Quality Limin’ in the U.S. Virgin Islands

Shodō: Islands in Ink
Seattle’s “Bedroom” Islands
Guide to Summer Travel
I HAVE TO PINCH MYSELF sometimes," someone was saying. Beached in a nearby lounge chair, I turned my back a moment on the sun, on the lazy slap of the Caribbean against Saint Thomas' sand, and saw two gentlemen seated among the vacationers at bayside café tables: an American, whose swagger and worn, rope-skinned complexion suggested he was a "continental" (one from the States who lives and works in the U.S. Virgin Islands), and his companion, obviously a local in the first man's employ.

"I'm here so often," said the American, "running around, working all week. I forget that this is a vacation in paradise for most people, something they save pennies for all their lives, a once-in-a-lifetime experience." He shook his head in disbelief.

QUALITY LIMIN'
In the U.S. Virgin Islands

By Charles Siebert
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For Wheeler Pictures
Charlotte Amalie sets a slow and easy pace, allowing residents time enough for shopping (opposite top), socializing (opposite, bottom right) and just limin' in the sun (opposite, bottom left). Islanders go about their business unfazed by the juxtaposition of new upon old in a former doorway of the Bank of Saint Thomas (below).

For a moment I let my eyes follow the general curving embrace of his upheld arm, taking it all in: the harmless clouds herded by a warm trade wind across a sunlit dome of sky, the multimediated shades of blue bay below, the people bobbing on bright foam rafts or, like me, resting just above a perfect concavity of white sand lined with palm and sea-grape trees—in short, paradise. I fixed my gaze again upon the American.

"But I don't go in for this lounging on the beach business, you know, getting a tan. When you get back to the States, all people are gonna see is your face and arms anyway." He laughed. "Nah, sometimes I might snorkel, or go off over there somewhere"—my gaze followed his arm this time far down to where the beach gave way to a low hillside of woods—"you know, to sit under a tree and read a book."

That sounded like a good idea to me. I'll do that next, I thought, and then go beyond the hill and see the rest of Saint Thomas, only 12 miles long and 4 miles wide, a half-day's jaunt, knowable. And in the days ahead, I'll see the other islands too, Saint Croix and Saint John, awaiting discovery like unopened gifts.

But I was just getting situated, and in those first moments of my first visit to one of the many covert Caribbean bays that describe these islands, I was as obsessed with the novelty of paradise as that businessman was with how pedestrian it all had become. I'd already enjoyed an inaugural drink at the nearby hotel bar built of stone and set at a low, perfect lounge-chair height above the beach. I'd met some of the other vacationers: a group of seven girls from Boston who had won their trip for selling the most commercial air time for their radio station; three thrilled middle-aged housewives from Ohio; and two drunken British sailors from H.M.S. Arrow, a veteran of England's battle to recapture the Falklands docked at Saint Thomas for a rest and recreation tour. So, for an hour or two at least, I was ready and determined to do what it seems everyone else goes there to do: lie back, slow my blood down and let my cares fall away for a while.

Saint Thomas is called "Rock City" because it is essentially one big mountain with one main town, Charlotte Amalie, on its central southern shore. The remaining coastline is a garland of beach resorts ringing a wooded interior of private homes—bright red corrugated tin-roofed aeries set into the steep hillsides. There's a crowded feel to Saint Thomas. The Cyril E. King airport runway, for instance, had to jet out into the sea because there was no other place to put it. I quickly found that staying at any one resort's beach too long brings on a sense of confinement that compels you to move about and discover what a diversified place Saint Thomas really is.

It was odd, at first, making the transition to driving on the left. Like Alice through the looking glass, I just passed over to the other side and tried to behave as I would normally. It required constant vigilance, which detracted from any prolonged sight-seeing.

I set off down Charlotte Amalie's main road, cruising past
the busy, boat-lined wharf and waterfront shops, making somewhat halting progress toward open country. Traffic jams are a constant in the vicinity of town, but they're peculiarly "island" traffic jams—not so much the result of too many cars as they are of a certain lack of urgency in the average islander's driving. Cars are more like rolling café tables to them, and when two friends pull up alongside each other, you've no choice but to wait out their conversation.

