VIBER periodically surveys visitors to determine average visitor spending. The latest survey was conducted in 2015; a new survey is planned for 2023. Table 4 summarizes visitor spending by district for cruise and air passengers. For the St. Thomas/St. John district, in 2015 on average, a cruise visitor spent \$253, while air visitors spent \$1,302 per visitor.

Table 4. Average Expenditure by Visitor by District: 2015

Expenditure Items	Cruise Visitors 2015			Air Visitors 2015		
	USVI	St. Thomas/ St. John	St. Croix	USVI	St. Thomas/ St. John	St. Croix
Hotel and Lodging	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$855.38	\$855.02	\$860.17
Meals and Drinks	\$19.68	\$24.59	\$14.37	\$253.13	\$250.75	\$281.41
Taxi/Car Rentals/Tours	\$25.48	\$24.15	\$28.06	\$128.13	\$125.93	\$156.74
Entertainment/Recreation	\$36.74	\$41.24	\$29.98	\$152.96	\$152.19	\$161.90
Shopping Expenditures (1)	\$106.19	\$158.55	\$34.10	\$297.22	\$310.78	\$140.03
Average Total Expenditure	\$251.25	\$252.95	\$219.07	\$1,291.61	\$1,302.23	\$1,152.39

Source: VIBER 2015.
Notes: (1) Shopping expenditures include Souvenirs, Local Arts and Crafts, Jewelry and Watches, Perfume and Cosmetics, Leather Goods, Electronics, Liquor and Clothing; breakout is available from the source.

Population and Demographics

Population and demographics are basic factors to consider in understanding potential limitations for tourism development. According to the 2020 Census, the island of St. John had a resident population of 3,881 in 2020, making up less than five percent of the USVI population. Table 5 provides a breakdown of St. John population by subdistrict, and a comparison of the 2010 and 2020 Census population data.

Table 5. St. John Population

Island/District	Population		Change (2020 less 2010)	
	2010	2020	Number	Percent
St. John	4,170	3,881	-289	-6.9%
Central Subdistrict	779	470	-309	-39.7%
Coral Bay Subdistrict	634	724	90	14.2%
Cruz Bay Subdistrict	2,706	2,652	-54	-2.0%
East End Subdistrict	51	35	-16	-31.4%
St. Thomas	51,634	42,261	-9,373	-18.2%
St. Croix	50,601	41,004	-9,597	-19.0%
USVI Total	106,405	87,146	-19,259	-18.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022a.

While the USVI population declined by 18 percent from 2010 to 2020, St. John's population only decreased by seven percent.⁹ Based on 2020 Census data, the Cruz Bay subdistrict represents just over two-thirds of the

⁹It has been suggested that the 2020 census was an undercount of USVI population due to difficulties of obtaining accurate information during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, information is not available to make any adjustments. For example, the island area census did not count residents residing in group facilities during the 2020 Census. Census data

island's population (68%), while the Coral Bay area accounts for nearly one-fifth (19%). In 2020, St. John had 488 school age children (Age 5 to 19); more recent information indicates that there are approximately 500 children enrolled in three schools on St. John.¹⁰ In both St. John and the USVI overall, approximately 20 percent of the population was over 65 years of age in 2020; this is slightly higher than the U.S. average of 16.9 percent. According to the 2020 Census, approximately 58 percent of the St. John population identify as Black or African American (alone or in combination with other races) and 14 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino (of any race).

Based on the households captured in the 2020 Census, St. John has the highest median household income of the three islands at \$50,352, as compared to \$40,408 for the territory as a whole. Similarly, per capita income for St. John is \$31,329, substantially higher than the USVI which has per capita income of \$26,897. The 2020 Census indicates that 14 percent of St. John households have incomes below the poverty level, as compared to 19 percent for the USVI (U.S. Census Bureau 2022a).¹¹

Business Establishments

To understand the number of businesses operating on St. John, information was obtained from the VI Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA) on the number of business licenses issued on St. John. These data indicate that there are a total of 1,041 businesses holding a total of 1,733 active licenses as of November 7, 2022. For purposes of this study, over 200 license categories have been combined and assigned into 29 condensed categories (see Table 6). The category with the most business licenses on St. John is Short-Term Rental, followed by Food and Liquor related licenses and Retail.

For additional context, the annual average number of employers territory wide has ranged from 3,350 to 3,598 during the period from 2017 to 2021 based on data from the USVI Bureau of Labor Statistics (VIBLS 2022); these data were not available for specific islands. However, employment data are available by Island and are presented in the next section. Figure 4 provides a breakdown of these employers by sector type. As shown in Figure 4, in 2021, 96 percent of employers in the USVI were in the private sector.

counts people at the residence where they live and sleep most of the time. If they cannot determine a place where they live most of the time, then they are counted where they are staying on Census Day. (US Census Bureau 2022b).

¹⁰ Personal communication from Friends of VINP, January 11, 2023.

¹¹ To determine poverty status, the Census Bureau uses thresholds (income cutoffs) that vary by family size and the number of family members under 18 years old. For example, the 2020 poverty threshold for a four-person family with two children under 18 is \$26,246 (U.S. Census Bureau 2020).

Table 6. Active Business Licenses on St. John as of November 2022

Assigned Category	Number of Licenses
Short-Term Rental	285
Food and Liquor	227
Retail	175
Property Services	122
Real Estate Related	104
Importer	103
Business Related	74
Building/Construction	72
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	69
Boat Charter/Rental	56
Misc. Services	53
Apartment Rental	51
Rental Business	51
Auto Related	47
Mail/Trucking/Cargo Services	44
Beauty & Health Related	30
Car Rental	27
Manufacturing	18
Advertising	17
Commercial Boat, Freight or Pass.(per boat)	17
Photography Related	14
Telecom	13
Fishing	12
Hotel/Guest House	12
Education	11
Health Care/Social Work	9
Marine	8
Wholesaler Other than Liquor	7
Farming	5
Grand Total	1,733
Source: DLCA 2022.	
Notes:	
Current data as of November 7, 2022. The 1,733 active licenses represent 1,041 individual Business Names; many businesses hold more than one license. A total of 225 expired licenses are not included in these counts. Categories have been assigned to combine license types for purposes of this report; DCLA reported 225 different license types.	

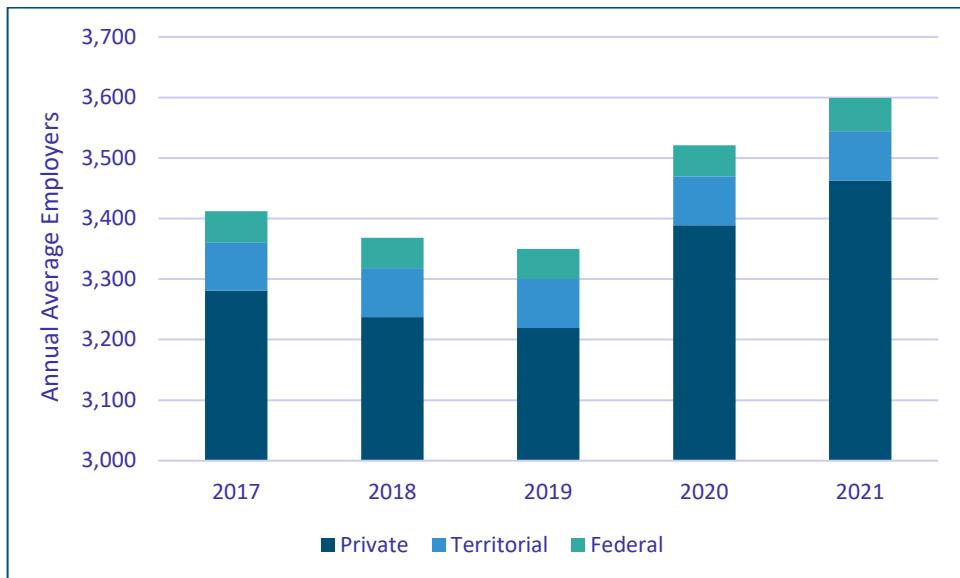


Figure 4. Number of Business Establishments in USVI 2017-2021

Source: VI Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages Program (VIBLS 2022)

Employment

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate in the USVI and the United States grew to extraordinarily high levels; the United States peaked at 14.9 percent in April 2020, while the USVI reached 13.6 percent in May 2020. While the United States has rebounded more quickly than the territory, the St. Thomas/St. John district has rebounded better than the territory as a whole. In the first 11 months of 2022 the unemployment rate for St. Thomas/St. John declined from 7.0 percent to 3.9 percent; during this same period, the USVI territory wide unemployment fell from 8.4 to 4.6 percent. The unemployment rate in the territory has remained higher than the U.S. unemployment rate which ranged from 4.0 percent in January 2022 to 3.6 percent in November 2022. Figure 5 illustrates unemployment rates over the past two years on St. Thomas/St. John as compared to USVI and the United States in 2022.

