THE UNKNOWN INSTANT CARIBBEAN 6 getaways you can do this weekend P. 57 WORLD'S **VIRGIN** NEWEST **ISLANDS** ARK P. 50 WHERE TO GO 11 CXT Thailand Swim with Amazing Sea People P. 26 > Find Its Little-Known Coast P. 34 Australia Smell the World's Cleanest Island P. 10 IS MORE SECRET SPOTS

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Easy Breezy Beautiful U.S. Virgin Islands

QUICK ARRIVAL



Once a Danish trio, St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix have been America's Caribbean since 1916. But a history lesson isn't needed to visit. Nor is a U.S. passport. Other perks? English is spoken and the currency is greenbacks.

- IN THE AIR Eleven major U.S. hubs offer nonstop flights to St. Thomas. The other flight you'll want to take is a seaplane to St. Croix — it's fun, quick and easy (more than 30 take off per day). ON THE GROUND Ferries to St. John from St. Thomas run often. On-island, open-air taxis (called "safaris") are widely available
- and easy to flag down. Rent a car for less than \$30 a day; remember to keep left.

MITHIN EASY REACH

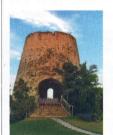
- o GET WET A waterproof camera and flip-flops were all I needed to explore the thick green mangroves, offshore reefs and volcanic rocks in St. Thomas' Inner Mangrove Lagoon Sanctuary and Cas Cay, a deserted island in the Virgin Islands National Park, viecotours.com
- OVENTURE OUT On St. Croix (25-minute seaplane ride from St. Thomas), I realized why locals urged me to rent a car to reach the National Wildlife Refuge on the western tip. With 2 miles of sugarwhite sand, Sandy Point is one of the Caribbean's most unspoiled beaches,

and it's open only on weekends.

DINE WITH A VIEW ZoZo's northern Italian cuisine is what enticed my palate. What kept my gaze? The sunset view of St. Thomas and the BVI from the openair dining room inside the ruins of Caneel Bay, St. John's, 18th-century sugar mill inspired dining at its finest. zozos.net

M INTO A ROOM

- DOLONGO BAY This family-owned resort 15 minutes from St. Thomas' airport had me the moment I stepped inside Iggies, its thatched-roof beach bar. It also helped that there was a charter-ready catamaran on its dock and a booze hunt in its bay, where I snorkeled for bottles of Cruzan rum. Travel before Aug. 31 for discounts. bolongobay.com
- CANEEL BAY It's on St. John, but getting to it is a boozy 20-minute private ferry from St. Thomas. This low-key luxe resort is set on 170 acres with seven white-sand beaches. That it's the only property within the isle's national park was just a perk (Cottage 7 was once the home of the park's founder, Laurance Rockefeller). Go before



Aug. 26 for a special \$399-a-night rate. caneelbay.com

THE BUCCANEER A golden beach. Steel-pan music on the terrace of a 1650s-era house. Cocktail parties in the old windmill.

Yep, I'm in the Caribbean. From \$271 a night. thebuccaneer.com — DAVID LAHUTA

DID YOU KNOW?

March 31 is Transfer Day, when the U.S. took over the VI. Locals eat pumpkin soup to celebrate.