Once outside of town, the road twisted and tumbled dramatically with the terrain. Over and over, little side lanes lured me off to the right, heading down toward the sea to one posh resort after another. I kept working my way back up to the main road again, trying to stay to the left and within the law. I was well aware of what a wonderfully frenzied and graceless entrance I was making into Saint Thomas, on the narrow road separating its beachside resorts from its inland residents. I was also aware of being somewhere between the initial conceit that this was an extension of America, a nice little island dream the larger continent was having, and the pleasant realization that it was a place unto itself, completely dependent upon tourism—the only vital industry outside of rum left to the islands—and yet somehow very removed from it all.

A small sign, "Dollar Stop," dangled from a roadside shed with an extended front porch, where some people were sitting in the shade sipping their beers. The place looked like a derailed caboose in the dust. The sun was in the trees, getting ready to drop off the island's edge, and it was close enough to cocktail hour to warrant a stop. The bartender, a Rastafarian, sat behind the shed's wooden flap that was propped open like the hood of a broken-down truck. Two customers sat on stools opposite him looking in. Their conversation, low-key and sparse, was in a nearly impenetrable patois. Umba, the bartender, was able to scale it down for me when I ordered a beer or asked a question.

Umba told me that he had grown up on Saint Thomas and had been a trombone player in a local reggae band that toured a few years ago in the northeastern United States. He thought it was nice up there, but "too fast," so he came back and got himself a house across the bay in Saint John because, for him,
life in Saint Thomas had also become too fast. He now rides the ferry back and forth between home and work.

I asked Umba about a place to eat. He pointed right across the road to a structure not unlike the Dollar Stop, with its own little wooden sign: “Eunice’s Terrace.” It was more like an open deck on stilts above nothing but jungle brush, but the terrace did have rolled canvas side flaps to guard against the rain, brief rains that pass over the islands like a much-needed seasoning for the otherwise bland stew that too much perfect weather can concoct.

When traveling, my tendency is toward stasis—finding a place to hole up in and return to, night after night. It’s a way of having your trip and home too. Eunice’s, I quickly surmised, was that home. The six picnic tables up front enjoyed a steady flow of customers, islanders and tourists. In back, the bar area bordering the dark jungle held a crew of island regulars drinking and eating and talking. A nice new color television fluttered with sporting events beamed in from the States.

I took my first meal right at the bar: a sweet, steamed white fish called guu, accompanied by vegetables and various West Indian staples like fungi—resembling grits but made of yellow cornmeal, okra and butter—some slices of local sweet potato and plantains. A very strange bottle of home-brewed hot sauce was nudge my way along the bar, gently, as if it were nitroglycerin. The elegant old glass brandy carafe with 18-carat gold trim designs was filled to the brim with a clear mixture of white vinegar and oil swirling around stalks of celery, onions and native peppers colored red, green and—the hottest ones—yellow. The stuff makes your heart skip.

For some reason, the following day I had a maniacal urge to visit every platitudinous tourist attraction on the island. I stopped at Coral World, a “unique” underwater observatory in which humans become the contained curiosity and the fish the passing curious. I drove up to Mountain Top, “the highest point on the island,” where one can get “the world’s best banana daiquiri.” Finally I stopped at Drake’s Seat, famous for its expansive view of the islands and, directly below, Magen’s Bay Beach, voted by National Geographic one of the 10 most beautiful beaches in the world.

The story goes that Sir Francis Drake used the spot as his
There's a sense of newness to the geography in the islands, as if the land and water were still maneuvering for position.

As it has since the 1600s, Charlotte Amalie's tranquil harbor (opposite) shelters a wide range of seagoing vessels. But today sleek yachts and luxury liners replace the merchantmen, slavers and pirate ships of old. The true origins of Bluebeard's Castle (above) have been lost to legend over the centuries.

It felt good to be alone in that strong trade wind with an
occasional cool fold in it, like summer lake water the sun hadn't quite reached. The wharf was one long line of docked boats. The first group I passed included sleek yachts and sailboats with names like Windjammer or Kon Tiki. Passengers just back from daylong island tours still sat on deck with drinks in their hands. The rest of the way down, there were only inter-island cargo ships, catfish round-bellied boats with smokestacks and circular windows, rusted hulls and lamp-lit, lived-in cabins with little cooking stoves. There was the Lady Jenny, the M.V. Effort, the Bomba Challenger and the M.V. Dianne B. Each had a blackboard hanging off the side rail that listed its destinations: "Accepting cargo for Sint Maarten, Dominica, Saint Lucia and Saint Kitts." There were cars on some decks, stacked window frames, piles of lumber and plumbing and so on, disparate parts of people's lives waiting to be shipped off and assembled on other islands.