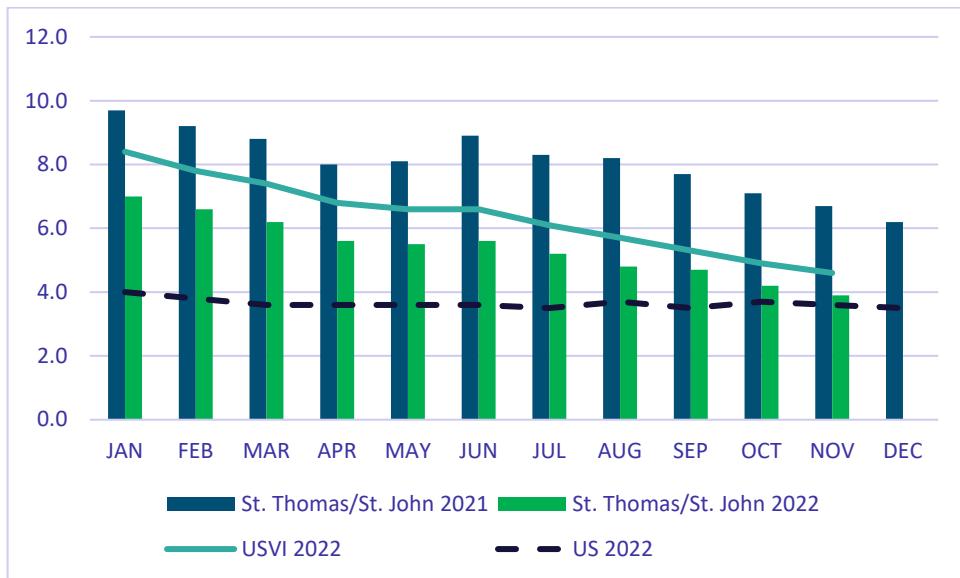


Figure 5. USVI and St. Thomas/St. John Unemployment Rates 2021-2022

Source: VIBER 2023a, USBLS 2023.

In testimony to the USVI legislature in June 2022, the Director of the U.S. Virgin Islands Office of Management and Budget, Jennifer O’Neal, predicted that employment growth would grow in 2022; but she also noted that “[d]espite the improvement in the labor market, however, the territory had about 3,000 fewer jobs in April 2022 than it had in February 2020 before the pandemic” (Straker 2022).

As shown in Table 7, as of December 2021, the private sector accounted for 96 percent of employment on St. John, followed by three percent Federal jobs and less than one percent from the USVI Government. This differs substantially from the rest of the territory, with both St. Thomas and St. Croix having closer to 70 percent private and 30 percent USVI government employment.

In 2021, approximately 45 percent of the 1,770 employed civilian population of St. John was employed in the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services sector, while 15 percent were in the retail trade sector, 10 percent were in real estate, rental and leasing sector, and eight percent were in the construction sector (VIBLS 2023).

“The OMB lead said employment growth should continue in 2022 but at a slower rate. This, in addition to the loss of approximately 20,000 residents per the 2020 Census, is indicative of the difficulties being faced in recruiting that the GVI (Government of the Virgin Islands) and other entities are enduring,” she said.”

- VI Consortium website (Straker 2022)

Table 7. Employment by Island and Industry, December 2021

Employment Count				
	St. John	St. Thomas	St. Croix	USVI Total
PRIVATE SECTOR				
Accommodation & Food Services	781	3,198	1,592	5,571
Retail Trade	257	2,785	1,649	4,691
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	169	404	326	899
Construction	135	746	1,066	1947
Transportation & Communication	81	732	418	1231
Admin. Support & Waste Mgt. & Remediation Serv.	80	1,028	644	1,752
Other Services	69	420	914	1403
Prof., Sci., & Technical Services	65	579	549	1193
Education Services	65	331	219	615
Manufacturing	27	136	413	576
Health Care & Welfare Services	14	804	913	1731
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	11	480	254	745
Information	9	270	207	486
Finance & Insurance	7	532	382	921
All Other Private	0	376	388	764
PRIVATE SECTOR TOTAL	1,770	12,799	9,937	24,506
GOVERNMENT SECTOR TOTAL	6	5,210	4,378	9,594
FEDERAL SECTOR TOTAL	60	577	307	944
GRAND TOTAL	1,836	18,854	14,622	35,044
Source: VIBLS 2023.				

Real Estate, Housing and Construction

The island of St. John has seen significant growth in the real estate and construction industries in recent years. An August 2022 real estate newsletter noted “[t]he US Virgin Islands housing market is heating up, buoyed by strong demand and improving economic conditions, as the world eases pandemic-related travel restrictions” (Delmendo 2022). In 2017, only 38 homes were sold on St. John, with an average price of \$891,763, while in 2021, there were a total of 117 home sales with an average price of \$1,757,642 (see Table 8). This is significantly higher than average prices on the other U.S. Virgin Islands; average home sales price in 2021 was \$861,503 for St. Thomas and \$618,943 for St. Croix (Delmendo 2022). While many factors influence property values, the existence of the VINP may impact property values on St. John. The park constrains the amount of privately available property on St. John, and may also affect demand for property on St. John, which in turn increases price. The most expensive private home for sale on St. John (in January 2023) is a four-bedroom waterfront home listed for \$12 million; of the 60 homes currently listed, 48 are priced at over \$1 million (St. John MLS 2023).

Table 8. St. John Home and Land Sales Data

MLS Sales Data – St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands						
	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
HOME SALES*						
Average Sales Price	\$1,562,905	\$1,757,624	\$1,216,419	\$1,169,878	\$1,049,483	\$891,763
Average Days on Market	340	378	450	436	534	426
Number of Transactions	80	117	51	45	60	38
LAND SALES						
Average Sales Price	\$450,974	\$435,208	\$296,847	\$248,815	\$280,547	\$203,053
Average Days on Market	652	766	517	433	394	566
Number of Transactions	70	53	31	36	31	19

Source: St. John MLS 2023.

* Note: Home sales do not include condos.

According to the 2020 Census, median housing value on St. John is \$591,160 (as compared to \$290,558 for the USVI). Median gross rent for all renter-occupied housing units is \$1,233 on St. John versus \$926 for USVI total; on St. John 68 percent of renters pay \$1,000 or more (as compared to 38 percent for USVI total) (U.S. Census Bureau 2022a).

Housing affordability has been identified as a critical issue in the USVI, and a major issue for employers struggling to find employees on the island of St. John (see Business Outlook section below and Wenner 2022). Discussions with Scenic Properties and Islandia Real Estate indicate there is currently a shortage of long-term rental stock on St. John, and apartments are rented within days when they become available. As shown in Table 9, current apartment rents range from \$1,200 to \$1,600 for a one-bedroom and \$2,000 to \$3,500 for a two-bedroom apartment. In comparison, across the United States, the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment was \$1,295 in February 2022 (Statista 2023). In a recent opinion piece about the USVI's housing affordability crisis, Mark Wenner, a USVI economist, noted that a standard financial rule of thumb is that rental expense should not exceed 30 percent of gross monthly income.¹² Based on the 2020

"[T]hree measures (construction cost per square foot, residential house price to income ratio, and rent to income) indicate an unaffordability problem in the Territory."

