

**\$88** A DAY IN  
BELIZE!

**EXPERT ADVICE:** DEALS  
AND CASH-SAVING TIPS

**JAMAICA'S** COOL  
NEW BOBSLED RIDE!

# CARIBBEAN

TRAVEL+LIFE

*Find Your  
Very Own*

# Island Escape

- SECRET BEACHES
- SEXY RESORTS
- EXOTIC RESTAURANTS

## CURAÇAO

Beach Getaway for Culture Lovers

## ST. THOMAS

Right for Romance

MARCH 2009

US \$4.99



CARIBBEAN

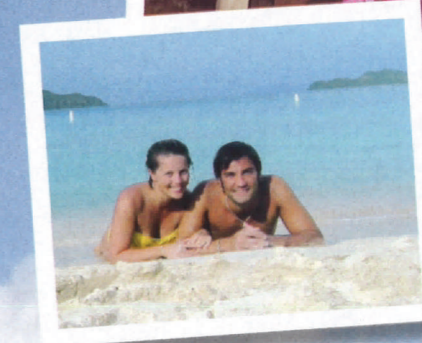


Sensual Healing  
Rejuvenating Wellness Retreats

# road map to ROMANCE

USING HIS PARENTS' HONEY-  
MOON DIARY AS A GUIDE,  
**DAVID LAHUTA** AND HIS WIFE,  
JOY, GO IN SEARCH OF  
**ST. THOMAS**, THEN AND NOW.

Photography by Zach Stovall



*"Spectacular paradise setting with colorful flowers, hummingbirds*

*and coconut palms swaying amidst the ever-present gentle breezes."*

#### SANDS OF TIME

Vacant Lindquist Beach harks to an era when St. Thomas seemed much farther away. Insets: Snapshots of the author's parents on their honeymoon, and of him and his wife 35 years later.



**ON THE PATH**  
 Clockwise:  
 Charlotte Amalie's 99 Steps; hibiscus adds a splash of color at Bolongo Bay; Pineapple Beach Resort circa 1973; bargain hunting in Charlotte Amalie.



**I** never meant to read my father's journal.

But when I found the yellowed stationery tucked away in my childhood home, I couldn't help myself. It was like discovering an antique treasure map — and my dad was the pirate who'd penned it.

From a dusty manila envelope I pulled five sheets of paper, each with his unmistakable handwriting beneath a teal letterhead that

read, "Pineapple Beach Resort, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, U.S.A." After a quick scan of page one, it was clear that I'd uncovered an intimate piece of family history: a day-by-day account of my parents' honeymoon in 1973.

I'd always heard stories of that trip — how they ate fresh pineapple for breakfast, got sunburns even while sitting in the shade, tried snorkeling for the very first time — but this was different. This was a road map to Caribbean romance. After reading about their one-week trip, it was clear the St. Thomas of my parents' past was idyllic and largely undiscovered. "In those days going to the Virgin Islands was like going to Tahiti today," says my mother, who's still honeymooning with my dad more than 35 years later. "Everything felt so exotic."

What remained of that era, that atmosphere? Only one way to find out: My wife, Joy, and I head to the island with my father's journal as our guide.

**SUNDAY, MAY 6, 1973:** Arrival 12:06 amidst "dinky" but colorful airport. Crossed St. Thomas via cab driven on left. Country abodes look poor, as stray goats wander about bumpy high tortuous roads. Stop at Bluebeard's Castle afforded high, colorful glimpse of town nestled among the mountains. Into the luscious aqua-tinted waters by late afternoon. Spectacular paradise setting with colorful flowers, hummingbirds and coconut palms swaying amidst the ever-present gentle breezes. Pineapple Beach quite lovely with scenic, island views circling the bay.

