



Who hasn't fantasized about being a mermaid? Mermaid Swim V.I. can make that dream come true!

St. John is for Doers

By Andrea Milliam

Enhance your island visit with
unique experiences

Beaching and hiking are surely on your St. John to-do list, but did you know that our small island offers surprisingly varied opportunities to enrich yourself and learn something new? Love City residents are a creative bunch, and many of them share their skills via group and private lessons—a great way to add depth to your island vacation.

The island's natural beauty has undoubtedly inspired countless artists, from novices to experts. You too can render the vibrant blues, rich greens, and brilliant tropical colors that make up St. John's landscape with the help of popular island artist Livy Hitchcock, (340) 693-7070, who teaches plein air pastel classes at Maho and Hawksnest beaches. Her three-hour session includes all the supplies so even if you've never put a chalk stick to paper, you're sure to walk away with a beautiful, beachy pastel painting as a reminder of your island vacation. "Most of the time, I get people who've never done anything like this," says Livy of her pastel classes.

If the thought of painting the St. John landscape has you feeling hesitant, why not learn how to capture it on camera with well-known island photographer Steve Simonsen? (340) 513-9687. Teaching and photography go hand-in-hand for this widely published photographer, who's been doing both for several decades. Steve offers private lessons for everyone from those who need help navigating the complicated buttons and menus found on even the most basic digital point-and-shoot cameras to accomplished photojournalists looking for an insider's perspective. "I take them places they might not have seen on their own to give them an elevated photographic awareness," says Steve.

Branch out into a different genre at Casey Giakas and Gail Van de Bogurt's Pottery in Paradise, (340) 514-6594, the former Maho Bay Clay Works, which relocated to Coral Bay when the eco-resort closed in 2013. Get messy and really work with your hands at one of their various pottery classes, where you can build your piece by hand or work on the wheel. When finished, the experts will

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Artist Livy Hitchcock offers pastel art classes for a personal memento of your visit to St. John.



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Get creative with a pottery class at Pottery in Paradise.

glaze your ceramic with the color of your choice, fire it in the kiln, and ship it to your home. They also offer half-day watercolor lessons, generally at the beach of your choosing. Keep an eye on the studio's website, www.potteryinparadise.com or Facebook page. If you're lucky, your visit may be at the same time as one of their pottery workshops, usually led by a nationally known clay artist. Pottery in Paradise is located in the backyard at Pickles in Paradise Deli.

Sloop Jones, (340) 779-4001, and his funky, colorful painted clothing are St. John icons, and thanks to his Shirt of Art workshops, you can create your own wearable art to bring some brightness to your wardrobe. "To me, it's about transferring the knowledge I've developed," says Sloop. "It all comes from knowing that what I do creates a lot of happiness in the world, and wanting to make sure that continues." Students at the workshops are given access to the artist's studio and all the tools that Sloop has amassed over the decades at his East End shop. The three-hour shirt painting workshops are led by Sloop or his talented artists. "We are the technicians providing our students with the capabilities to manifest their vision," he says.

Not all workshops on St. John are art-centric, some are inspired by the cerulean seas surrounding the island. Ever look at those vivid blue waters and wonder what it would be like to glide through the ocean, powered by your own mermaid's tail? Now you can learn at Mermaid Swim V.I., (340) 228-4977. The experience isn't limited by your age, fitness level, or gender. Mermaid Swim V.I.'s owner Crystal D'Abbraccio expertly tailors the sessions, from talking to younger students about where mermaids come from and what they eat to providing flotation devices to those who aren't strong swimmers. The swims generally take place in the calm waters of Maho Bay. "A lot of times, my students tell me, 'You've made my dream come true; I always wanted to be a mermaid,'" says Crystal.

There are other ways to get physical while you're on St. John. Yoga classes are popular on the island, and one of our best known yogis is "Yoga Beth" Escardo, (340) 643-6467. This integrative yoga therapist has a multitude of trainings and certifications she works from. "When I see clients, I can customize what they'll need," says Beth. "The body won't always be comfortable doing certain styles of yoga." Beth's teachings go beyond fitness, she's a reiki master who has studied ayurvedic sciences. "I can really support each individual, no matter their challenge or intention," Beth says.

Another way to stay in shape while you're on vacation is at Pilates Worx, (877) 249-9679, located at the Lumberyard in Cruz Bay. Specially designed equipment allows students to use their own body weight and strength for resistance. "It helps develop nicely toned muscles rather than big bulky ones," says Pilates Worx owner Melissa Luterek. A certified second generation classical Pilates instructor, she offers private and group sessions. Melissa works with everyone from regular Pilates practitioners who want to keep up their routine to those who've never tried it before.

If you're looking to really delve into the intricacies of island life, the Friends of the V.I. National Park, (340) 779-4940, offers an extensive seminar series that runs from January through April. Seminars are led by local experts and cover a wide range of subjects from making pepper sauce to drumming. Make sure to check their schedule, generally available in early December, to see if your trip to St. John coincides with a class you find interesting. Sign up early, the seminar series has garnered quite a following of visitors and locals alike.

Yes, it's tempting to simply sink your toes into the sand and just soak up the sun and gorgeous scenery, but island workshops will give you the chance to mingle with islanders and longtime residents and discover new ways to enjoy St. John.