- VI Consortium website (Wenner 2022)

¹² Affordable housing is generally defined as housing on which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs, including utilities (HUD 2023).

Census median household income of \$50,352, monthly rent of \$1,260 or less would be considered affordable on St. John for a household earning median income levels.¹³

Table 9. Long-term Rental Rates on St. John

Long Term Rentals – St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands				
	Efficiency	1BR	2BR	3BR
Apartment Rental Rates ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾	\$850-\$1,100	\$1,200-\$1,600	\$2,000-\$3,500	\$2,650
Whole House Rental Rates ⁽²⁾⁽³⁾		\$1,000 - \$2,500		\$2,500 - \$7,000
Sources:				
(1) Scenic Properties.				
(2) Islandia Real Estate.				
(3) Delmendo 2022.				

Contributing to the housing affordability issue is the cost of new construction, which can cost \$400+ per square foot for masonry construction on St. John (Holiday Homes 2023). This compares to typical building costs starting at \$250 per square foot for St. Thomas and St. Croix (VInow.com 2023), between \$100 to \$200 per square foot for the U.S. mainland, and from \$150 to \$180 in Puerto Rico (Wenner 2022).

Despite the high cost, construction has grown recently in the territory, based on the value of construction permits reported by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (VIBER 2023b). Available data are not broken out for St. John specifically; therefore this section presents data for the St. Thomas/St. John district. The value of all construction permits on St. Thomas/St. John rose from \$116.2 million in 2020 to \$206.7 million in 2021 and \$158.7 million in the first 11 months of 2022. The growth in 2021 was due primarily to public construction (the value of intended Federal or Territory government building construction) on St. Thomas/St. John which increased over one thousand percent from 2020 to 2021, from \$6.6 million in 2020 to \$90.6 million in 2021, likely reflecting an influx of hurricane recovery funding. This value fell to \$24.8 million in the first 11 months of 2022. In the first 11 months of 2022, the value of private residential construction permits on St. Thomas/St. John was \$110.2 million, up from \$97.6 million in 2021 and \$93.7 million in 2020.¹⁴

Charter Industry

This section presents available information related to the charter business and boating use of waters around St. John. Numerous day charter businesses are based on St. John, as well as boat rental businesses. Term charters (i.e., charter boats doing overnight trips) visiting St. John are typically based in St. Thomas or the British Virgin Islands. In addition to using the moorings in VINP, visiting charter boats anchor in various bays around St. John, often including a visit to the Lime Out floating taco bar in Coral Bay and the shops and

¹³ Based on 2020 Census median household income of \$50,352 for St. John, this equates to a monthly income of \$4,196. Thirty percent of this monthly income would equal a monthly rent of approximately \$1,260.

¹⁴ Value of intended construction of new housekeeping residences as well as additions and alterations to existing residences. Construction relating to hotels and other structures intended for use as transient accommodations are not included. Compiled from Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources approved permits for which estimated value is available.

restaurants in Cruz Bay. The island of St. John is also home to a lively liveaboard boating community, with boats moored in various bays around St. John, including Coral Bay, Great Cruz Bay, and Cruz Bay.

Day Charter Businesses

There are several sources of data related to the number of day charter businesses operating in St. John. According to DCLA, there are 51 active business licenses for boat charter (one per boat) and five for boat rental businesses on St. John (DLCA 2022).¹⁵ These data represent only a subset of the charter vessels operating in St. John waters. The VINP indicates that they have issued 111 commercial use authorization permits for day sail excursions to operate in the VINP. The most comprehensive estimate is likely information from the VI Professional Charter Association (VIPCA), which indicates that there are a total of 150 to 200 day charter vessels that regularly use St. John waters (Blake 2022). According to businesses surveyed anecdotally, a gypsy industry has sprung up to provide shuttles back and forth to the Lime Out taco bar in Coral Bay. VIPCA estimates that in 2020-21 season, day charters in the USVI contributed over \$45 million to the economy.¹⁶

Term Charter Businesses

Information from VIPCA indicates that there are a total of 100 to 150 term charter vessels that regularly use St. John waters (Blake 2022). VIPCA estimates that in 2020-21 season, term charters (including bareboat charters)

“Really, the growth started in 2017, and as the deep rich green came back to the island and the undergrowth had the opportunity to grow back in no time at all, the industry really flourished in the same way,” Blake said.

“We have grown dramatically and rapidly, and have become, partly through work with VIPCA, much more on the map in the world as a destination because of the continued energy invested into understanding the Virgin Islands a destination quite within its own right.”

- Oriel Blake, Executive Director of the VI Professional Charter Association (Abbotts 2022, VI Daily News)

in the USVI contributed over \$42 million to the economy.¹⁷ One term charter business estimates that their guests spend an average of \$500 during a visit to the Lime Out taco bar in Coral Bay, which is a popular stop for every charter as well as spending at least one day in Cruz Bay for shopping and eating out. A VI Daily News article indicates that the USVI charter industry growth started in 2017, and has continued in part due to pandemic protocols put in place in the USVI to help make chartering a safer vacation option (Abbotts 2022). According to Oriel Blake, the Executive Director of VIPCA, “the

Caribbean Charter industry took a big hit from hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, but the U.S. Virgin Islands had the benefit of bouncing back quicker than the rest of the Caribbean courtesy of federal funds. Further, since most term charter boats were out of territorial waters during hurricane season, they were undamaged” (Abbotts 2022).

¹⁵ While some of these charter businesses may also provide term charters, it is likely they are primarily operating day charters.

¹⁶ Note, these figures include some expenditures which likely would not flow to the USVI economy, including U.S. Coast Guard documentation and VINP fees.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Mooring and Anchoring Information

For purposes of understanding the use of the waters around St. John, information regarding the number and locations of mooring and anchoring permits issued for marine areas around St. John was requested from DPNR; however, no response was received. Similarly, the VINP did not provide requested information about the number and use of the moorings installed in the waters of VINP and the Coral Reef National Monument.

In order to use the territorial waters around St. John, vessels must obtain mooring, anchoring and/or cruising permits according to the DPNR website (see <https://dpnr.vi.gov/environmental-enforcement/anchoring-mooring/>):

- Any vessels registered in the territory seeking permanent anchorage to which a vessel may be secured must apply for a mooring permit.
- All recreational vessels seeking to anchor in the waters of the USVI who do not have a mooring permit are required to obtain an anchoring permit.
- Further, vessels seeking overnight anchorage, not registered in the USVI, who are conducting charters are required to obtain a cruising permit for a fee of \$20/foot per month.

Within park waters vessels anchoring or mooring within park waters may not exceed 30 nights in a 12-month period and no more than seven consecutive nights in one bay. Information on use of park waters is explained in the Superintendent's Compendium (NPS 2022d). Vessels 60 feet or less pay \$26/night for overnight mooring use; paid at the applicable fee station (NPS 2022d).

Business Outlook – Anecdotal Observations

To supplement available economic data, outreach to St. John businesses was conducted to gain a better understanding of current business conditions on St. John. Responses were received from only a small number of businesses, but the messages were consistent across the business sectors, including hotel/lodging, restaurant/retail, and charter/excursion sectors. Key insights are summarized below.

General Business Outlook

For the 2021 -22 season, businesses were extremely busy and struggled to find enough staff for all the positions they would ideally have filled to operate their business. Several businesses indicated it was their best year ever financially and that they continued to be busy all year (i.e., there was no 'off' season; shoulder seasons and summer remained busy). With many other destinations (including the British Virgin Islands) still limiting visitation or just emerging from pandemic-related limitations on visitors, the USVI benefitted from pent-up demand for travel. However, a major challenge for many businesses was hiring the optimal number of employees, as discussed further below.

For the current season (2022-23), business is expected to slow somewhat as other destinations have reopened after pandemic related closures. Lodging businesses also cited increased airfares as a factor leading to lower occupancy. While still expecting a good year, businesses expect a return to something more like pre-pandemic levels, with a pattern of seasonal highs and lows. Employment issues have eased, with the businesses who responded to the questionnaire indicating that they be able to fill most positions.