For a career English teacher and amateur poet, my father's sentences read much like a telegram. Visited the beach. Stop. Admired the palms. Stop. But as Joy and I deplane on the

*Drakes Seat, Mow  
 Top, and Magen's h  
 as we covered the is  
 by bus for three hou  
 Lovely shots from  
 above as crystal  
 waters lapped again  
 white beaches. Hib  
 and  
 na  
 moo  
 and piña colodas.*



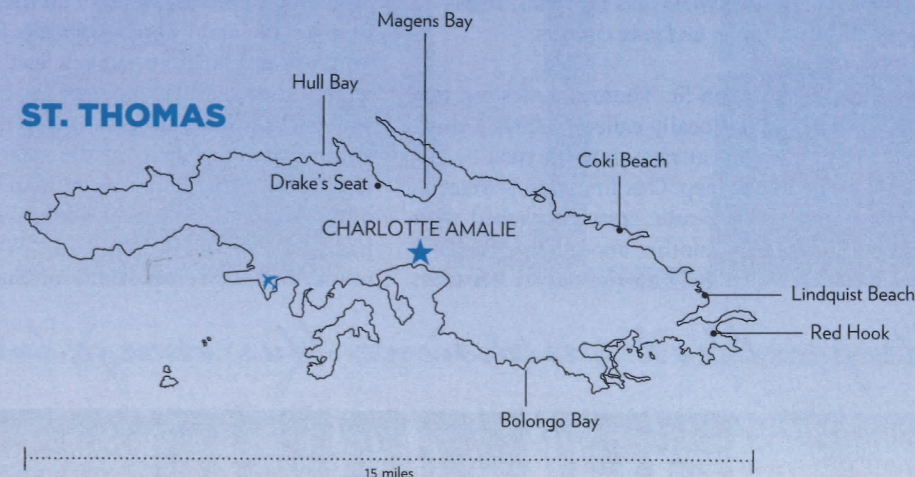
*"Morning excursion to town, where we walked the narrow flag-lined streets and browsed through the many stores offering bargains galore."*

St. Thomas tarmac, his truncated reflections speak volumes. Cyril E. King Airport, while far from “dinky,” is still awash in local color. We’re welcomed by steel-pan music and offered free shots of Cruzan rum that tempt us to linger, but there’s a rented Jeep waiting. The drive east takes us through historic Charlotte Amalie — pronounced “Charlotte Amalah,” it’s the island’s main city and U.S. Virgin Islands capital — but instead of stray goats, we encounter wandering cruise-ship passengers, and lots of them. Still, the setting is glorious. The harbor-hugging road gives us our first glimpse of the sea, then lifts us up into the hills, where our Jeep fills with tropical scents of the surrounding forest. No longer are St. Thomas’ roads “bumpy” and “tortuous,” and they soon deliver us to Bolongo Bay Beach Resort.

Owned by the Doumeng family since 1974, the cozy hotel reaches back to my parents’ era. It has 65 well-appointed rooms right on the beach, and a laid-back vibe you just don’t find at many big resorts. Joy loves our room’s tasteful wicker furniture and plantation style ceiling fan, and I can’t

**DINNER A DEUX**

A quiet corner rendezvous in the Old Stone Farmhouse restaurant. Opposite: Charlotte Amalie and its harbor glitter as evening sets in.



*“Fresh pineapple for breakfast as sunburn forced us to a wonderful morning tour of Drake’s Seat, Mountain Top and Magens Bay.”*

get enough of the water view from our patio. Sitting at the pool bar, being served ice-cold Carib beers by an affable St. Thomian named Harry, Joy and I imagine it’s much like what Pineapple Beach Resort must’ve been like before it closed in the early ’80s: friendly owners who greet you by name, oversized hammocks slung across shady palms, all on a quiet cove to call your own. My mother likes to say that Pineapple Beach made them feel like they were characters in a romance novel, and that’s just how Bolongo Bay feels to us.

Hot on my parents’ trail, we make dinner reservations at Banana Tree Grille, an Italian-inspired restaurant on the grounds of Bluebeard’s Castle. Sure enough, my dad was right: It’s got one of the prettiest overlooks on the island, with the lights of Charlotte Amalie twinkling below.

