

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## National Park In St. John Is Now 'All Open,' NPS Says

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The Virgin Islands National Park has declared all roads, trails and beaches open at the park in St. John, 105 days after Hurricane Irma ravaged the island of St. John, the National Park Service announced Wednesday.

"Virgin Islands National Park is home to some of the most beautiful beaches in America and is a major economic contributor to the Island's economy, which is why it will be an important part of rebuilding after this devastating hurricane season," said Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke. "We are very excited to declare the park open for business, just in time for the holidays when many tourists visit the Islands."

"We've reached a major milestone at Virgin Islands National Park," said Virgin Islands National Park Acting Superintendent Darrell Echols. "Maho Bay Beach reopened last Wednesday, we finished the rest of the beaches Thursday and Friday, and the remaining work at Annaberg Sugar Mill was completed Friday afternoon. We are excited to welcome visitors back to their park."

According to NPS, all of the park's beaches have been checked for underwater debris, but visitors should still exercise caution. Mooring buoys have been assessed and either cleared for use or had a red tag attached indicating it needs additional work. There are either working vault toilets or portable toilets available at the major beaches. Beach gear rentals are available at Honeymoon Beach and Trunk Bay Beach, but visitors will need to provide their own food and water at this time. Glass bottles are not allowed on park beaches.

"This was a huge undertaking," Echols reflected. "Over the last three months, a host of federal employees from the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service have spent countless hours working with the park's permanent staff to get us to where we are today. The Friends of Virgin Islands National Park contributed a crew of sawyers to help with the trails, and carpenters, electricians, and a host of other skilled responders repaired employee housing and other facilities. The park still has a large number of challenges ahead, such as removing 64 displaced vessels sunk within the park or washed upon the shore, and completing major repairs on utility systems, roads, and several park houses. This has been a job well done."

"Virgin Islands National Park is an important part of the community. It helps preserve the natural beauty of the Islands, generates millions of dollars in tourism, and ensures tourists and locals have recreational opportunities that the Virgin Islands are known for around the world," said Assistant Secretary of Insular Areas Doug Domenech. "I'm incredibly proud of the team at the National Park Service for their tireless work getting the beaches, trails, and visitors facilities up and running after the hurricanes."

NPS describes itself as an important economic engine in the USVI, attracting more than a half a million visitors in 2016 and supporting 900 jobs in the community. Visitors spent \$70 million and helped support \$34 million in labor and more than \$90 million in economic output.