Hiring Challenges

A major theme of the responses was the difficulty in operating short-staffed during such a busy 2021-22 season. Nearly all the businesses responding noted challenges in hiring enough employees during the 2021-22 season. Some of the respondents noted they had never had hiring issues prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Housing was reported as the number one challenge to hiring and retaining the optimal number of employees. The lack of available affordable rental units for staff to live in, as well as what seemed to be fewer responsible people looking for work, and a lack of trained/skilled job applicants were identified as issues. Immigration issues have also been a challenge for obtaining term charter crew, leading to a crew shortage at times. Some businesses also mentioned competition with other businesses that are paying higher wages as a barrier to filling positions.

For the current season (2022-23), the small sample of businesses responding indicated they have not had the same challenges in filling positions as last season, with the exception of maintenance workers (for property management businesses) and back of the house positions (e.g., dishwashers for restaurants). While businesses seemed generally hopeful that their dire hiring challenges have improved, one business reported still looking to hire maintenance, plumbing, electrical, and office staff.

For those businesses willing to share information, they reported a mix of percentage of employees are Virgin Islanders (i.e., someone who is born in the Virgin Islands and/or the descendant of someone born in the Virgin Islands). The smaller businesses generally reported few to none, while one larger business reported over 70 percent of their employees are Virgin Islanders.

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FRIENDS OF VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

IMPACT REPORT 2025





Friends of Virgin Islands National Park was founded in 1988 and is the official philanthropic partner of Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument. Our mission is to protect and preserve natural and cultural resources while connecting visitors to the park and the park to the community.

This annual Impact Report serves as a record our work and achievements. Everything we do depends on your generous support. Thank you for helping make a difference in this small, beautiful corner of the world.

Dear Friends

When I took the role of Friends' Executive Director four years ago, I was excited that the organization had such a strong history of meeting its mission. I had inherited a well-written 5-year strategic plan and saw opportunities for growth within each area of focus – land, sea, community and culture. Today, we are more than ever our Park's best friend.

In one of our first board meetings with Superintendent Penny Del Bene, it became clear that working towards excellence with dignity was to be our shared call to action. Over the past few years, we have worked hand in hand to connect the dots between our existing programs and our future goals. We articulated, for example, how essential volunteers are to the Park's operations, and how the Sea Turtle Program and the Trails Program are models for volunteer engagement, not just in the U.S. National Park Service, but worldwide, as we learned at the International Sea Turtle Conference last spring in Ghana.

We jointly recognized the expanded reach of the School Kids in the Park program, which now brings more than a thousand youth from St. John and St. Thomas into the Park on field trips led by local culture bearers, expert educators, and retired Park rangers.

The Friends set out to model and practice internally that which we aimed to achieve on behalf of our Park and community. Starting with the Board of Directors, we amended our by-laws, created a Young Professionals Board, and reserved a voting seat for someone under 35 years of age. We elected a Virgin Islander, and the first woman, as Board Chair, and added three new board members.

We have also made professional development part of the organization's DNA, allowing staff new opportunities to grow their skills and enrich existing programs. This commitment to professional excellence attracted Virgin Islanders looking for meaningful careers in conservation. Today, five of our nine full-time staff were born in the Virgin Islands.

As you will see in this year's reporting, Friends programs are designed to meet strategic goals and make big impacts. Our stats are impressive and we are well-poised to continue to support our Park during times of change – whether that be a catastrophic hurricane, a global pandemic, a massive government shutdown, or something else.

Here at the Friends, we are in the forever business. Every volunteer, every member, every donor is carrying the torch to pass to the next generation. This is not a sprint, or even a marathon. There is no finish line. I look forward to implementing our next strategic plan which we will share with you at our Annual Meeting in January, and continuing this work with all of you.

We have an incredibly motivated, well-trained, dedicated network of people who live, work and play in our Park and like you, care deeply about St. John. I hope as you page through our report you get a glimpse of the dedication of our staff, volunteers and partners. Many, many thanks to all of you!



Tonia Lovejoy
Executive Director



Board of Directors

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors consisting of community-oriented leaders who represent a variety of interests in the Virgin Islands from both the public and private sectors. Officer positions are assigned based on bylaws. The Board meets monthly, requires a seven-member quorum, and holds an annual membership meeting to fill any vacant positions and to update members on the state of the organization and the state of the park. The Friends Annual Meeting held in January, is public and open to all.

Audrey Penn, Chair
Rafe Boulon, Vice Chair
Curtis Penn, Secretary
Lani Clark, Treasurer

Tammy Donnelly
John Fuller
Julice Holder
Dr. Paul Jobsis
Shikima Jones-Sprauve

Adonis Morton
Miles Stair
Lila Uzzell (Young Professional)
Dr. Kim Waddell

Honorary Advisory Board

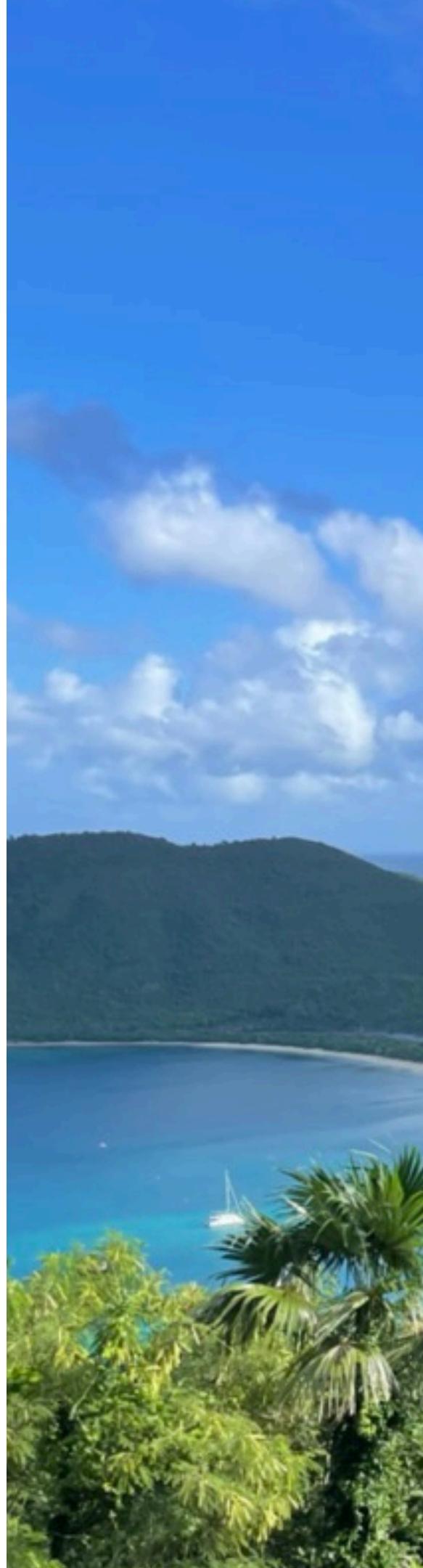
Lawrence Boshulte
Adrian Davis
Cid Hamling
Andy Rutnik

Young Professionals Board

The Young Professionals Board serves to support the mission of Friends of Virgin Islands National Park and create more engagement among younger generations.

Lila Uzzell, Chair
Ki'Janne' Alfred
Kaitlyn Cummings

Tommy Gibney
Enzo Newhard



Letter From The Park



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Virgin Islands National Park

Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument

1300 Cruz Bay Creek

St. John, VI 00830



September 24, 2025

Ms. Tonia Lovejoy
Executive Director
Friends of Virgin Islands National Park

Via Electronic Mail: tlovejoy@friendsvinp.org

Dear Tonia,

As we reflect on the many achievements of 2025, I want to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation for our invaluable partnership. The Friends' unwavering support and commitment to increased collaboration have significantly contributed to our shared vision of protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural treasures of our park, as well as fostering meaningful connections with the St. John community.

This year, we witnessed remarkable success in programs that align with our mutual goals while fostering community engagement and providing vital opportunities for our youth. I am particularly grateful for your contributions to impactful initiatives such as the Summer Youth Trail Crew, the Sea Turtle Program, and efforts to connect and engage locals and visitors with St. John's cultural heritage.

