

# St. John Trail Race Certain to Challenge Runners on Feb. 29

By Andrea Milam  
St. John Tradewinds

Hiking trails on St. John are renowned for their beauty, varying degrees of difficulty, and sweeping vistas. Now, a new island race will challenge runners to traverse 13.6 miles of trails in less than three and a half hours.

The St. John Trail Race, scheduled for Feb. 29, starts with a climb from Cruz Bay to Caneel Hill. The course follows the ridge line to Margaret Hill before dropping down to the Water Catchment Trail head. Runners then encounter the longest non-trail portion of the course with a 1.3-mile stretch on Centerline Road to L'Esperance, where they will descend alongside the Fish Bay Gut to Reef Bay. The course climbs up the Reef Bay Trail and crosses Centerline before descending down to Maho Bay via Maria Hope Trail. Runners then head to the Leinster Bay Trail where they connect to the Johnny Horn Trail before descending toward the Coral Bay finish line.

The race was created by St. John resident and longtime trail runner Kyle Hart.

"I asked myself, 'What's the best experience I could create on St. John for trail runners?'" said Hart. "How could I incorporate the most beautiful places along the way?"

After several trial runs on various routes across the island, Hart decided on a course that would go from Cruz Bay to Coral Bay while maximizing use of the V.I. National Park's trails. The number of runners accepted on this inaugural run is 35 in an effort to minimize resources needed for the race. Runners must complete the race in three and a half hours or less. At press time, 32 runners were registered.

"One of the aspects of the race is you have to be self-supported," said Hart. "We may stash water at various checkpoints but you're kind of on your own. You have to take care of yourself, and it's rewarding."

Portions of the trail are out of cell phone range, Hart added.

"You don't want to turn your ankle on L'Esperance because you'd have to drag yourself back up," he said.



St. John Tradewinds News Photos by Andrea Milam.

The first St. John Trail Run will wind past some beautiful scenery during the 13.6 mile course which leads from Cruz Bay to Coral Bay on February 29. Organized by Kyle Hart, the race will be a gruelling run for only 35 athletes who will enjoy passing ruins, above left, and several stunning shorelines, above right.

Though the St. John Trail Race is just two days after 8 Tuff Miles, Hart anticipates that those fit enough to compete in his trail race will view the popular road race as a warm-up.

"The timing was intentional because there's a certain type of person who flies down for 8 Tuff Miles, and I have a few people in the Trail Race who are doing that," said Hart. "Some people have mentioned the timing as a barrier to them participating in the Trail Race, but I wanted to get people who are very fit this year. The 8 Tuff Miles is a good taper-down race before the Trail Race."

The VINP, where the majority of the run will take place, has been supportive of the Trail Race, Hart said. St. John Rescue will be on hand at checkpoints where the trails meet the road. Hart is still searching for volunteers to man various checkpoints, a commitment that will take less than two

hours, to ensure runners are successfully navigating the course.

Though the course may sound grueling, there's a certain beauty in trail running, Hart explained.

"It's so intense because you have to focus really deeply, sometimes for very long stretches, to avoid tripping on rocks and roots, so it can be mentally fatiguing," he said. "Then you come around a bend and the trail opens up to a beautiful view or a wildlife sighting that just blows your mind. There's so much surprise and delight in trail running."

"I'm delighted to be able to share this with the community, and I hope it becomes an event everyone looks for on a regular basis," Hart said.

To learn more about the St. John Trail Race or to volunteer at race checkpoints, visit [www.stjohntrailrace.com](http://www.stjohntrailrace.com).



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