"Tell me," one captain said from his ship's deck. He'd seen me standing alongside his boat looking like I wanted to ask some questions. He said his name was Pascal Goigo, from Dominica. He said he'd been in port for two days and would wait one more, taking on as much cargo as he could. He does this year round, up and down the Caribbean. The captains of the various boats all know one another; it's like a floating village that moves apart and then assembles again alongside a series of solid, stationary ones. Pascal said they don't go ashore that often or for very long. Many, he could see, were inland only as far as a game of dominos beneath a lighted fruit and vegetable stall a few feet from the wharf.

From across the road, the live music and revelry of Charlotte Amalie's clubs wafted up along the waterfront. In the other direction there were just the wind off the harbor, the distant clustered deck lights of a docked cruise ship and the faint clinking sound of sailboat mast lines. It both lulled you and made you want to stay up all night, making you feel like a kid in an upstairs bedroom kept half-awake from the sounds of his parents' party below.

I enjoyed dinner at Eunice's again that night, and afterward Eunice's sister Althea and I drove over to nearby Sapphire Beach. There we heard a popular local band, the Starlites, play calypso and reggae rock and roll in a Sunday-night ritual that attracts both islanders and tourists. Couples danced madly beneath a giant cabana and then spun off to the surrounding tables and beach like little shipwrecks.

With all my exploring, I had missed the biggest island
calypso party of the week. It was held in a vacant lot along the beach right beside my hotel and was just breaking up when I returned. A line of cars half the length of Saint Thomas was letting out along the airport road. I sat out on my hotel room's veranda overlooking Lindbergh Bay. It was nearly 3 A.M. A full moon outlined the dark volcanic outcroppings off the far shore and the round-leaved sea grape trees below me. Two of the girls from Boston stole out across the sand, dropped their towels and slipped into the calm sea.

A seaplane — "It's fun to land on water," said the sign at the Saint Thomas terminal — flew me 37 miles to the south the following morning. But I'd barely touched base in Saint Croix's main town of Christiansted when I took off again for a half-day boat tour of Buck Island. The small, platypus-shaped hump of land just off Saint Croix's northeast shore is covered mostly with prickly pear and organ-pipe cactus, though there's a nice stretch of beach off the west end that sailboaters like to dinghy up to.

The main attraction is Buck Island Reef, an underwater park off the east end of the island. When I heard it had a marked underwater trail, I had images of individually labeled fish swimming by. But once out there with mask, snorkel and fins, I saw that the trail consists of a series of little white arrows on submerged headstones and an occasional sign warning you not to touch anything. The surrounding coral is very brittle, and the reef reminded me of a sunken china shop. The delicately designed fish — dusky damselfish, red-banded parrot fish, yellowhead wrasses and lockdown moonfish — floated free from the coral shelves, as if tempting me to reach out and take one. I found that if I was very quiet and held my breath for a moment, I could actually hear the fish nibbling on the coral around me.

Back in Christiansted, heading for the Cane Bay Planta-
tion, I took note of how different Saint Croix is from Saint Thomas—and how different the opposite ends of Saint Croix are from each other. It takes a while to get anywhere, so, heading from east to west, I had plenty of time to study the dramatic change in the landscape. Nearly 23 miles long, Saint Croix has room enough to accommodate varying climates. It’s more arid to the east, and the western end is prone to drifting, lingering mists. Starting from low, grassy, seaside hills that reminded me of Cornwall, England, I passed into the lush rain forest surrounding the hotel.

That first evening, I decided never to leave. Built into the side of Mount Eagle, the hotel’s rooms overlook Cane Bay. Up a flight of white wooden steps lies the world’s most perfect bar, perched above a swimming pool at the level of the rain-forest treetops. Through the telescope set up by the bar, I was able to spot a group of whales bounding across the sea on their way south to Antarctica. Looking west out over the tip of the island, I saw the moon, Jupiter and Mars form a perfect vertical line above the bay. I had no idea as to the significance of this, but people at the bar were pretty excited about such a rare alignment. I took it as one more nice detail some giddy god was tossing into paradise.