Additionally, the Beach-to-Beach Power Swim event was a fantastic community gathering, drawing an impressive 125 volunteers and nearly 350 participants! I commend The Friends for the outstanding safety programs you have implemented, such as the Learn to Swim Program, which has empowered hundreds of community members to enjoy the beauty of our waters safely. These initiatives have not only enriched our park but have also inspired the next generation to become stewards of our resources and the community as a whole.

Thank you for your continued commitment to Virgin Islands National Park. Our collaborative spirit is a testament to the positive impact we can achieve when we work together. I am excited to see what we accomplish in 2026 and beyond!

Sincerely,

PENELOPE DEL
BENE

Digitally signed by PENELOPE
DEL BENE
Date: 2023.09.24 11:40:00 -04'00'

Penelope Del Bene
Superintendent



2025

BY THE NUMBERS
Fiscal year ending September 30, 2025

turtle protection

38 nests protected and monitored

3,221 hatchlings made it to sea

11 nesting beaches with 45 monitored

1 species nested hawksbill



maintained

27 miles of trails

30 historic sites

5

events

Annual Meeting,
Annual Gala, Culture
Day, Earth Day, Power
Swim

440
SEMINARS

hikes, talks,
demonstrations &
boat trips

7,977
volunteer hours

1,887 hours
contributed by 95 trained sea
turtle volunteers

5,280 hours
by 453 service camp and walkup
volunteers

810 hours
by 135 event volunteers

2025

BY THE NUMBERS
Fiscal year ending September 30, 2025

9
undergraduate
scholarships



SKIP

School Kids In The Park



62
field trips

12
classroom
presentations

1,315
students from
18 schools



learn to
swim

240 youth & adults
taught to swim

34 instructors &
lifeguards
trained or
recertified

15
learn to fish
students



summer in
the park

180 summer campers
from 4 camps

11 summer trail
crew

Marine Protection

SEA TURTLE MONITORING, PROTECTION & RESEARCH

The Friends marine resource protection priorities are focused on sea turtle protection, monitoring and research, coral reef and mangrove ecosystem health including supporting mooring maintenance, and outreach and education to schools, visitors and boaters.

CORAL REEF PROTECTION

Since 2015, the Virgin Islands National Park Sea Turtle Program, funded and managed by Friends of Virgin Islands National Park and collaborating with Virgin Islands National Park, has been coordinating sea turtle monitoring and protection efforts on St. John. The team supported by a crew of trained volunteers documents nesting activity, promotes conservation through education and outreach, and mitigates threats to sea turtles that utilize the beaches and waters of the Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument. In the 2024/25 season, 3,221 hawksbill hatchlings made it to the ocean and 38 nests were monitored.

ANCHORLESS PARK

Since 2015, the Virgin Islands National Park Sea Turtle Program, funded and managed by Friends of Virgin Islands National Park and collaborating with Virgin Islands National Park, has been coordinating sea turtle monitoring and protection efforts on St. John. The team supported by a crew of trained volunteers documents nesting activity, promotes conservation through education and outreach, and mitigates threats to sea turtles that utilize the beaches and waters of the Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument. In the 2024/25 season, 3,221 hawksbill hatchlings made it to the ocean and 38 nests were monitored.

SNORKEL APP

Since 2015, the Virgin Islands National Park Sea Turtle Program, funded and managed by Friends of Virgin Islands National Park and collaborating with Virgin Islands National Park, has been coordinating sea turtle monitoring and protection efforts on St. John. The team supported by a crew of trained volunteers documents nesting activity, promotes conservation through education and outreach, and mitigates threats to sea turtles that utilize the beaches and waters of the Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument. In the 2024/25 season, 3,221 hawksbill hatchlings made it to the ocean and 38 nests were monitored.

OCEAN WEEK

In collaboration with the Sea Turtle Assistance and Rescue (STAR) network, twelve emergency calls documenting various injuries and physical ailments were recorded, including: suspected watercraft collision and predation, disease, and entanglement in fishing gear.

COASTAL CLEANUPS

Our program was proud to attend a variety of sea turtle meetings, providing invaluable opportunities for networking and professional development including presenting posters on the programs education and outreach and ID research in Maho at the South East Regional Sea Turtle Meeting, and attending the International Sea Turtle Society Symposium.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Through our partner, CORE Foundation, a coral growing nursery has been established in park waters, and Friends continues to support, and advocate for ongoing maintenance of the parks mooring system that we helped establish.

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

The Friends Plan Your Snorkel App offers snorkelers the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the marine world smartly and safely. Seasoned snorkelers and newbies can use the app to plan their snorkeling adventures within Virgin Islands National Park. The app includes maps, descriptions of all the best spots by skill level, available utilities, tips for responsible and safe snorkeling, and a marine life identification guide.

Marine Protection

Sea Turtle Research: Using photo-ID to monitor the status of fibropapillomatosis in green turtles at Maho Bay.

The Virgin Islands National Park Sea Turtle Program run by Friends of Virgin Islands National Park has been cataloging underwater photographs of sea turtles dating back to 2012 using photo-ID and facial markings to track the presence of fibropapillomatosis (FP) in green sea turtles in Maho Bay.

A paper on this work authored by Adren Anderson and Willow Melamet was published in the highly acclaimed Marine Turtle Newsletter (Issue Number 169, October 2025) that features information concerning the biology, conservation, management, legal status and survival prospects of all species of endangered and threatened sea turtles.

The paper entitled: Using photo-ID to monitor the status of fibropapillomatosis in green turtles at Maho Bay, St. John, United States Virgin Islands, discusses how facial markings are used to track sea turtles and monitor the status of FP in a foraging population in order to establish a baseline to aid in future research and management decisions.

Fibropapillomatosis (FP) is a panzootic disease affecting sea turtles worldwide, primarily green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*). This neoplastic disease presents as both external and internal tumors that can interfere with an individual's sight, ability to swim, reproduce, forage, and evade predators. The use of photographic ID (PID) has proven to be an efficient and alternative capture-mark-recapture method to evaluate the presence, absence, growth and severity of FP tumors over time.

The paper discusses the monitoring of FP tumor status using PID by assigning tumor scores to individuals, tracking growth and regression of tumors for recaptured individuals, determining the percentage of the marked population with FP, and evaluating the efficacy of this technique. In addition, a baseline was created to estimate the current status of FP tumors in the population to aid in future studies assessing tumor causation as well as management techniques for minimizing threats to this population of foraging green turtles.

Between February 2012 and July 2024, 472 encounters revealed 95 individuals. FP was detected, or suspected, in 71 of them. In addition, from March 2020 to July 2024, a subset of 66 individuals were assigned a tumor score using a 5-tiered scoring system. Another 51 individuals were evaluated between June 2013 to July 2024, showing various trends in tumor growth and remission.



Terrestrial Conservation

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

NURSERY MANAGEMENT, NATIVE PLANT PROPAGATION & PLANTING

COASTAL PLANTING & BEACH STABILIZATION

HISTORIC SITE CONSERVATION

EARTH WEEK

TRASH & DEBRIS REMOVAL

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

The Trails Program, managed and funded by Friends of Virgin Islands National Park, runs annually from November through August and is essential for keeping the park accessible and safe. The program protects natural and cultural resources by maintaining all 27 miles of hiking trails and more than 30 historic sites, restoring native plant habitats, and removing trash and debris from the park.

This year, 453 volunteers contributed 5,280 hours of service to improve Virgin Islands National Park. This included 207 service group volunteers and 246 walk-up volunteers.

The walkup program provides an opportunity for community and visitors to volunteer on the trails every Tuesday and Thursday morning from November to June. Work locations are posted every Monday. Service groups stay for longer periods of time and included the American Hiking Society, Conservation Volunteers International Program, Soul Trak Outdoors, Sierra Club, Appalachian State University, and others.

