

# MACO

C A R I B B E A N L I V I N G



US \$7.95



ROLLING WIND-WHIPPED LANDSCAPE DEFINES ST JOHN ECO-RESORT WHERE VISITORS CAN KISS THE SKY

closer to heaven





LEFT TOP Concordia's front desk is a welcoming sight

LEFT CENTRE Drunk Bay work of art

LEFT BELOW Coral creations at Drunk Bay

BELOW The Heavenly Stair, and Drunk Bay beyond

BOTTOM Eco-tents nestled in the hillside



EACH OF CONCORDIA'S 42 UNITS OFFERS ITS OWN PERSPECTIVE ON THE DRAMATIC, WIND-WHIPPED LANDSCAPE THAT'S SO CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS SIDE OF THE ISLAND. THE ECO-TENTS ON THE PROPERTY'S EASTERN SIDE AFFORD PREVAILING WINDS AND THE SOUNDS OF WAVES ROLLING IN TO DRUNK BAY

THE JOURNEY TO CONCORDIA ECO-RESORT IS A LONG ONE BY ST JOHN STANDARDS. Every mile you traverse during the 45-minute drive from the island's largest town, Cruz Bay, takes you farther away from the responsibilities and burdens of everyday life. Concordia offers a blissful escape from worry and an opportunity to truly disconnect—there's no cell phone service on the island's far-flung southeastern side, where the resort's 42 units are sprawled across 20 acres of rolling seaside hills.

Concordia has become a component of St John's narrative, earning itself a cult-like following among guests who return year after year. Stanley Selengut is a name that's well-known by island residents. He developed the now defunct Maho Bay Campground, whose mere mention still elicits a feverish loyalty among past guests and employees alike, four years after its closure owing to the property's sale. Selengut, a civil engineer who specializes in sustainable resort development, created Concordia in the late 1980s with the same ethos of sustainability that had gained such popularity at Maho.

The majority of St John, an island measuring less than 20 square miles, belongs to the National Park Service; it couldn't be a better home for Selengut's inclinations. Visitors seek out this US Virgin Island for the very natural beauty that his developments have aimed to protect. Concordia visitors pass through part of the Virgin Islands National Park on their drive out to the eco-resort before turning right at "the triangle"—a T junction whose bright, funky signs for local businesses announce arrival in Coral Bay.

In this small waterfront town, live-aboard boaters, native St Johnians, and those who find beauty in a simple existence live peacefully side by side, miles away from Cruz Bay. In true Coral Bay fashion, your journey may be slightly delayed by a large flock of sheep crossing the road—the only form of traffic to

speak of on this laid-back island. Ten minutes after turning into Coral Bay, your arrival to Concordia is announced by a blink-and-you'll miss it sign and a turn-off to the left.

As part of your welcome to Concordia, the cheerful front desk attendant will kindly suggest you put your phone in airplane mode, since there's no cell phone service at the resort. Don't panic. In this modern-day world, where bright red notifications and cheerful dings and beeps demand near-constant attention, this opportunity to fully disconnect from your electronic tether is a gift.

Each of Concordia's 42 units offers its own perspective on the dramatic, wind-whipped landscape that's so characteristic of this side of the island. The eco-tents on the property's eastern side afford prevailing winds and the sounds of waves rolling in to Drunk Bay, a beach where the quirkiness of St John's residents and visitors is on display. Here, beachgoers arrange the bleached coral fragments and assorted flotsam delivered by the waves that constantly arrive at the shore into renderings of people, names of loved ones, and other curious designs.

Concordia's eco-tents are a step up from camping; these screened-in units evoke a treehouse feel, while newer eco-studios feature unique touches such as countertops forged from locally made recycled artisan glass. The units are connected by sturdy wooden stairs joined by long walkways that form the main thoroughfare at Concordia. The landscape is rife with scrubby vegetation and a variety of cacti, their spiny arms stretching ever upward in pursuit of the hot sun, whose rays have given rise to this part of the island's arid landscape. Parts of the resort's hilly acreage have been augmented by planted areas of fruit trees, cotton trees, and lush banana plants, which get their water and nutrients from a subsurface greywater system.



Concordia draws a special kind of visitor. Those who stay here care about their carbon footprint; they understand the benefits of the resort's eco-friendly measures such as solar panels, shower water that's warmed by the sun, and composting toilets. They also happen to know that Concordia is one of the most naturally beautiful spots on the island, with a kindness and camaraderie among resort staff and fellow guests that deliver exactly the kind of upliftment we seek by going on vacation.

Concordia's restaurant serves up breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with a Sunday brunch that attracts a big crowd, and menu items that are reminiscent of an upscale resort. Their Monday open-mic night is the best on the island, drawing a standing-room-only crowd. The resort's open-air pavilion overlooking Salt Pond and Drunk Bay below hosts numerous yoga classes, giving visitors the opportunity to relax mind, body, and spirit.