“Gradations of paradise,” I kept repeating to myself from island to island, having already heard so many conversations comparing one island with another, declaring what one had over the other. You heard a lot of that from resident aliens, who make up one-third of the U.S. Virgin Islands’ population. Those folks who’ve migrated from other Caribbean islands to find work are known as “garotes” after a local bird that flies from island to island.

There was the guy from Anguilla I had met in Saint Thomas who told me that the beaches on Anguilla are the best in the world, “like Cream of Wheat,” he said. My taxi driver in Saint Croix, from Aruba originally, told me how much clearer the water is off Aruba. Umba at the Dollar Stop had talked about the tranquility of Saint John. And you hear it too from the
The place is all broad arches and colonnades. . . . Somehow, the Danish perfected a weighty architecture that barely interrupts the air.

"continental," like the hotelier dressed all in white, shoes too, speaking to me at the Cane Bay bar that first night as a few cows moosed in a field below. He called his place just down the road "quiet and modest, like Saint Croix." He said he wants to keep it that way, developing the island's tourist trade gradually so things don't get out of hand as they have on Saint Thomas. Everyone tends a personal definition of paradise.

I thought that if Saint Thomas is "Rock City," then Saint Croix might be considered its pastoral suburb. The island's largely undeveloped inner landscape of old sugar plantations with names like Jealousy, Upper Love and Lower Love (names the Danish plantation owners gave as tributes, of sorts, to their various island mistresses, which makes you wonder about the plots called Bold Slob and Barren Spot) gives the place a provincial feel. Saint Croix is large enough to leave you alone. You often hear about the seven different flags that have flown over Saint Croix since Columbus first sailed up the island's Salt River in search of fresh water only to find hostile Saint Croix retains strong evidence of its Danish heritage. Bricks from Denmark were used in 1732 to build Fort Christiansvaern (opposite) on the site of a former French stronghold. Christianssted's Government House (above) served as home to a series of Danish governor generals before the United States bought the island in 1917.
Historic plantation windmills (below) dot the hillsides of Saint Croix. The stone tower of one forms the centerpiece for a modern home just north of Frederiksted (opposite left), while another private flight of fancy reigns over the stark desert landscape on the island's eastern shore (opposite right).

Carib Indians instead. The Spanish, English, Dutch, French, Danish and even the Knights of Malta have each held the island at one time or another before the United States took over in the interest of protecting passages to the Panama Canal during World War I.

Still, it's the Danish influence you feel most in the main town of Christiansted. All the cream-colored buildings are made of bricks. I was told, that the Danish ships brought over as ballast. This was said of so many buildings that I had images of a whole town in Denmark placed in sections on their sides into ship hulls and then set upright when the ships reached shore. The place is all broad arches and colonnades and covered alleyways woven in between the sunlit streets—perfect for modern shopping galleries. Somehow, the Danish perfected a weighty architecture that barely interrupts the air. Christiansted is a town built to make the most of its offshore breezes. Walking through its streets I felt like one of those figures in a Chagall painting, too light, always floating up out of the frame.

Near dusk my wanderings led me in the direction of Christiansted's Times Square. Hardly New York City's strip of noisome neon and illicit dealings, it's just an open, sun-baked square lined with flamboyant trees. Dilapidated wooden storefronts stand on one side. The other side is dominated by a big old yellow barnlike structure with a kind of crow's nest up top (that crows looked to be nesting in) and wide-open windows with falling shutters. From a big stone stoop out front I was able to look in without entering. The place had no name, just a dozen or so beer clocks on the bare walls and a bar in one corner where an old woman poured drinks from unmarked bottles into plastic cups. The roomful of men was concentrating on games of pool and cards. It looked like a fairly exclusive Cruzan social club, not the place for a passing drink, so I continued on my way.

The following day I sort of bounded from beach to beach along Saint Croix's North Shore Road before turning inland on Mahogany Road toward Frederiksted, the island's other coastal town. The road takes you through the heart of the rain forest—a richly bowered darkness with vines hanging from a variety of trees: giant mahogany and kapok and one called the mother-in-law tongue for the way its long seed casings rattle in the wind.

Nothing at all happens in Frederiksted, which is why people like it there. I sat alongside old Fort Frederik in the town park under the flamboyant trees, talking with a Cruzan named David Benjamin.

"Dey'll be a Rita Marley concert comin' up at Pearl Joseph Stadium," David told me, redding his straw hat in the direction of a nice little ballpark on the other side of the open field across from us.

"Who's Pearl Joseph?" I asked.