The Native Plant Restoration Program continues to grow since its launch in 2019. Work included removing temporary wire cages from coastal plants, removing invasive species from the native plant landscape at the NPS Lind Point Resource Management building, and watering 40 newly planted trees at Francis Bay. Eleanor Gibney continues to serve as lead advisor on all planting projects, providing invaluable expertise to the plant team.



Terrestrial Conservation

Scientific data of the *Solanum conocarpum* reserve population continues to be gathered. St. John has several federally listed endangered species on the island including *Solanum conocarpum* or Marron bacora which is endemic to the Virgin Islands and much work has been done over the past few years to protect and grow the size of the population.

The Friends Cinnamon Bay Plant Nursery established in 2021 continues to thrive as a place to raise endangered and native trees as well as an educational space to teach youth about local plants and traditional uses.

Trash and marine debris removal included the Friends staff biannual coastal cleanup at Drunk Bay and a Summer Trail Crew cleanup at Drunk Bay, as well as pickups by volunteers on the trail crew and turtle monitoring team, and volunteerism classes for students.

This year the 11 young crew members of the Summer Trail Crew worked hard clearing trails and historic sites, planted at the senior center, gained CPR skills, learned about turtles and marine ecosystems as well as the traditional uses of plants. They also had fun in and on the water. This 8 week program provides a professional job opportunity to Virgin Islands high school students (ages 15 to 18) interested in conservation.

Summer Trail Crew is an opportunity for students to gain professional experience, develop leadership skills, work outdoors as part of a team, and learn about Virgin Islands National Park. The crew works in the park on St. John under the supervision of the Friends Trails Coordinator. One of the goals of the Summer Trail Crew program is to help the participants gain an appreciation and passion for the natural world, conservation, and environmental stewardship. It is common for crew members to return for consecutive years.

Outreach and education programming included a special screening of the award-winning documentary *Out There* that tracks the path of a young filmmaker on a 10,000-mile exploration of the national parks. It is a tribute to the national parks and their history, and is also a recognition of the people that appreciate them and work to maintain their beauty.

Exploring and learning in the park is the guiding star for the iconic Guided Reef Bay Hike which ran twice a week in high season. Friends supported the interpretation team at the park to help facilitate the hike that includes a boat pickup.



Youth Education

SCHOOL KIDS IN THE PARK (SKIP)

Engaging our youth is a fundamental investment in the future of conservation and our island community. Friends of Virgin Islands National Park's Youth Education Programs aim to create a pipeline of environmental and cultural educational experiences for youth from preschool to college and beyond that encourage empathy for plant and animal life and promote environmental stewardship and community engagement!

LEARN TO SWIM

School Kids In The Park (SKIP) encourages educators to use the park as a living classroom. In all, 76 educational opportunities were facilitated, including 62 field trips, 12 in-class presentations and 2 all school events. A key objective of the program in 2024/25 was achieved with the expansion to more schools on St. Thomas. The SKIP program serviced 1,315 students on St. John and St. Thomas from 18 schools.

SUMMER CAMP PROGRAMMING

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park holds two all school events to foster community and share the rich cultural and natural resources found in the park. 1,030 students from St. John and St. Thomas schools attended Culture Day and Earth Day Fairs.

SUMMER TRAIL CREW

Culture Day for schools celebrates and promotes the rich culture of the Virgin Islands. Students were able to travel from booth to booth and interact with local culture bearers and scientists to learn about the Guinao Taino Tribe of Virgin Islands, St. John history, Caribbean archeology, Bamboula dancing, traditional and medicinal uses of local plants, drumming, Moko Jumbie heritage, traditional food carving, local juices, and more!

SCHOLARSHIP & INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

EARTH DAY

CULTURE DAY



Photo: Kayden Richards

Youth Education

This year's Earth Day Fair was the 16th annual fair hosted by Friends and is part of a week long celebration of conservation and community. A fun day of learning kicked off with a Litter Stomp Parade led by VI Waste Management's Litter Critter. Students marched in the parade with posters and crowns to raise awareness about protecting our planet and conserving its resources. Booths at the event this year included numerous organizations, nonprofits, federal organizations and local advocates to teach youth about conservation in the USVI. In addition, 4th grade students presented their completed Junior Ranger workbooks to the National Park Rangers, recited the Junior Rangers Oath ,and were sworn in as official Junior Rangers by the National Park Service.

The Learn To Swim program is build on the belief that being able to swim is an important safety issue, as well as the pathway to a world of joy above and below the water, and a number of employment opportunities in the tourism and marine industries and in areas like marine research and conservation. 240 youth and adults attended free clinics that took place every Saturday throughout the year and every weekday during the summer.

In the Learn To Fish program, 15 students learned the basics of sustainable fishing in Virgin Islands National Park over the summer. All the necessary fishing gear was provided, and participants took home a rod and reel upon completion of the program. During the program, the junior anglers learned about the history of fishing, the laws of fishing, types, sizes and eligible "take" options, the appropriate safe sites, and proper use of fishing gear.

In all, 180 students from 4 summer camps participated in Friends programming including swimming, fishing and eco-lessons, and 11 high schoolers participated in the eight week summer job opportunity that is Summer Trail Crew.

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park awarded nine scholarships to Virgin Islands youth studying at the undergraduate level in 2024/25. The awards totaling \$42,500 fall under the auspices of the Friends' two scholarship programs: the Jeffery Matheny Scholarship and the Noble Samuel Scholarship and Internship.



Photo: Nancy Borowick



NAME	GRADE

FRIENDS OF VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK



Culture & Community

*All hail our Virgin Islands, Emeralds of the sea, Where beaches
bright with coral sand, And trade winds bless our native land.
All hail our Virgin Islands.*



Virgin Islands March Mosaic Project

The Virgin Islands March Mosaic Project was a community project honoring Alton Adams and celebrating the Virgin Islands March with images and stories from these emerald isles.

The march is the regional anthem of the US Virgin Islands composed by Sam Williams and U.S. Virgin Island native, Alton Adams in the 1920s. It served as an unofficial regional anthem until 1963, when it was officially recognized by Legislative Act.

In all, 87 seniors, students and other community members carefully laid colorful tiles in 4 frames in celebration of Alton Adams powerful contribution to the place we call home.

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park worked with St. John School of the Arts, Adrian Senior Center, Julius E. Sprauve School, St. John Christian Academy, Gifft Hill School and the Westin to complete a series of mosaic pieces designed by the creative team of Sean and Crystal D'Abbraccio of Tiny Tile Mosaics.

Culture & Community

ANNABERG CULTURAL PROGRAM

Preserving and sharing St. John's history and culture which includes archaeological sites dating back to as early as 840 BC connects people with their environment, history and culture, and is important for current and future generations.

VI MARCH MOSAIC PROJECT

CULTURE DAY

MEETING OF THE CHIEFS

HISTORIC SITE CONSERVATION

COMMUNITY FIELD TRIPS

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Annaberg is the park's most accessible historic site and a must visit for anyone interested in understanding the island's history and heritage. On Mondays through Wednesdays St. John cultural ambassadors talk about bread making and local flavors in the old cook house, medicinal and other uses of the plants in the Annaberg gardens, and showcase craft skills that have been passed down through generations. Every year, hundreds of visitors and students learn about the important history of Annaberg and the rich culture of the people of this place.

Friends helped facilitate a gathering of indigenous Caribbean leaders who met here on St. John and visited significant cultural heritage sites in Virgin Islands National Park including traveling to the Taino petroglyph site in Reef Bay. The group included leaders from the Kalinago Nation of Dominica, and the Guainia Taino of Boriken. Together the chiefs signed a Declaration of Unity at Cinnamon Bay for all to witness and honor.

Sharing the rich cultural heritage of St. John through demonstrations of skills and crafts that have been passed on through generations is central to Friends seminar programs like Cinnamon Campground Chats, visitor outreach, and youth programming including School Kids In The Park (SKIP) and Culture Day for schools.



Photo: Kayden Richards

Events & Visitor Outreach

SEMINARS & HIKES

Connecting visitors to the park and the park to the community underpins Friends events and seminar planning and scheduling. Events run from November to June and aim to educate and connect visitors and residents with the park, with some serving as fundraising opportunities in support of our programs.