**TUESDAY, MAY 8:** Morning excursion to town, where we walked the narrow flag-lined streets and browsed through the many stores offering bargains galore. China, silver, jewelry, watches, liquor, cigarettes — all at 30-40% off ... colorful arcades and architecture make it somewhat quaint. Perused the old synagogue ...

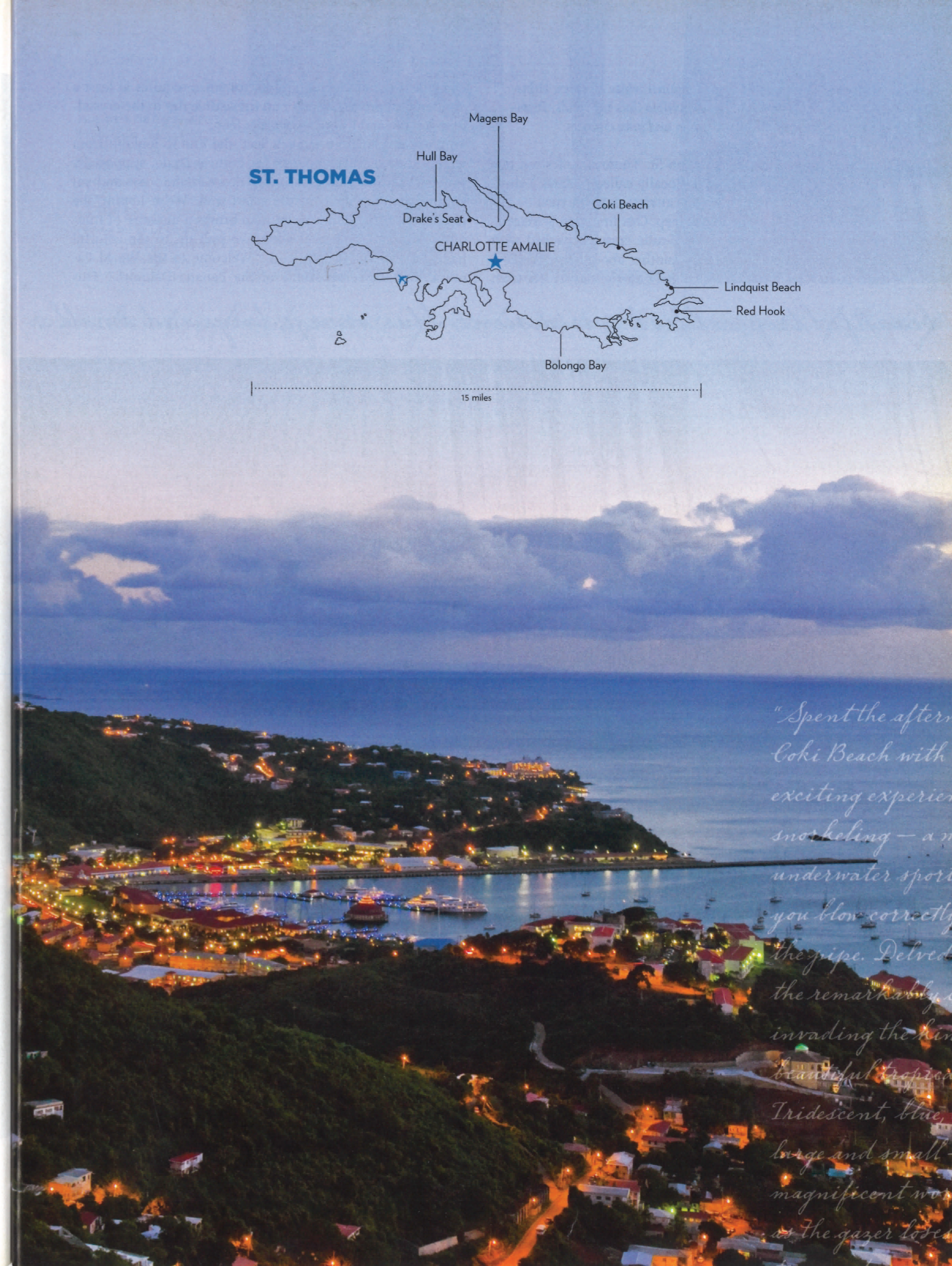
With nearly 2 million cruise-ship passengers per year, Charlotte Amalie is one of the most visited ports in the Caribbean. In season it sees as many as eight ships a day, which turns much of it into a bustling outdoor mall. The bargains are still to be found — on diamonds, watches and gold jewelry galore — but we soon tire of navigating the fanny-packed horde. We admire the well-preserved Danish architecture and the charming stone-and-brick alleyways before walking uphill to scope a handful of spots we’d seen in my parents’ old photo album. The Frederik Lutheran Church remains stately and regal — as it has been since 1793 — and not far away are