Though Concordia's amenities offer plenty of on-site entertainment, the true beauty of the resort's location is that it's an ideal striking-out point to explore some of the island's most incredible hiking trails and beaches. A 10-minute walk from Concordia via a shady hiking trail is Salt Pond, a beach with powdery white sand and some of the island's best snorkeling. From here, you have direct access to the salt pond for which the beach is named, where during times of drought, locals come with five-gallon buckets to fill up with the natural sea salt that's left behind when the pond's water evaporates. Beyond the salt pond is Drunk Bay, where you'll find plenty of all-natural inspiration to make your own artistic creation.

Salt Pond also serves as the beginning of the island's most dramatic hike—Ram Head. A mile-long trek takes you across an enchanting blue cobblestone beach and through desert-like landscape, where turk's cap cacti offer up their vibrant pink fruits for sustenance along the way. At the consummation of the trail, you're rewarded with cooling winds whipping up from the sea and dramatic 360-degree views of St John and the British Virgin Islands to the northeast.

Another more rigorous hike begins at the Reef Bay Trail, which you can reach via the island's public bus service or by hitchhiking, a safe, common, and accepted mode of transportation on St John. The trail takes you south past 19th-century plantation ruins, massive termite nests, and some less-than-timid deer before arriving at the sacred site where Tainos carved petroglyphs in blue basalt rock around 1,000 years ago to honour their ancestors.

From there, head east, where you'll encounter more ruins as you glimpse stunning south shore vistas through the forest. The well-worn trail gains elevation as you ascend the knoll separating Reef Bay from several south shore bays to its east, and at that moment when you're certain you can't climb another foot, the trail begins to descend; when you can't take another moment of the hot sun beating down on the back of your neck, the high canopy suddenly envelops you once again.

Over the next several miles, the trail alternately hugs the shoreline and climbs over ridges, with spurs leading to Europa Bay, Little and Great Lameshur bays, and Kiddel Bay before one last steep climb up Route 107 delivers you back to the entrance of



PREVIOUS PAGE A cosy eco-tent interior  
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE  
Salt Pond Bay; Reef Bay petroglyphs; the Reef Bay great house ruins; hiking to beauty; the salt pond that gives the beach its name





TOP The writer immersed in nature

MIDDLE Great Lameshur bay

BOTTOM Concordia lights up at night



ANDREA MILANI



Concordia. It's a nine-mile journey that's exhausting and electrifying. There's no better way to celebrate such an accomplishment than waiting for nightfall before settling in on a bench at the top of Concordia's "heavenly stair," where certainly you're as close to heaven as is earthly possible.

The night sky explodes with stars, each one a glittering pinprick of light on the ebony canvas overhead. The moon illuminates the source of the evening's soundtrack—waves rolling ever onward onto the shore of Drunk Bay below. Being surrounded by nature and far from the constant attention that electronic devices typically demand inspires a feeling of euphoria. Sleep is sure to come easy after a day of exploration, as frogs in the trees surrounding each unit chirp expectantly and the delicate breeze flows gently through the windows.

When it's finally time to return home, you'll leave Concordia not with a sadness that vacation is over, but with a renewed energy, buoyed by the memories of the time you spent free from gadgets, free to explore St John's beguiling landscapes.M

WHEN YOU GO:

- 1 There is no airport on St John, so to get here you'll fly into the Cyril E. King Airport on nearby St Thomas, which is serviced by several major airlines including American, Delta, JetBlue, United, and US Airways. Direct flights arrive from a handful of major cities including New York-JFK, Chicago-O'Hare, Atlanta, and Washington-Dulles. Once you arrive on St Thomas, you'll take a 30-minute taxi ride to Red Hook, where you'll catch a ferry to Cruz Bay, St John. The ferry ride is approximately 20 minutes.
- 2 A rental car is recommended, and there are plenty of rental car companies on St John. There are also many open-air taxis called "safaris," and hitchhiking is a very common, safe, and accepted mode of transportation here. A note to the uninitiated: an extended index finger—not thumb—indicates you're seeking a ride.
- 3 Concordia's open-air pavilion plays frequent host to yoga classes. Don't miss the popular open-mic night every Monday evening, when locals and visitors enjoy live performances by talented singers.
- 4 Concordia is an excellent jumping-off point for several hikes, including the one mentioned in this story, and the shorter hike down to Salt Pond beach. From there, it's a short walk to Drunk Bay, where you can create your own coral design, and a one-mile hike out to Ram Head, where you'll find incredible 360-degree views.
- 5 Make sure you bring decent hiking shoes. St John's numerous trails are worth exploring, but you don't want to be wearing flip-flops when you hike. If a trip to the BVI is on your itinerary—and it should be!—don't forget to bring your passport.