CINNAMON CAMPGROUND CHATS

Last season, Friends hosted five events and some 440 seminars, hikes, demonstrations, volunteer opportunities, and boat trips. A daily calendar and information on all our events and activities are posted on social media and on the Friends website.

ANNABERG PROGRAM

Opportunities for visitors to explore, learn and experience the gifts of Virgin Islands National Park can be found in the Cinnamon Campground Chats evening seminars, the Annaberg Cultural Program demonstrations, the YP Talk Series from the Friends Young Professionals Board, the Ranger-led Reef Bay Hike, and Sea Turtle Boat Seminars.

ANNUAL MEETING

Education is woven into the all our programs and outreach to encourage responsible visitation and boating features in marketing, print and communications activity.

ANNUAL GALA

Key fundraising events included the Villas For The Park Auction, the Annual Gala, and Joe Kessler's Beach To Beach Power Swim. The success of these events is dependent, in particular, on the generosity and support of the local business community that donates thousands of dollars of goods and services—it takes an island.

VILLAS FOR THE PARK

JOE KESSLER'S BEACH TO BEACH POWER SWIM

CULTURE DAY

EARTH DAY

OCEAN WEEK

VISITOR EDUCATION, VOLUNTEERISM & OUTREACH



Photo: Andre Miguel Goolishian Hernandez



YP TALK SERIES

JEFF MILLER TALKS OCEAN SWIMMING

Friends of the Park's Young Professionals Board presents marine biologist and ocean swimmer, Jeff Miller. Entitled Just Keep Swimming, Jeff's talk will include lessons learned crossing the Drake Channel from the BVI to St. John, circumnavigating the Island, and swimming in Joe Kessler's Beach To Beach Power Swim every year since the first event 22 years ago. This is your chance to learn what it takes to be a distance open water swimmer and get some tips from a Power Swim GOAT!

- THURSDAY, May 22, 2025
- 6pm - 7pm
- NPS Lind Point Building, St. John

Shuttle available from the National Park Visitor Center in Cruz Bay at 5:30pm

www.friendsvinp.org

Friends Of Virgin Islands National Park

ANNUAL MEETING

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 2025
11AM to 2PM
RAINTREE CAFE
CINNAMON BAY BEACH & CAMPGROUND

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Speakers

Kit Janne Alfred
Friends Young Professionals Board Member
Penelope Del Bone
Superintendent, Virgin Islands National Park
Tonia Lovagey
Executive Director, Friends

Question & Answer Session

Lunch will be served!

Please register on our website so that we can determine space, shuttle bus, and refreshment requirements - www.friendsvinp.org



FRIENDS OF THE PARK EVENTS JANUARY 2025

FRIENDS ANNUAL MEETING
Raintree Cafe, Christiansted
Saturday, January 25, 2025

ANNAABERG CULTURAL DEMONSTRATIONS
Every Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday, 10am to 1pm

CINNAMON CAMPGROUND CHATS
Raintree Cafe, Cinnamon Campground, Cinnamon Bay

- Monday: Sea Turtle Talk
- Tuesday: Traditional Arts & Crafts
- Wednesday: Music of the Caribbean
- Thursday: Birds of St. John
- Friday: Coral Reef Ecosystems

MARIN SEA TURTLE INFO TABLE
Wednesday, 10am to 1pm, Raintree Cafe

ANNAABERG SEA TURTLE SWIMMING & MARCH EXHIBITION
Sunday, February 11, 2025, 10am to 1pm

FRANCIS BAY BIRD WALK
Every Friday at 7:00am

VOLUNTEER TRAIL CREW
Every Tuesday & Thursday, 10am to 1pm

LEARN TO SWIM CLASSES
Every Saturday & Sunday, 10am to 1pm

LEARN. EXPLORE. VOLUNTEER.

Visit our website for more information
www.friendsvinp.org

FRIENDS OF VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

CINNAMON CAMPGROUND CHATS

SEA TURTLE TALK
Monday | 6PM to 7PM | Cinnamon Raintree Cafe

TRADITIONAL ARTS & CRAFTS
Tuesday | 6PM to 7PM | Cinnamon Raintree Cafe

MUSIC OF THE CARIBBEAN
Wednesday | 6PM to 7PM | Cinnamon Raintree Cafe

BIRDS OF ST. JOHN
Thursday | 6PM to 7PM | Cinnamon Raintree Cafe

CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEMS
Friday | 6PM to 7PM | Cinnamon Raintree Cafe

PLAN YOUR VISIT. FIND EVENTS, VOLUNTEER, DONATE AT
www.friendsvinp.org



Friends of Virgin Islands National Park
We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.
Budget Category: 100% National Park Activities



REGISTER TODAY TO SWIM IN JOE KESSLER'S BEACH TO BEACH POWER SWIM

SUNDAY, MAY 25, 2025

REGISTRATION CLOSES WHEN CAPACITY IS REACHED

www.friendsvinp.org/power-swim





OUT THERE

A NATIONAL PARKS STORY

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park & St. John Film Society invite you to a screening of this award-winning documentary and a conversation with Director, Brendan Hall

Saturday, February 22, 2025
5:30pm to 8pm
at St. John School of The Arts
Tickets: \$25 | Refreshments Included

Purchase tickets at www.friendsvinp.org or via this QR code



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FRIENDS OF THE PARK EVENTS MAY 2025

JOE KESSLER'S BEACH TO BEACH POWER SWIM

Sunday, May 25, 2025

MARIN SEA TURTLE SWIMMING & MARCH EXHIBITION

Sunday, May 25, 2025, 10am to 1pm

CINNAMON CAMPGROUND CHATS

Raintree Cafe, Cinnamon Campground, Cinnamon Bay

- Monday: Sea Turtle Talk
- Tuesday: Traditional Arts & Crafts
- Wednesday: Music of the Caribbean
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LEARN TO SWIM CLASSES

Every Saturday & Sunday, 10am to 1pm

Visit our website for more information
www.friendsvinp.org

LEARN. EXPLORE. VOLUNTEER.

YP TALK SERIES

ELEANOR GIBNEY TALKS LAND USE ON ST. JOHN

Friends of the Park's Young Professionals Board presents local expert and horticulturist, Eleanor Gibney talking about land use through the years on St. John.

- THURSDAY, March 6, 2025
- 6pm - 7pm
- NPS Lind Point Building, St. John

Shuttle available from the National Park Visitor Center in Cruz Bay at 5:30pm

www.friendsvinp.org



Friends Of Virgin Islands National Park

PLAN YOUR SNORKEL APP

Your guide to exploring the underwater beauty of Virgin Islands National Park

snorkel maps

amenities

fish identification



Get the FREE app at
www.friendsvinp.org/snorkeling





EXPLORE RESPONSIBLY

WELCOME TO VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Experience the breathtaking beauty of St. John. Make your stay both enjoyable and sustainable by following these helpful tips:

- **Leave No Trace.** Take only memorable photos and leave the place better than you found it.
- **Respect Wildlife.** Keep your distance and avoid feeding or touching turtles, donkeys, fish, birds, and other animals.
- **Stay On Trails.** Protect the park's ecosystems and historic sites by sticking to marked paths.
- **Stand Only On Sand.** Coral are fragile creatures that damage easily and can sting.
- **Use Reef Safe Mineral Sunscreen.** Sunscreens with active chemicals damage reefs and are banned in the Virgin Islands.
- **Pack In, Pack Out.** Use reusable containers, avoid single use plastic, and take all trash with you.
- **Educate Yourself.** Learn about the rich history, culture, and natural wonders of the Virgin Islands.



VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR THINGS TO DO
WWW.FRIENDSVINP.ORG

FRIENDS OF VIRGIN ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK IS THE PHILANTHROPIC PARTNER OF THE PARK

This advertisement is generously
sponsored by 340 Real Estate Co.



Outreach to encourage responsible visitation is woven into seminars and education programs as well as in marketing, print and communications activity. This advertisement generously sponsored by 340 Real Estate Co appeared in VisitVI magazine.