"He's a guy who died some time ago, a baseball playah. You be here next week?"

"No," I said, "I'm leaving here today, in fact." He went on to
describe the great party I would miss: a giant calypso tent in the field and a big parade and a lot of amusement park rides.

"We'll be puttin' up a little Coney Island," he said. "I guess we'll be limin'." I'd heard that expression before. People say, "I'm just limin'," or "Are you enjawin' ya line?" It means basically, hanging out, exactly what we were doing right there in the park. The party would constitute some quality limin'.

The ferry from Saint Thomas pulls you right into Cruz Bay and the town of the same name, the only town on the island of Saint John. Essentially, Saint John's fate was sealed by the Caribbean Sea itself, which lapped up enough of the island's coastline to render it a mere cove. Only nine miles long and five miles wide, Saint John is not so large that one man couldn't buy most of it, as Laurance Rockefeller did, and preserve it in his image. The bulk of Saint John remains a national park, with the islanders living on its periphery.

Cruz Bay is like a little Cape Cod town; people come in to meet a friend at the ferry, pick up their mail, buy some groceries, then retreat back into the woods. The town square, just opposite the ferry dock with its little wooden guardhouse for the ticket vendor, is a raised curb bordering a patch of grass with an X-shaped crosswalk on it, some tall trees and a little fenced-in mound of dirt. The mound was either some sacred Arawak burial site, or the town statue works only part-time. Taxi drivers mill about or, I should say, lime in the shade. There are T-shirt shops and moped rental shops and open food stands and down-and-out bars next to nicer tourist restaurants—all within a casual stroll of one another.

Saint John has been described as "heavily embayed," which is to say that if you could straighten out its craggy shoreline, the island would be as long as Saint Croix. The bays add to the island's sense of exclusivity. Saint John is the island the owners of those long lovely sailboats most like to sit back up to and forget the rest of the world by. They'll stay anchored for days, washing down their hulls, lolling about in the water and the sun.

The bays here defy attempts at original descriptions of blue Caribbean water. They are exactly the colors the most exuberant travel guides say they are. This unabashed list is my favorite: aquamarine, tourmaline, lapis lazuli, jade and sapphire. I might add that the deeper water just behind the bays is exactly the color of Aqua Velva shaving lotion.
Things seem pretty cut-and-dried on Saint John. People come here to hide away and feel good. Businessmen fall off windsurfers into the perfect water. College girls sneak through the woods to isolated arches of white sand so they can get all-over tans and then take them at night to the town bars. In fact, everyone seems to pass somewhat disinterestedly through Saint John’s only two public attractions: the ruins of sugar plantations and the nature preserve.

You can go up a hill and take a 30-minute walking tour of the Old Annaberg Sugar Mill, where there are the barest remains of the houses where slaves slept and, farther on, the various parts of the mill they slaved away in. But aside from the fact that the mortar between the stones of the buildings is made of flour, molasses and seashell, and apart from the great view you get up there of the nearby British Virgin Islands, there’s really not much you’d care to remember. The trail back down to the visitors’ parking lot is lined with a small, low-growing, fernlike plant known locally as “gritchee-gritchee.” As if bearing some long-held grudge, the plant’s tiny leaves retract and fold up at the approach of a human hand.

The walking tours led by park rangers through the national park reveal other interesting facts about the indigenous flora and its various medicinal applications or dangers. The poisonous manchineel tree, for instance, has been marked all over the island with red bloches of paint because even raindrops rolling off the tree’s leaves can burn your skin.

I spent an afternoon at Trunk Bay, one of the most popular public beaches on the island. Offshore, in the miraculous, multihued water, lay another of those underwater nature trails. When it rained periodically throughout the afternoon, all of us on the beach would just retreat under the sea-grape and palm trees and then reemerge with the sun, moving back and forth like the little mongooses that scamper all over the island. After one of the brief showers, a rainbow flung itself from the inland treetops right out into the bay. I thought, okay, this is it; we’re pushing our luck. There’s going to be a tropical storm any minute to balance out the bliss. I pulled my gear together and headed down a path from the beach to the main road to find a cab. That’s when I got hit with my storm.

Her name was Mary, and she was a cab driver. The taxis in Saint John are pickup trucks with long metal benches and brightly colored tin roofs over the back. Mary’s cab was full
Essentially, Saint John’s fate was sealed by the Caribbean itself, which lapped up enough of the island’s coastline to render it a mere charm.

