

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Editorial: Fungi & Fish, Pole Dancing And More: Camping At Salt River Beach

Opinion / **Published On April 06, 2015 10:10 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **April 06, 2015**



ST. CROIX – Every Easter, St. Croix residents leave the comfort of their homes to brave the hot sunny days and cold nights on beaches throughout the island, bringing with them tents, nonperishable goods, lights, makeshift kitchens and yes, even the children.

That's because Easter season is camping season on the big island.

This year was no different at Salt River, where extended families gathered to get away from the world of brick and mortar and the hustle of everyday life. The new camping experience included family humor, fires lit from dry wood and fish dinners baited in the nearby ocean.

"We do this every year," camper Lewis Felix, told *VI Consortium* while paying close attention to two pots of food. One pot he called "man soup," and the other was filled with hot water in preparation of fish and fungi.

Felix pointed to the north side of the beach and said the space to build tents had dwindled since two developers built new homes in the area. But the recent developments haven't halted a family tradition that's been around for about two decades.













NO TRESPASSING
WITH YOUR
EMPTY HANDS





According to Felix, his extended family has been camping at Salt River for about 20 years. The tradition, he said, has been passed onto the younger generations.

But how did camping on St. Croix start? The veteran camper couldn't say with certainty. He could only speak on behalf of his own family.

"I don't know how it started. Our parents showed it to us and we showed it to our children but that's about it," Felix said.

During a camp tour, Lewis lead *VI Consortium* to a makeshift kitchen, which he said will be broken down early on Monday to give enough time for cleanup and packing so they can leave at 2:00 p.m.

Lewis presented a variety of dishes: lobster, fish, octopus -- just to name a few. A family member playing dominoes nearby said the food would be able to feed all camping in the area, and there might even be enough left over for the following day. She said the food is cooked continuously so there is constant supply.

The Felix family shared the Salt River camping experience with yet another family – a family whose camping experience, hidden behind the bushes, went beyond sun, sea and food.

A few feet away from Felix's family, *VI Consortium* found the friends and family of Alida Migueles, camp host. Camping for her family meant a DJ, a bar, a luxury tent and – a male pole dancer.

The Migueles party camp starts two weeks before Easter and typically lasts one week after.

"Sometimes we stay until the 4th of July," Migueles said. "Sometimes we go home to pick up the things we need, but that's it. We're always here."

According to Migueles, her deceased father and his friends started the family tradition some 19 years ago. But like Felix, neither she nor her camping partners could pinpoint the origin of camping on St. Croix. Some guessed it was the Puerto Ricans while others said it came from Vieques.

For fun, the family danced on the pole, enjoyed movie nights, and played dominoes, volleyball, and limbo. Food was always for the taking for anyone who was hungry, and for those who were of age, Cruzan Rum and other strong drinks lined the makeshift bar latched to the stem of a tree. Latin music permeated the area, making it likely to find campers shaking their bodies to the festive rhythms.

And so Salt River was and, indeed, still is a shared camp getaway for a variety of campers including the traditional and nontraditional.

And while for many, Easter means a Christian season filled with solemn moments of remembering Jesus Christ's sacrifice, others see the season as a time to move away from the set path of life and to forget about the troubles of the world – at least temporarily.