Volunteer Program

The Friends organization is the little engine that could thanks to the help of hundreds of volunteers. From our volunteer Board of Executives who lend their guidance and experience to organization strategy and operations, to the volunteers who get up early to patrol our beaches during sea turtle nesting season, and the service groups and individuals who help clear trails and plant trees on our shores, we are blessed by a community that cares. Important fundraising and community events like our Annual Gala and Joe Kessler's Beach To Beach Power Swim are only possible with the help of volunteers.

This year 683 volunteers contributed an impressive 7,977 hours in support of our programs and events. If you see someone out and about with a volunteer shirt on, please thank them.



Advocacy & Vision

FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

As the philanthropic partner of Virgin Islands National Park, Friends of Virgin Islands National Park recognizes it serves the public as both a vehicle and a voice to stand up for the preservation and protection of the natural and cultural resources found in Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument.

VISITOR USE STUDY

In developing our Five Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030) the Friends considered its role in a partnership where it inspires philanthropy that enables the park to meet challenges without financial compromise and makes the park competitive for federal funding that requires a match. Because of this interconnectedness of partnership, thought leadership and financial support, the park can be nimbler and more dynamic as it faces 21st century challenges.

NEXT GENERATION RANGER

In order to aid in making informed management decisions relative to resource allocation, visitation impacts, and natural and cultural resource protection, Friends of Virgin Islands National Park, in cooperation with Virgin Islands National Park, is conducting a Visitor Use Study in 2026. The results will be used to measure and characterize visitation to the park on roads, parking spaces, beaches, and moorings.

TEKTITE DOCUMENTARY

Beyond legacy programs, projects in the coming year include working with the park on their Next Generation Ranger Program. This initiative aims to provide a pipeline of conservation job opportunities available to island youth like our Summer Trail Crew and our scholarship students.

The Tektite project that took place in Lameshur Bay in 1969 and 1970 was the USA's first nationally sponsored scientists-in-the-sea scheme. A cooperative government-industry-university effort it involved teams residing below the waves for around 60 days. It is a story worth telling and Friends is sponsoring the development of a documentary on the project.



thank you

OUR DONORS, MEMBERS, SPONSORS
AND VOLUNTEERS FOR SHARING OUR
LOVE FOR THIS PLACE AND FOR MAKING
THIS WONDERFUL YEAR POSSIBLE!



WAYS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

Donate

Donate today! Your support makes a difference in this small corner of our beautiful world and helps continue all of our programs.

Giving options include one-time donations and recurring monthly or annual gifts. If your employer has a matching charitable contribution program, please bear us in mind.

Donations are accepted online via our website at www.friendsVINP.org or checks can be mailed to
Friends of Virgin Islands National Park,
P.O. Box 811,
St. John, VI 00831

Please contact our Development Officer, Ki'Janne Alfred at kalfred@friendsvinp.org or (340) 779-4940 if you are interested in starting a conversation about a multi-year pledge or endowment.

Stock Donations

With markets at record highs, a gift of appreciated stock to Friends of Virgin Islands National Park is a smart way to give. You'll avoid capital gains taxes and help protect our natural beauty, cultural heritage, and educational programs. It's a powerful way to turn growth into good.

To make a gift of stock to the Friends, contact your broker to initiate a transfer and request a charitable gift transfer or a stock transfer form.

Friends brokerage information:

Friends of VI Schwab Account #: 1790-9256

Account Title/Registration: Friends of VI National Park/Charity Nonprofit

Name of Receiving Institution: Charles Schwab

DTC number: 0164

Contact name at Charitable Organization: Tonia Lovejoy

Telephone number: (340) 779-4940

Mailing Address: PO Box 811, St. John, USVI 00831

Please contact our custodian, Antolino & Associates, Christian Hertl at CHertl@antolino.com for assistance.

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions, including donations and membership dues, are tax deductible.



Friends of Virgin Islands National Park has a Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency through GuideStar Charity Check.

Donate online at www.friendsvinp.org



WAYS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

Gifts In Will

Planned giving is an opportunity to leave a legacy on St. John for future generations. Legacy or gift-in-will giving offers numerous benefits, both to the donor and the recipient organization. By including a charitable gift in your will, you ensure a lasting impact that extends beyond your lifetime, supporting the causes you care about for future generations.

This type of planned giving allows individuals to make significant contributions without affecting their current financial situation, offering peace of mind and personal satisfaction. Additionally, legacy giving can provide tax benefits, reducing the burden on your estate and potentially increasing the inheritance for your loved ones. Ultimately, it is a meaningful way to create a lasting legacy and make a difference in the world.



In Memoriam Gifting

Gifts and donations in memoriam offer a meaningful way to honor a loved one while contributing to a cause they cherished. These contributions can provide lasting benefits by supporting important projects and initiatives, such as conservation efforts, scholarships, or community programs. They not only serve as a tribute to the individual's passions but also create opportunities for positive change and development within the community. Moreover, memorial donations often inspire others to give, fostering a spirit of generosity and remembrance. This act of giving can bring comfort to grieving families, knowing their loved one's legacy continues to make a difference.



A Legacy of Love For The Kesslers

Our heartfelt thank you to the friends and family of Joe and Cristina Kessler who have collectively donated \$7,243.81.



Joe and Cristina shared their deep appreciation for Virgin Islands National Park through their extraordinary work and volunteerism with the Friends. Their legacy will live on in the programs and projects they inspired or created for many years to come!

Donate online at www.friendsvinp.org



WAYS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT



Become A Member

Be a Friend! Since its establishment in 1988 our Friends organization has worked to help protect natural and cultural resources, engage and educate island youth, and connect visitors and community with the Park. As a Member, you become a part of a special community that makes it all possible.

Membership dues can be paid online annually a year at a time, or as a recurring annual payment. Per annum, individual dues are \$30, family dues are \$50, and business dues are \$100. Your membership dues support numerous projects and programs to further our mission to help protect this beautiful corner of the world.

Please feel free to contact our Membership Manager, Jennifer Stone at jstone@friendsvinp.org or 340-779-4940 with any questions.

Adopt A Turtle

Adopt A Turtle is an opportunity to support the Sea Turtle Program specifically. These adoptions are symbolic. They provide an opportunity to support sea turtle protection in Virgin Islands National Park and make wonderful gifts for grandchildren, children, family and friends.

Adoption options include adopting a hawksbill, a green, a leatherback, and a nest of hatchlings. On request, adoptions come with an adoption certificate that can be made out to a child, family member or friend and a cool species card.

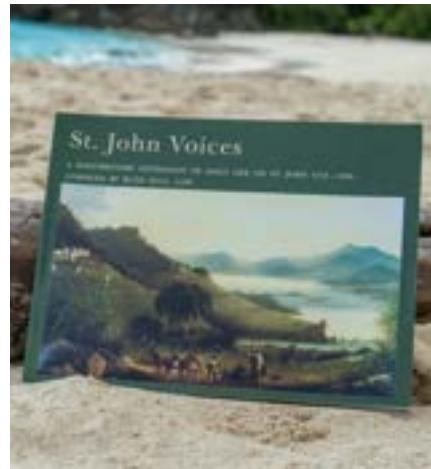
Should you choose to adopt a Nest of Hatchlings, you will receive an adoption certificate (don't forget to include the name of the person you want on the certificate in the special notes section at checkout) as well as a general nesting fact sheet and update emails when the nest has been laid and when it has hatched. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about the nesting cycle and share in the excitement of baby hatchlings heading out to the ocean!

Become a member at www.friendsvinp.org



WAYS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

Shop The Park Store



Proceeds from sales of Virgin Islands National Park merchandise and more support our programs.

Shop online on our website or stop by the National Park Visitor Center and Park Store in Cruz Bay which is open Monday to Thursday from 8:15am to 4pm and on Friday from 8:15am to 1:30pm. We look forward to welcoming you!

Shop online at www.friendsvinp.org





Get involved

**“Every individual matters.
Every individual has a role to play.
Every individual makes a
difference.”**

Dr. Jane Goodall



LEARN. EXPLORE. VOLUNTEER.



www.friendsvinp.org