Virgin Islands National Park covers two-thirds of Saint John, leaving sleepy Cruz Bay (opposite) the island’s only town. Cinnamon Bay (left) attracts scores of campers, hikers and windsurfers, while Trunk Bay (above) provides a favorite mecca for sunbathers and a self-guided underwater nature trail for snorkelers.
She pointed off to a nice house on stilts among the lush forest trees. “You see?” she said. “Dat is where I live, and dat is what I’m fidin’ for!”
when I arrived. She was having a little trouble starting her engine. A wily male competitor came along, persuading all her fares to pile into his cab and drove them all away. Mary, a big woman in a bright dress and sandals, unleashed a torrent of incomprehensible patois.

From somewhere in the midst of the maelstrom that was her arms, she motioned me into the back of her cab and drove away with me, her only fare, toward no place I suggested. Over a loud engine, with a thick windshield between us, she just kept talking and driving in fits and starts as I bounced around in back. I got a fairly complete tour of the island this way. Then we breezed into town, where Mary took her tale past all the cab drivers limin' in the shade of the town square. They listened, smiled and waved her on.

She cruised every back street in Cruz Bay and, sure enough, found the guy who'd wronged her. He was waiting in his truck under a tree for his group of shopping tourists. She didn't get out, but just pulled right up to him, bumper to bumper. Shaking her fist in the air, she shouted words even her patois couldn't disguise, then left him and started off up the steep hill toward my hotel. Things were quiet now, but we made one more stop, in the middle of the dark woods. She got out of the truck, came back to stand by me and pointed off to a nice house on stilts among the lush forest trees.

"You see?" she said. "Dat is where I live, and dat is what I'm fixin' for!"

As we'd arranged, Mary showed up again an hour later at my hotel to bring me into town for the evening. She had on a new white dress and nice shoes and was all smiles. "You see?" she

Most island homes are designed to take full advantage of continuous offshore breezes. On Saint John, a luxurious Gallows Point condominium (top) opens wide to the gentle trade wind and breathtaking view (opposite). Floating accommodations (above) await off Protestant Cay in Saint Croix's Christiansted Harbor.
said. "I can be a lady, too." She left me at the town square where I ate some West Indian food and drank at a dockside bar called Mooie's with some old-time Saint John residents and some salty-looking white beachcomber types. Then I headed along the waterfront to a place called World Headquarters, where there was live music and a lot of those well-dressed, all-over-tans. In the course of the evening, I met at least four women who told the same story. They had met some guy in a bar in the States. He had a boat and lots of time and said, "Hey, would you like to sail to the Virgin Islands?"

The latest victim of these most benevolent of kidnappings was dancing wildly in just her nightshirt. There was a guy next to me at the bar telling me her story. "You see her?" he asked with a faint slur. "She was sound asleep in her cabin an hour ago, and we pulled her out of bed to come here. My friend met her in a bar in San Francisco last night and brought her down here on a plane. They're staying with me and my wife on my boat. It's right out here in the harbor, September Style, fastest boat in the islands. We're taking it to Jamaica." He changed the subject abruptly. "So, what do you do?" he asked.

"I'm a writer," I said absently-mindedly.

"Oh, yeah? I'm a writer too. Well, I'm in real estate, but I like to write. A writer, huh? That's great. Hey, you know what?" he said, his voice rising. "Why don't you come to Jamaica with us?"

"Excuse me?"

"C'mon. No questions. My guest. Right now. Let's go. I'd like you to see Jamaica. I'd like to show you Jamaica. You think it's nice here, but Jamaica - that's paradise."

There it was again, that phrase: gradations of paradise. I told my exuberant new friend perhaps some other time. I started back toward town to find a cab, thinking all the while that I'd had a very adequate dose of paradise. Tomorrow I'd be on a ferry, and there'd be some gritchee-gritchee on a hill opening itself up again to the air.

Poet and free-lance journalist Charles Siebert lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.
They had met some guy in a bar in the States. He had a boat and lots of time and said, “Hey, would you like to sail to the Virgin Islands?”

The warm waves and gentle breezes off Saint John’s heavily embayed coastline provide abundant opportunity for sailing, surfing and windsurfing (opposite), though four-legged types may opt for a leisurely stroll along the beach (left). Area boaters find scenic Cruz Bay (above) a particularly appealing anchorage.