

**The majority of St. John is protected by the Virgin Islands National Park, where miles upon miles of hiking trails wind along the island's rolling terrain, just begging to be explored. From those new to the hiking game to wheelchair users to hardcore hiking enthusiasts, St. John's varied trails truly offer something for everyone.**

# Better

by Andrea Milam

At Francis Bay on the island's north shore, a large salt pond teems with a unique ecosystem, attracting one of the most diverse bird populations on the island. A boardwalk that spans the length of the pond's northern edge is the perfect place from which wheelchair users, parents with young children, or anyone else looking for an easy, peaceful stroll through nature can watch the enthralling activity of this healthy ecosystem.

History is also a major part of what you'll encounter on St. John trails, and the 18th-century sugar factory ruins at Cinnamon Bay can be explored via a concrete and wooden boardwalk. The hiking trail continues beyond the boardwalk in an approximately half-mile loop through the island forest, where you can see a variety of flora and fauna, as well as the graves of the former Danish owners of Cinnamon Bay plantation.

As you might expect given the island's terrain, you'll experience changes in elevation on most trails. If hiking uphill isn't your thing, join one of the Virgin Islands National Park's two guided hikes. VINP rangers regularly lead group hikes down the Reef Bay and L'Esperance trails, pointing out the island's iconic bay rum trees and massive termite nests, and showing guests how to "fish" for ground spiders. L'Esperance boasts two sets of ruins and two distinct natural environments, while the Reef Bay rum factory ruins are among the island's most complete and impressive. A boat picks up hikers at the bottom of each trail, allowing you to skip the energy-zapping uphill climb back to the starting point in favor of a leisurely cruise back to Cruz Bay along St. John's south shore.

*Incredible vistas and amazing natural environments await those who trek the National Park's trails on St. John*



# by



There are a handful of St. John trails that pay out big rewards in exchange for a little bit of effort. The Caneel Hill trail, which can be accessed from several different starting points, offers one of the most stunning views of the island. After close to 30 minutes of walking from the starting point at Centerline, including a significant but not-impossible rise in elevation, you'll find yourself at a viewing tower that begs for pause. From the bird's eye view of Cruz Bay to St. Thomas on the horizon to Caneel Bay below and Jost Van Dyke in the distance, you're sure to find this hike worth the picture-perfect vista. Once you're finished admiring the view, continue along the trail in the

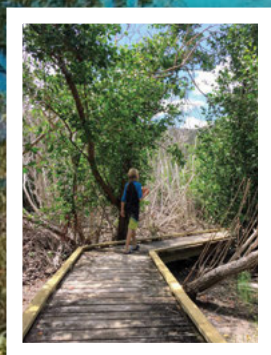
same direction and you'll find yourself just east of Mongoose Junction, where a well-earned libation or ice cream cone is in order.

Other hiking trail rewards come in the form of quintessentially beautiful St. John beaches, like the Lind Point trail which deposits hikers at Salomon Beach, or the spur trail off the ascent to Peace Hill, which will take you down to Denis Bay with minimal effort.

On the island's south shore, the hike from Salt Pond to Ram Head is popular for good reason. The environment here is desert-like, so different from many of St. John's other trails. Start this one as early in the morning as possible, before the heat of the day sets in. Part of the

hike involves a trek along a curious blue cobblestone beach; be sure to linger long enough here to hear the sound of the waves washing over the rocks. Once you're past this beach, keep an eye out for ground turk's head cacti; their tiny, delicious pink fruits—flavored like a very mild kiwi—are the ultimate treat as you make your way toward the Ram Head itself, which offers 360-degree views of St. John's rolling hills, its peninsulas stretching out to sea, and to the south, crisp horizon where ocean meets sky. Standing on Ram Head point with the cool salty breeze washing over you, feeling like you're at the ends of the earth, is undoubtedly one of the most dramatic experiences on St. John.

# Foot



Whether you opt for an easy boardwalk stroll or you're in for a strenuous hike with big rewards, remember that the island's heat can dehydrate you very quickly, so plenty of water is a must. Lightweight, nutrition-packed snacks like granola bars are also a good idea, as are sunscreen and bug spray. And definitely don't forget your phone or camera for those post-hike sweaty selfies. Happy hiking!