

Exploring Buck Island Reef

Protect Your Park

Protect Buck Island's reefs and its endangered species by following all regulations. Prohibited in the entire national monument are: fishing, fishing gear, collecting any plant or animal, waterskiing, jetskiing, spearfishing, overnight stays on the island, or anchoring in the lagoon (see large map below). Boats must pick up a day-use mooring. Scuba diving is prohibited at the underwater trail but allowed at the two scuba moorings in the north lagoon.

Before setting out, get information and park regulations at the National Park Service visitor contact station at Christiansted National Historic Site. On Buck Island, kiosks at

West Beach and the Diedrichs Point shelter post the regulations.

Corals are not rocks but fragile skeletons. Do not stand or hang on corals. Do not feed the fish.

On the Island Buck Island closes to visitors at sunset. Pets, vehicles (except wheelchairs), artificial light, camping, glass containers, generators, and loud noises are prohibited. No digging on beaches; tent poles, beach umbrellas, and stakes are not allowed.

Build fires only in the grills that are provided by the National Park Service at picnic areas.



Boats operated by authorized concessioners anchor at West Beach for snorkeling practice



Sandy Point orchid

Safety and Other Tips for Sea and Shore

Local custom and town ordinances require that you wear shirts or coverups in Christiansted. Bathing suits alone are not acceptable. Avoid sunburn hazard: Use sunscreen (SPF 30 minimum) and wear a hat and coverup clothing. On an average tour to Buck Island you are exposed to sunlight for four hours. That is enough time to get a severe sunburn, even though the trade winds may give you the illusion of being cool. Bring a bathing suit, foot gear (topsiders, sandals, or flip-flops), and a towel.

A concrete pier used for National Park Service operations and for off-loading passengers provides wheelchair access to Buck Island.

Reef and Marine Hazards Shallow reefs near shore have sharp corals, spiny sea urchins, fire coral, fire worms, and barbed snails. Cuts from marine organisms infect quickly: Seek medical attention right away.

Portuguese man-o-war and sea wasps, both stinging jellyfish, are rarely found here. Barracuda, stingrays, and sharks are marine wildlife, and are not usually aggressive toward swimmers and snorkelers. Treat them with caution.

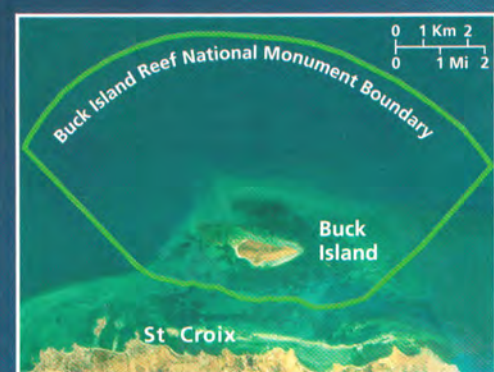
Hazards Ashore Stay on the beach or designated trail to avoid hazardous plants. The hiking trail is steep, with loose stones.

Contact with poisonous manchineel trees (sap, leaves, bark, or the fruit resembling small green apples) causes chemical burning. Touching your eyes after such contact causes swelling or blindness. Christmas bush looks like holly but causes contact dermatitis, and stinging nettle is painful.

Several other trees and cactuses and other plants bear thorns or barbed hairs to avoid. Beware of centipedes, scorpions, biting spiders, and ants. The National Park Service recommends that you stay on the designated hiking trail and do not stray off the path—to prevent coming into contact with hazardous native plants.



Manchineel tree and its poisonous apples (top). Avoid Christmas bush (above): Its oils cause blistering rash like its cousin poison ivy



What's Happening at Buck Island and Its Reef

Authorized concessioners, under contract with the National Park Service, offer trips to Buck Island from St. Croix daily. Reserve trips by phone or website or in person. Visit the park website for current information on the tours.

Snorkeling Beginners can snorkel Buck Island's coral grottoes after a short lesson from the boat crew. You will be guided through the underwater trail—closed sunset to sunrise. Maximum water depth in grottoes is 12 feet. Always snorkel with a buddy and keep well in front of moored boats. Scuba diving is allowed in the Monument only at two designated scuba moorings: shallow, 30- to 40-foot dives go through magnificent haystack formations of elkhorn coral.



A snorkeler on the underwater trail, with (top to bottom) stoplight parrotfish, French angelfish, and coney

Walking Trails A hiking trail from either Diedrichs Point or the West Beach picnic area crosses the island (45 minutes at a walking pace). Wear shoes and a shirt and bring drinking water. From West Beach the trail goes through low-lying beach forest up the gentle hillside with turpentine and pigeon-berry trees to the island crest. A side trail takes you to an observation point with panoramic views of coral reef and darker, deeper water farther out, where the island's underwater shelf falls off into the Puerto Rico Trench's west branch. The main trail goes down the south side in small switchbacks through frangipani trees, organ pipe cactus, and bromeliads. It ends at Diedrichs Point for an easy walk on the shoreline back to West Beach.

For the less energetic, West Beach trail offers a hike through a manchineel forest to giant tamarind and sandpaper trees. Return via the water's edge to the picnic area.

Research and Monitoring For over 40 years National Park Service managers and scientists have studied Buck Island, working to restore the natural ecosystem that has been altered by impacts of human use, overfishing, the devastating effects of hurricanes, and human-caused disasters—ship groundings, pollution, or oil spills. The National Park Service has removed exotic species, predators like the mongoose and tree rat, and invasive plants and re-introduced native plants and animals missing for 200 or more years.

With Marine Protected Area status, Buck Island's fishery will again grow and the coral reef may eventually regain its health.

Hurricanes force long-term, dramatic changes in both island and marine systems. They can kill beach forest and disrupt coastal hawksbill turtle nesting areas. Storm waves can destroy the barrier reef or push it landward. Monitoring these impacts on coral reef, sea turtles, and fishes will help us understand how global climate change affects these Caribbean island treasures.

Private Boating To take your own boat to Buck Island, first get information and your anchoring permit at the National Park Service

visitor contact station in Christiansted. Vessels over 42 feet should anchor at West Beach and visit the underwater trail by dinghy.

Picnic Areas West Beach and Diedrichs Point offer picnic tables, charcoal grills, and vault toilets. Diedrichs has a 20- x 20-foot shelter.

Take all trash off the island with you. Firewood may not be gathered on the island. Do not empty grill ashes on the ground; this soils the white beach and attracts biting ants. Put cooled ashes in container or plastic bag and take them off the island. If you must leave ashes that are not cooled, extinguish them with sand and leave them in the grill.

U.S. Virgin Islands National Park System Areas

Other Sites on St. Croix Christiansted National Historic Site preserves Danish-era architecture, and Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve offers tropical land and water ecosystems and evidence of 2,000 years of human history.

More Information National Park Service 2100 Church St., #100 Christiansted VI 00820-4611 340-773-1460 or www.nps.gov/buis CHRI_Superintendent@nps.gov

©GPO:2014—383-444/30312 Last updated 2011 Printed on recycled paper.