the famed 99 Steps (actually, there are 103) that lead to Government Hill. My mother’s old Minolta barely did it all justice, but when Joy and I finally reach the St. Thomas Synagogue, we quickly realize why it warranted mention in my father’s journal: Fine white sand still blankets the synagogue’s floor, a device for muffling the prayers of the faithful that’s a legacy of the Spanish Inquisition, when prayer meant persecution. To this day my parents talk with reverence about how it was so unlike anything they’d ever seen in a place of worship.

After all of the sightseeing, we duck into Cuzzin’s, a hole-in-the-wall cafe just one block from the main shopping strip. Housed in what was once an 18th-century red-brick stable, the restaurant specializes in authentic island cuisine, and we’re thrilled to find it full of boisterous tables of locals. After a small plate of conch fritters, Joy and I split the curried shrimp entrée served with heaping portions of fried plantains and rice and peas.

Still hankering for duty-free deals we skipped in town, we make a beeline for Yacht Haven Grande, a new shopping complex between Charlotte Amalie and the Havensight cruise pier. With high-end stores such as Gucci, Ferragamo and Louis Vuitton, it’s where Fifth Avenue meets the Caribbean — an open-air plaza where my mother gladly would’ve shopped, given its discount prices. “I could spend the whole day here,” says Joy from the fitting room of her favorite designer store. “Everything is 60 percent off!” Two cashmere dresses and a pair of fancy pumps later, Joy convinces me her purchases are all part of our quest.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 9:** Fresh pineapple for breakfast as sunburn forced us to a wonderful morning tour of Drake’s Seat, Mountain Top and Magens Bay, as we covered the island by bus for three hours. Lovely shots from above as



*“Spent the afternoon at Coki Beach with exciting experiences snorkeling — a new underwater sport you blow correctly the pipe. Delivered the remarkably ... invading the ... beautiful tropical. Iridescent, blue ... large and small magnificent ... the gazer lose ...*

ated for last  
 ute seashells as  
 harbored the  
 r final  
 apple.  
 pache  
 faren

crystal clear waters lapped against white beaches. Hibiscus still in bloom and bougainvillea dots the roads. Beautiful night with heavenly moon and piña coladas.

Tours are still big business on St. Thomas — it's not uncommon to see open-air vans (locally called "safaris") shuffling dozens of visitors from one attraction to the next — but we prefer going it alone in the Jeep. Our first stop is Magens Bay, where we find the half-mile crescent packed with day-trippers. When I asked my mother about Magens, she'd said there were a handful of people on the day of her tour,

surely less than a dozen. For us, romance requires at least a modicum of privacy, so after an irresistible dip in the crystalline sea, Joy and I hop back in the Jeep.

