

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Light Up The Night: Frederiksted Comes Alive On Independence Day

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ST. CROIX -- If you've lived here long enough, the gargantuan crowd that gathered at the Frederiksted Fort on Saturday evening came as no surprise to you, as it's the culmination of a weekend of events celebrating the independence of slaves from then-Danish West Indies on July 3, 1848, and the independence of America, which now owns the U.S. Virgin Islands, on July 4, 1776 from British rule.

Emancipation Day, of course, was marked by ceremonious events, including the annual Fort-to-Fort Walk organized by the office of Sen. Terrence Nelson, which sees participants walking from Fort Christian to Fort Frederik, followed by a more reflective commemoration at Budhoe Park.

Saturday, however, has always been reserved as an all-day, fun-in-the-sun affair. Residents descend upon Frederiksted from morning, enjoying the white, sandy beaches along the town's coast, augmented by local ensembles entertaining the free-spirited crowds who seek only a great time and the warmth of the sun soothing their cold bodies as they tread back-and-forth, in and out water, ready for the next leg of the daylong occasion.

That next leg, of course, is when the crowds really start to build. Beachgoers, attired in swimwear and shorts leave the water to set themselves up for the fireworks display and the jazz show hosted by the Frederiksted Economic Development Association. Then, like clockwork, as is the case every year, space becomes an issue as the waterfront is overtaken by untold amounts of residents from across the biggest of the three islands, bringing along their families to witness what has always been an outstanding fireworks display, lasting roughly 20 minutes.

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'Will there really be fireworks tonight?' That's the reoccurring question asked every year by some attendees, who somehow fear the night being ruined by last-minute complications.

There was.

From one end of Strand Street to the next -- all the way to Dorsch Beach and elsewhere -- families gathered themselves close, friends rallied their collective gaze towards the end of the port, children held up high by their parents -- waiting for the breathtaking display of fireworks lighting up the night in stunning exhibit of blazing, beautiful colors, as people gushed with every loud burst.

After the show, the party continued with various bands keeping the mood happy until 1:00 p.m. But the waterfront wasn't the only spot buzzing with entertainment.

At the Frederiksted Beach, near the Freedom City Surf Shack, the Russell Ensemble soothed the atmosphere with a diverse selection of songs. From Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff", Pharrell William's "Happy", and MAGIC!'s "[Rude](#)", among other outstanding hits -- people bobbed their heads in appreciation.

As the band continued playing, the Frederiksted crowds diminished. Residents began folding their chairs headed for home, but even then, some could be seen making good use of every inch of fun time remaining, knowing full well independence celebrations happen, but once a year.

Feature Image: Fireworks lighting up the night in Frederiksted.

Image Credit: [Cruzan Cowgirls](#).

Correction: July 5, 2015

A previous version of this story, because of a typing error, incorrectly stated that the territory became free from Danish rule on July 3, 1848. However, while the slaves fought for and won their freedom on the aforementioned date, the territory remained under Danish rule until the U.S. purchased the islands on March 31, 1917.

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