

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Journal: The Beauty And Virtues Of St. Croix

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Recent first-time St. Croix visitor, Robb Hamic, shares a first-person account of the adventures, sights, sounds, and people he and his wife, Aubrey, encountered while on island. In many respects, his journal entry serves as a reminder of the often-overlooked beauty -- both natural and interpersonal -- that abounds on these U.S. Virgin Islands we call home. May we ever be mindful of it, and see our islands, and their people, with fresh and loving eyes.

-VIC Staff

We got settled down into our seats for the final leg of our trip to St. Croix, U.S.V.I. I sat next to a retired St. Croix schoolteacher with a happy face and a warm smile. She had

the look of an educator. She was a life-long resident of St. Croix and was returning from a trip to visit her son in Delaware. I tried not to ask too many questions about this foreign place, but I never had the chance to talk to a local. Maybe if I were patient, she would tell me all that I wanted to know.

My wife and I had an uncommon reason for visiting the beautiful U.S. Territory of the Virgin Islands. We have already decided to move to St. Croix, sight unseen. There was no job to transfer us and we didn't know a soul on the island, save this kind schoolteacher sitting next to me.

I grew up dreaming about cruising my own boat in the Caribbean and one day living on an island. I suffered an injury after getting blown up in the U.S. Army that somehow made my wife inherit my dream, through our marriage, no children.



Robb and Aubrey Hamic

We decided months ago to "set the date" for our move and settled on St. Croix for a number of important reasons. We currently live in Austin, Texas and neither of us has ever lived on an island. Maybe I am crazy, but I never once considered the potential of us making a poor choice in our new destination.

We were immediately struck with the warmth of three people on the plane who heard our story. We exchanged names and numbers. Our new friends offered to show us around and introduce us to people whom we might have things in common. I think we were both surprised to feel this level of acceptance from people who actually seemed to care that we were to make this island our home. Growing up stateside made me feel unimportant and sometimes irrelevant. I feel very much like a name or a number and not a member of my community; despite trying really hard to fit in and assimilate in the large place we call home.

I hoped it would be different in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

We awoke the first morning from our apartment in Christiansted to hear the faint sound of the ocean. After drinking a couple pots of coffee, we drove off in our Jeep to explore our future home. We were astounded at the diversity in the scenery of the island and its laid-

back feel. We walked on a few dozen beaches and captured beautiful images from our travels. We are photographers and it wasn't hard for us to find thousands of landscapes and creatures to record. Being a normal man, I chose to not bring a map. We spoke to a guy on the street as we set off and he asked us if we knew where we were going. He imparted this knowledge to us, "The island isn't that big and if you get lost, who cares!"

We proceeded to get lost in the warmth and happiness of the people who call St. Croix their home. We stopped to get a drink from a roadside stand after combing a North Shore beach. Our host, Bernard, sat with us and we visited for half-an-hour. He cut us some sugar cane and laughed, saying he didn't see many tourists that carried their own knife. He told us that it wasn't hard to fit in on the island and he moved back after living in New York and St. Thomas. He introduced us to his daughter who was home from school in Chicago. She dropped off some coconuts for him to make drinks. We shook hands and he asked me for my name again.

We drove down the road and saw a beautiful, old schoolhouse adorned with vibrant colors facing the Caribbean. We stopped to take some shots of this building that was in the front of a small community that went up the hillside. We were on location for a few minutes and a couple of guys drove up playing loud music. *I'm trespassing* was my first thought, being from the mainland.

The guys hopped out and said hello, shaking our hands. They explained that the school was in disrepair and vacant for many years. They came down to clean up the bushes. We continued taking our photos and set up a tripod so that we could both be in the picture.

"You wanna make a picture with us," said one of the guys.

"Of course, get in here," replied my wife, and we all set down for a group photo.

We had fun taking the pictures and they said they made the photos so much better, which was obviously true. We spoke for thirty minutes about nothing and everything. They explained that they live up the hill and wanted to make their community look better, so they came to clean up the school. The man next door had horses that they rode from time to time and there was a baseball field up the road. Everybody gets together at the beach on Sunday and sometimes they cook up some fish. They said we could come anytime after hearing that we planned to move to the island. They were both immensely proud of their community and said we would like it best on the North Side. We had to get on down the road for some more exploring, but not until they asked for our names again and gave us warm handshakes.

We found ourselves in the rainforest many days and nights. We both loved the terrain and found many out-of-the-way places to abuse our rental Jeep. We happened upon a farm and met one of the guys that works it daily. We drove up during the middle of the day when no other people were around. He was getting some fruits and vegetables together for a market. He gave us some fruit as we talked for a long while. Upon leaving, he pointed us to a road that took us all over the farm. I never noticed a 'NO TRESPASSING' sign, and he never looked at his watch to mark the time missed from his work due to our visit.

I wondered many times why more people from the mainland didn't immigrate to the U.S. Virgin Islands. The price of real estate is relatively low, services are readily available, and although the cost of gas is twice that of Texas, the island is only twenty-eight miles long. In Texas, we may drive errands that take us farther. I retired from the Army at a young age and receive care from the Veteran's Administration for my medical needs, which exist on the islands. The people are warm, the sun shines and the trade winds usually blow from the east. There is a strange absence of 'NO TRESPASSING' signs.

We traveled 250 miles in that Jeep and talked with dozens of local people who we found on beaches, hills and restaurants. I noticed that people often asked for my name twice and fully expected to see me when I returned. It was always a good feeling and I have to admit, unexpected.

I moved to Texas eight years ago and remember a saying I heard about people becoming Texans: "I may not be from Texas, but I got here as soon as I could."

In writing this, I think I will come up with my own saying when we move to the U.S. Virgin Islands in six months.

Robb and Aubrey Hamic are travelling to the U.S. Virgin Islands from Austin, Texas in July 2015 aboard their boat, "Miss Lone Star." Robb is retired from the U.S. Army and is a service disabled Veteran. He was an investigator, private security company owner, and tactical firearms instructor. Aubrey is a professional portrait and landscape photographer. Visit their blog [here](#).

Feature Image Credit: Frederiksted, St. Croix/Robb and Aubrey Hamic