We're not far from Drake's Seat, the hilltop lookout from which 16th-century explorer Sir Francis Drake supposedly watched his fleet. It's a stunning down-island view and yet another popular spot on the safari trail. We're hoping the next stop on the honeymoon map brings a measure of tranquility, but we're suspect when we pull up to the colorful hand-painted mural that says, "Welcome to the World Famous Mountain Top Home of the Banana Daiquiri." This

*"beautiful tropical fish ... iridescent, blue, orange, large and small ...*



*swam hand in hand, perusing coral and darting denizens of the deep."*



**ALL IN A DAY'S PLAY**  
 From Coki Beach, with Coral World in the background (opposite), to the historic St. Thomas Synagogue (bottom), to cocktail time at Cuzzin's restaurant in Charlotte Amalie (below), and back to cozy Bolongo Bay Beach Resort (right).



being St. Thomas' highest point at 1,500 feet, the place sees plenty of action. Fortunately, however, it's well after 4 p.m., and since most cruise-ship passengers have long returned to their motherships, we've got the place all to ourselves. Two potent banana daiquiris later, Joy and I sit and admire the sweeping panorama: We can see uninhabited islets like Hans Lollick and Great Tobago, the British Virgin Islands, including Jost Van Dyke and Tortola, plus St. Thomas' sister island of St. John. We steal the moment to smooch like newlyweds.

The glow lasts as we tick off the last item of my parents' itinerary with a beautiful evening on the *Lady Lynsey*. The 53-foot catamaran is owned and operated by the Ritz-Carlton St. Thomas — the island's grand-dame hotel and spa — and we're thrilled to be greeted aboard with guava coladas. Under clear skies and on smooth seas, we watch the sun dip into the horizon. The mystical green flash eludes us yet again, but when the pinks turn to purples and the purples fade to black, we count shooting stars until we reach the shore.

**THURSDAY, MAY 10:** Spent the afternoon at Coki Beach with our first exciting experience with snorkeling — a marvelous underwater sport provided you blow correctly through the pipe. Delved beneath the remarkably clear water invading the kingdom of beautiful tropical fish. Iridescent, blue, orange, large and small — a lovely, magnificent world to behold as the gazer loses track of time and space. Swam hand in hand, perusing coral and darting denizens of the deep — simply thrilling.

Until then, the only shade of water my folks had ever seen was the murky Atlantic — forget about ever having breathed through a tube while swimming. It was all very new. My mother remembers being simultaneously frightened and amazed. "I was absolutely stunned by the brilliance of colors," she says. "It was like nothing I'd ever seen in my entire life." Coki Beach was the premier snorkeling destination of its time, with fully intact coral reefs and schools of fish. Excited to test the water — and to try something new ourselves — Joy and I head to Coral World, a marine park and undersea observatory just a stone's throw from Coki Beach.

We're here to try Snuba, a cross between snorkeling and Scuba: Instead of air being provided from a tank on your back, it's pumped through a hose from a raft on the water's surface — sort of like diving with a 20-foot umbilical cord, no experience necessary. After a quick orientation, we plop into

## ROADMAP TO ROMANCE

the azure water and follow our guide. Instantly, we're surrounded by brightly striped wrasse, rainbow-colored parrotfish and schools of blue tang. At a depth of 15 feet, Joy points out thriving brain and elkhorn corals. Bright shafts of sunlight pierce the Caribbean Sea as we clasp each other's hands, exploring

for nearly an hour.

We vividly relive the details of that awe-inspiring experience over grilled mahimahi sandwiches at Fungi's on nearby Water Bay. The dockside cafe overlooks the old Pineapple Beach Resort, and when Joy recognizes an aged wooden pier where my parents posed for

a photo, we can't help ourselves. We find our way to the beach, set up the camera and shoot away. A few minutes later we're dangling our legs off the pier.

"Do you wanna move back?" says Joy. We lived in the islands long ago, having met and fallen in love on St. Croix.

*Continued on page 90*



**HOME SWEET HOME**  
At Hull Bay on the north coast of St. Thomas, local residents far outnumber tourists.

Experience the resort that nature designed.

> At AKR, every day is a new adventure.

- Dolphins that mingle.
- Sharks, horses, rays & wrecks.
- Miles of pristine barrier reefs.
- Wild parrots & fiery sunsets.
- Canopy rides & hammock lazing.
- Rustic bungalows on the shore.
- Five-star PADI training & Dolphin Summer Scuba Camp for kids.

