A Living Museum Where Nature and History Blend

Salt River Bay is a living museum on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Pre-Columbian and colonial-era archaeological sites and ruins are found in a dynamic, tropical ecosystem that supports threatened and endangered species. In 1982 Congress created Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve as a part of the National Park System to preserve, protect, and tell the story of its rich contributions to the nation’s natural and cultural heritage. The 1,275-acre park is jointly managed by the National Park Service and Government of the United States Virgin Islands. The park’s blend of sea and land holds some of the largest remaining mangrove forests in the Virgin Islands, as well as coral reefs and a subtidal cayman. Salt River Bay’s varied habitat is itself an important ecosystem of interweaving, estuarial, coral reef, and subtidal cayman, as told on the other side of this brochure.

This setting has witnessed thousands of years of human endeavor in every period of human habitation in the Virgin Islands. A representative view of South American Indian culture, the 1602 on island in Ciboney Spanish colonists, and the 1651 French beach at Marigot, the 1760 British occupation, and the 1806 American acquisition, and their descendants. More than a dozen major archaeological investigations since 1980, together with historical research, reveal the remarkable story. Both sites encourage the imagination and so compellingly, drawing visitors into the spirit of the past and its beauty and sanctity. You can help, but this park and its stories will always be here to inspire people about our common heritage.

Ignem, Taino, and Carib Peoples

Migratory hunter-gatherers came up the Caribbean chain of islands from South America to the Virgin Islands about 3,000 years ago. The Taino, who arrived from the Greater Antilles about 800 years ago, are the only pre-Columbian peoples remaining on St. Croix. The Taino are the only carib or “black men” who survived the conquest and are represented by the Carib people of the Virgin Islands. By 1513, their native American culture would be extinguished. Diseases, wars, and foreign invaders are told here.

A Ceramic Bell Court

On Salt River Bay’s western shore are already ancient Indian settlement areas. One village on St. Croix dates from about 700 to the late 1400s. This painting depicts their village and ball court (or Jib). By 1300, however, it is the only bell ball game designed for the Taino. The ball game originated in Micronesia, and Taino teams used to play it on a large, wooden bell through which the ball passed, under the ground. The Taino, who had the only Bell Court in America, played it on the northern side of the bay. It was a game of skill, strategy, and luck, involving teamwork and endurance. The game was played for many years, but ended in the early 1800s.

A Town of Fifty

The Taino, who had the only bell bell from the northern side of the bay to the southern side of the bay and to the south, were skilled in sailing. Salt water fishing allowed them to become a “coastal” society. Rice, beans, and yams were staples of their diet, as well as fish, shellfish, and game.

An Encounter of Two Worlds

November 16, 1493: Columbus’ second voyage to the New World included his landing on the island we now call St. Croix. He sent his boy, Pedro de Bobadilla, to explore the shore and find fresh water. Returning to the west end of the island, the Indians of the “Valle de la Desolacion” (Valley of Desolation) of the Arawak.

European Struggles for Control

European powers competing to dominate the New World in the 17th century, sought to colonize the Virgin Islands. The settlement of St. Croix by the French in 1643 was followed by a rapid settlement of the Virgin Islands by the English in 1653. The English, in turn, were succeeded by the Danish in 1670. In 1733, the Danes leased part of St. Croix to the French, and a small settlement was established. In 1671-72, the Danes settled the Virgin Islands, and the Virgin Islands became a part of the Danish West Indies. The Taino and the Caribs were forced to leave the island of St. Croix. The Taino were displaced by the Black Indians, but their language, culture, and traditions continue to live on in the community.

Archaeological Treasures

Salt River Bay is the most important archaeological site in the Virgin Islands. It remains all three joined together. The Taino, and Carib and European cultures. The Taino lived here in 1611. They are known for a wide range of activities, including agriculture, fishing, and hunting. The Taino people lived in small, oval dwellings called cahuts. They grew corn, beans, and sweet potatoes, and they gathered shellfish, crustaceans, and fish. The Taino people also made pottery, carved stone tools, and wove baskets. They used these materials to create a culture that was unique to the Virgin Islands.

The religious beliefs of the Taino included the belief in a supreme being, the creator of the world. The Taino also believed in a spirit world, where the souls of the dead lived eternally. The Taino people believed that the world was divided into two parts: the visible world and the invisible world. The Taino people believed that the world was divided into two parts: the visible world and the invisible world. The Taino people believed that the world was divided into two parts: the visible world and the invisible world.
Salt River Bay National Historic Park and Ecological Preserve is a Dynamic coastal habitat whose significance extends far beyond the boundaries of the bay and the park. Perhaps nowhere else in the Caribbean does a protected national area exhibit so many of this region's important ecological relationships in such a small area.

From Terrestrial Uplands to Estuarine Bay

Salt River Bay is unique in its diversity, where fresh and saltwaters mix. Rich in aquatic plant and fish life, it is ecologically imperative. The variety of the local flora and fauna is extraordinary. Estuarine habitats serve as living laboratories for the study of estuarine ecosystems. This makes the bay an important site for research.

Coral Reef

A rich biodiversity of fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and invertebrates adds to the diversity of life in the estuary. The coral reef is a vital ecosystem that supports a variety of marine life. It is a valuable resource for the local community and is a popular destination for tourists.

Mangrove Forests

Salt River Bay is fringed by mangrove forests, creating a habitat that supports a diverse array of plants and animals. Mangroves are salt-tolerant trees that grow in brackish water. They provide crucial habitats for many species and are important for coastal protection.

Planning Your Visit

There are currently no visitor services authorized by the National Park Service at Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve. The park is in the development stage, and visitors are encouraged to visit the park and experience its natural beauty. For more information, contact the Saint John National Park Service at 340-777-1480.

For Your Safety

Cover up during the heat of the day and wear hats to protect against sunburn. Keep children and pets well hydrated in hot weather. Be aware of venomous snakes and spiders. Stay on marked trails, and do not remove any endangered species from the area. Be mindful of the wildlife and respect their habitats.

Underwater Research

Salt River Bay has been extensively studied, providing valuable insights into marine ecosystems, coral reef health, and the impact of human activities. The park is involved in various research projects to better understand these aquatic environments.