

The Virgin Islands Consortium

From Cramer Park To Frederiksted Beach, Easter Camping Is Alive And Well On St. Croix

Culture / **Published On April 22, 2019 10:40 AM /**

Shenneth Canegata **April 22, 2019**



Seventh Day Adventist Southgate Campsite (Shenneth Canegata, VIC)

ST. CROIX -- Easter weekend camping on St. Croix, which customarily starts on Holy Thursday and runs through Easter Monday, has been a long-standing tradition on the big island. Young and old alike come together to spend quality time. There is an exuberant warmth and camaraderie as campers share, not only stories and games, but food, fun, and fellowship. Some set up at campsites, while others choose to set up right on the beach. The sound of music wafts across the campgrounds as campers all come together in a festive mood.

The Virgin Islands Police Department was out in full force at the campsites, and the campers expressed that they felt safe as a result of the V.I.P.D.'s presence. They spent time sharing a bit of laughter and often offered to share a meal with them. Their presence was applauded and encouraged.



Elizabeth Hansen-Watly at the Cramer Park camping site (Shenneth Canegata, VIC)

The sound of music echoed a heartwarming welcome to each camper and visitor that drove through the Cramer Park entrance. Elizabeth Hansen-Watly, the assistant commissioner of the Department of Tourism, wore a welcoming smile and expressed that the annual Easter weekend camping was a family tradition. "We are often trying to determine things that are unique to the Virgin Islands. This is one of those things. It is like a big family reunion each year when grandparents share stories and details of times past that parents may not remember. Different families swap stories with each other. This is reminiscent of a time before technology when children were often outside playing. It is a great time for them to be exposed to culture," said Mrs. Hansen-Watly.

Her parents often begin camping two weeks prior to Easter, then the rest of the family joins them on the Easter weekend, and they – her parents – often choose to stay an extra week after the campers are long gone.

Her father, Esdel Emanuel Hansen Sr., who is in his 70s, shared that his parents began the tradition before he was born. "This is over 100 years of tradition," he stated. Mr. Hansen has been camping all of his life. "When we began camping, everyone was under one big tent together, but were separated by group in different sections – men, ladies, and children."



Mrs. Hansen-Watly said that there is always a core group of families camping at Cramer Park, but this year there were many new families and tourists and visitors alike, who stopped by to chat and share a meal.

The general consensus was that the families looked forward to this time of fellowship where being at the ocean shore with the sounds of lapping waves, salt air touching their skin, and the wind blowing through their hair gave them a chance to put their problems aside and relax.



Elder Eileen Huggins (Shenneth Canegata, VIC)

Dr. Calvin G. Walwyn, deputy commissioner of the V.I.P.D., stopped by to check on campers. He had been patrolling all the camp grounds and had come just to sit with the locals and play a serious game of dominoes, he said.

At the Christiansted Seventh Day Adventist Southgate Campsite peals of laughter came from a group sitting under the "Neem Grove" as they enjoyed the breeze and each other's company confidently sharing about the mosquito repellent effects of the neem trees. Elder Eileen Huggins, considered the resident historian in charge of the campsite, had been camping every Easter weekend for almost 40 years. Their camping adventures began at Cramer's Park, she said, and later segued to the Southgate campsite where they have been camping for the last 23 years.



Horace Graham eats a meal at the Seventh Day Adventist campsite located in Southgate on the east end of St. Croix (Shenneth Canegata, VIC)

Members of the group expressed that they look forward to getting together every year to sit under the shady neem trees, sway in their hammocks and enjoy the breeze as they play scrabble, dominoes and other games and hold deep discussion about various subjects. Their light banter with each other is more reflective of a close-knit family.

When they began camping, they each had small pup tents, but now they utilize larger canvas tents and the site boasts a 10-stall shower room. Ms. Huggins said camping was encouraged by one of her teachers and evolved into a lifelong love for her. She said the families look forward to this time each year, and it has brought them closer together.



Seventh Day Adventist Southgate Campsite (Shenneth Canegata, VIC)

In Frederiksted, tents spanned from the Vincent F. Mason, Sr. pool, also known as the Frederiksted Pool, to shorelines well beyond Rainbow Beach.

Carol Maldonado, owner of Beach Life Sports, said it was her first time experiencing the interaction with campers. She expressed that she had recently returned to St. Croix after being away for 30 years. Interacting with the campers gave her an opportunity to reconnect with her community and provide a chance for locals to participate in water sports, something she said was lacking when she spent time on the beaches in Frederiksted as a child.

Mr. Joseph Newton, a day guest hanging with his friends at the Dorsh Beach campsite, said that he fished, and cleaned and applied seasoning to the fish right on the beach. He had a small fire pit going on the ground and the smell of fried fish tantalized taste buds.



Carol Maldonado (Shenneth Canegata, VIC)

This long-standing tradition of camping on Easter weekend on St. Croix brings the community together. The intermingling of local families, tourists and other visitors from the mainland, along with the V.I.P.D., made for a safe, relaxing weekend of food, fun, and fellowship. Campers come together to “let their hair down” and it is a time when people from all walks of life unify and have a “good ole time” camping Crucian style.

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