And we've barely scratched the surface.

**Anthony's Key Resort**  
Roatan • Bay Islands Honduras  
[www.anthonyskey.com](http://www.anthonyskey.com)

CATCH US LIVE IN NJ at Booth 531 / March 27 - 29

Call & mention code CTL09 888.888.5415 / 954.929.0090  
or email: [akr@anthonyskey.com](mailto:akr@anthonyskey.com)

**be a diver**  
at

**SUNSET HOUSE**  
Grand Cayman's Hotel For Divers By Divers  
[www.sunsethouse.com](http://www.sunsethouse.com)

## Caribbean Villa Vacations

Make it perfect. Make it Island Hideaways.



Your dream vacation awaits...

Our Villa Consultants will arrange an escape matching your needs and desires, often for less than staying at a luxury hotel.

Call toll free: **866-468-8345**

**Island Hideaways**  
islandhideaways.com

## The Treasure Of The Caribbean



**RESORT**  
SAN PEDRO, BELIZE

A PADI Gold Palm IDC Resort

Thatched cabanas hidden beneath coconut palms and lush tropical foliage, dining at its finest in our tropical open air beach side restaurant and a full service dive shop are a small sampling of what makes Ramon's Village Resort the treasure of the Caribbean.

CALL TOLL FREE:  
**1-800-MAGIC 15**  
www.ramons.com

## ROADMAP TO ROMANCE

Continued from page 88

"It's not a bad idea," I say, and it dawns on me that our experiment is working: Following my parents around St. Thomas, we have rediscovered our own romantic island dreams. As we stare at the horizon and fantasize about what kind of life we could have here, nostalgia and a sense of possibility wash over us. The view hasn't changed in more than 35 years, nor has the enchanting power of the Virgin Islands.

*SUNDAY, MAY 12: Hunted for last-minute seashells as we harbored thoughts of our final morning pineapple. Dressed and packed in time for a farewell piña colada ... the end of a marvelous and perfect honeymoon.*

My parents have always been avid shell collectors, and it's a favorite pastime of ours too, so with last-day blues setting in, Joy and I set out to find a beach to call our own. Working on a tip we got a few days earlier, we search for Lindquist Beach on the island's northeastern shore. It takes us awhile to find the unmarked entrance road, and when we finally pull into a dusty lot with two other vehicles, one of them has a bumper sticker that reads, "Jah Is My Co-Pilot." Island cars. Jackpot. When we reach the sun-dappled shore, we regret we hadn't found Lindquist sooner. The white-sand beach is nearly empty. Two boys — both with ribbed tank tops and thin rows of braids — are racing by their dad in the shallows, and a 20-something former mainlander is enjoying a dip with her visiting mom.

That's it. On a beach that's perfectly pristine, there's no one else in sight. As we gaze into the distance, there's not even a building within eyeshot. Just an endless island view from a place that feels so evocative of the St. Thomas of my parents' past.

We laze the day away, and when Joy and I troll the water's edge for shells, my father's sentiments echo across the decades: "the end of a marvelous and perfect honeymoon." **CT+L**

For **THE ESSENTIALS** on St. Thomas, turn to page 92

Explore the real Bahamas.  
YouTube.com/RealBahamas



Hundreds of islands. Millions of stories.  
The real Bahamas.



BAHAMASOUTISLAND.COM

## THE ESSENTIALS | ST. THOMAS



St. Thomas draws most visitors from mid-December to late-April, when the weather is at its most stable and prices are highest. If you're searching for a deal, target the months between May and November. If you're planning a stay in late April, it's best to make hotel reservations way in advance: The St. Thomas Carnival, easily the largest annual street party in the U.S. Virgin Islands, is typically held the last week of the month; this year it's May 1-2.

