

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Young Attorney Gives Up Successful Life In Chicago, Moves To St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- The ailing economy here has increased stories of people leaving for the mainland in search of better living conditions. In fact, the middle and upper middle classes [have all but vanished](#), amplifying an already undesirable situation that has left desolate the island as businesses continue to shutter, [people remain unemployed](#), and crime [continues to rise](#).

The problem began in earnest after the 2008 U.S. recession that affected the world, and was heightened when HOVENSA closed in 2012. Leaders have promised fixes, but [little has changed](#), and the government continues to dance around collapse, reporting on Thursday that it expends \$2 million daily in operational costs, and that it had [nine days of](#)

[cash on hand.](#)

But amidst the gloom, and as residents continue to leave, some have looked beyond the island's trials and embraced its beauty -- the beaches, its people, food and weather -- living behind wealthy, well-established lives in the U.S., for serene lifestyles in the territory, where the day-to-day hustle prevalent on the mainland becomes an afterthought; overtaken by the sound of waves crashing softly on the sand, or the gentle breeze soothing the restlessness caused by 96 degrees heat.



er Marina Ricci, who moved here on June 2, life with less clutter and more, well, living.

Marina Ricci, 32, left a successful life in

Chicago and moved to St. Croix.

"I really wanted a better quality of life," Ricci told *The Consortium* in a phone interview on Saturday. She had become used to too many phone calls from clients and a daily inundation of emails, "and I did not want to do that ten years down the road."

The process was methodical. Ricci still wanted to be close to family wherever her new life would take her, and after doing some research, decided that somewhere in the U.S. territories would be the best place to settle. Her investigation took her to various online forums where people talk about the islands and discuss moving ideas, and was advised, "if you want to live in the VI, live on St. Croix and visit St. Thomas," she said.

Ricci, who practiced law in Chicago for eight years and taught as a professor for four, decided to visit St. Croix in March for a pre-moving experience.

She instantly fell in love.

"I have met so many good people -- more so than I have in the last 32 years of my life," Ricci proclaimed. "In the big cities, people don't even look at you; but here, they say good morning, and I've made really good friends. It's been a great experience."

Ricci loves the weather and can't stay away from the beaches. "In fact, I was there today," she made known. And she's been keeping busy, getting to know her

surroundings, participated in Rotary meetings, has watched turtles hatch, visited the beer-drinking pig and attended [Mango Melee](#), among other island adventures.

The Chicagoan-turned-Crucian has no intentions to practice law in the territory, and has not bothered to apply for a job at the University of the Virgin Islands. But she's been working part time, and every now and again, grapples with the bold decision.

"I wake up sometimes and think, 'did I really do this? Am I really on an island?'" she confessed. But Ricci decided if there ever was a time to do something extraordinary, "I have to do it now; I'm not married."

At 32, Ricci has accomplished a lot. The risk-taker received her juris doctor (J.D.) degree at Valparaiso University in Indiana, and a bachelor's in finance at Loyola University in Chicago. Ricci's goal was to complete school at a young age to move ahead with life. And while her parents aren't thrilled about the island move, Ricci said her newfound friends have made the change easy.

"Over the last two weeks, I saw baby turtles being born, rum being made and people who just met me welcoming me into their community as if they had known me forever," wrote Ricci on her blog, dubbed [St. Croix Beach Bum](#). "I even saw my first questionable looking frog sitting on a stairway last night. So while moving to an island may not have been my dream, it seems like there is nowhere else that I would rather be right now."

Feature Image: Marina Ricci in the Frederiksted Rainforest looking at the beer-drinking pig.