### WHERE TO STAY

#### THE RITZ-CARLTON, ST. THOMAS

**Style:** Luxurious villa-style resort  
**Location:** Secluded south-shore bay near Red Hook  
**Accommodations:** 180 modern rooms with balcony or terrace  
**Rates:** From \$339 in low season (\$619 high)  
**Amenities:** Four restaurants, two pools, Jacuzzi, nonmotorized water sports, 53-foot catamaran for day sails and private charters, children's programs, full-service spa  
**Contact:** 340-775-3333;  
ritzcarlton.com

#### BOLONGO BAY BEACH RESORT

**Style:** Laid-back and family-friendly  
**Location:** Bolongo Bay, a 15-minute drive from Charlotte Amalie  
**Accommodations:** 65 beachfront rooms with kitchenettes  
**Rates:** From \$212 in low season (\$493 high)  
**Amenities:** Pool, dive shop, sailing charters, sea kayaks, windsurfing, Sunfish, Hobie cats, Iggy's Beach Bar and Grill, Lobster Grille  
**Contact:** 800-524-4746;  
bolongobay.com

#### ISLAND VIEW GUEST HOUSE

**Style:** Cozy hilltop bed-and-breakfast  
**Location:** Near Charlotte Amalie, atop Crown Mountain  
**Accommodations:** 15 air-conditioned rooms, some with balconies and kitchenettes  
**Rates:** From \$106 in low season (\$118 high)  
**Amenities:** Free continental breakfast; honor bar; pool; gas grill; wireless Internet; activities desk; restaurant; library of books, DVDs and games  
**Contact:** 800-524-2023;  
islandviewstthomas.com

### WHERE TO EAT

#### BANANA TREE GRILLE

**Setting:** Hilltop dining room with a view, in Bluebeard's Castle  
**Cuisine:** Italian with a dash of the islands  
**Recommendations:** Chef Patrick Bellantoni's specialties include a homemade ravioli appetizer (it changes daily), a crusty loaf of bread smothered in gorgonzola cheese, and his own Steak Gaetano, a grilled New York sirloin finished with olive oil, garlic and parsley.  
**Price:** Entrees \$27 to \$49  
**Contact:** 340-776-4050;  
bananatreegrille.com

#### CUZZIN'S

**Setting:** Casual Charlotte Amalie cafe  
**Cuisine:** Authentic West Indian  
**Recommendations:** Conch stewed in onion butter, curried shrimp, and a host of home-style sides, including rice and peas, fried plantains, and fungi — a traditional dish made with minced okra and cornmeal.  
**Price:** Entrees \$12 to \$40  
**Contact:** 340-777-4711

#### THE OLD STONE FARMHOUSE

**Setting:** Old World elegance in a restored 200-year-old plantation house  
**Cuisine:** Continental meets Caribbean  
**Recommendations:** Dine a la carte or choose from a three-, four- or five-course tasting menu. Selections change seasonally, but favorites include foie gras with red-onion jam and chocolate-port syrup, striped bass with duck confit and potato hash, and wagyu short ribs with jumbo prawns.  
**Price:** Three-course tasting menu from \$63  
**Contact:** 340-777-6277;  
oldstonefarmhouse.com

#### FUNGI'S ON THE BEACH

**Setting:** Dockside shack on Water Bay  
**Cuisine:** Island-inspired pub grub  
**Recommendations:** Johnnycakes, lobster roti, grilled mahimahi sandwiches and a shot of "roots" — homemade 185-proof rum made from local botanicals and dried insects.  
**Price:** Entrees \$6.50 to \$29  
**Contact:** 340-775-4142

#### BLUE MOON CAFÉ

**Setting:** Open-air beachfront dining on Nazareth Bay  
**Cuisine:** Upscale American  
**Recommendations:** Try the jumbo lump crab cake with black-bean-and-roasted-corn salsa or the twice-cooked baby-back ribs drizzled with a Black Strap Cruzan-rum barbecue sauce.  
**Price:** Entrees \$17 to \$36  
**Contact:** 340-779-2262;  
bluemooncafevi.com