

Buck Island Concessioners

Milemark, Inc. (☎ 773-2628) Sail or motor half-day or full day; glass bottomed boat available. King's Wharf.

"Charis" (☎ 773-9027) One six-passenger sail vessel, half or full day, available.

"Diva" (☎ 778-4675) One six-passenger sail vessel w/motor, half- or full-day, available.

Big Beard Tours (☎ 773-4482) Sail or motor, half or full day, available.

"Teroro II" (☎ 773-3161, ☎ 773-4041) One 42-ft trimaran sail w/motor, 36-ft. trimaran, Green Cay Marina, half- or full-day available.

RENT A MOM: Kat and Pat's **P. M. Services** (☎ 773-5443) offer everything from limo service to home cooked meals to babysitting. Custom packages are available.
pms@viaccess.net

The Caribbean Dance School (☎ 778-8824), 5 Church St., holds classes in gymnastics, self defense, yoga, jazz, ballet, etc.

GYMS: The a/c **VI Family Sports & Fitness Center** (☎ 778-5144) has freeweights, basketball court, 25-m heated pool, coed sauna, and steam room, climbing wall, and classes ranging from aerobics to yoga. Short-term rates are available.

Buck Island Reef National Monument

Comprising 880 acres in total, **Buck Island Reef** is the only underwater National Monument in the US. Its center, the 180-acre Buck Island, lies two mi. off the N shore of St. Croix. Some 30,000 people visit this seductive nymphet of an island every year. Proclaimed a national monument in 1961, the island has been uninhabited from the 1750s. The story of its name is a convoluted tale which has been frequently misrepresented. The earliest evidence is a French map dating from 1667 which shows the island called Ile Vert ("Green Island"); the Dutch settlers called it Pocken-Eyland because of the Pokholz (*Lignum vitae*) trees, which gave it its greenery.

A small island to the W, now known as Green Cay, was called Ile a Cabritz (Goat Island). In the early Danish period, the names for the cay and the island were transposed in a mapmaking error. Thus, Buck Island should really be known as Green Cay and vice versa!

Today, visitors are permitted onshore only from 8 AM to 5 PM daily. Dramatically reforested since the goats' departure, the island today is as close to nature now as it's been in 150 yrs. Even though the spectacular stuff is really underwater, it's worth a visit just for the island itself. More than 40 species of birds flutter around the 62 species



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of trees, and the island is a rookery for frigate birds and pelicans. A nature trail (takes one hour) runs along the top of the mile-long island; follow the trail to the top of the island for a spectacular view of St. Croix. The beaches here (on the SW and W coasts) are superior to any on St. Croix.

Watch out for the macheneel trees on the W coast and the touch-me-not which has yellow needles hidden under its green leaves. The National Park Service is currently aiming to exterminate invasive non-native plant species on the island. Of the island's 228 plant species, there are 19 invasive species, and, around ten of these threaten to overrun the native plants

UNDERWATER: Originally a simple fringing reef, a magnificent barrier reef stretches 2,000 yards along the eastern half of the island. Its effect is one of sheer fantasy. Swim past the elkhorn coral that marks the entrance to the reef and follow the markers on the bottom to find your way along the 30-min. underwater trail. While underwater, check out the rainbow gathering of fish, including the queen angelfish, the four-eye butterflyfish, the smooth trunkfish, and the French and blue angelfish. Others include the yellowtail, spadefish, red snapper, tilefish, trumpetfish, and several varieties of parrotfish. Fish here are so naive and trusting that they'll eat right out of your hand.

While you're investigating the downstairs branch of this living natural history museum, note the primitive multicellular animals. Most primitive of all are the sponges, which come in all shapes and sizes. A dinosaurian prototype of the starfish, the flexible, multi-

armed crinoid anchors itself to crevices with its central, white, root-like pedestal.

One of many reef organisms capable of producing sounds underwater, the spotted drum (*Equetus punctatus*) produces a continuous discordant and eerie symphony of snaps, pops, grunts and scraping noises.

GETTING HERE: Access is limited to private and chartered boats. Concessioners are licensed by the NPS and must meet strict standards. Expect to pay at least \$50 for the 5.5 -mi. sail. (A full-day sail is more). A variety of all shapes and sizes of boats (including catamarans, yachts, native sloops, trimarans and glass-bottomed boats) leave from Christiansted's King's Wharf and Green Cay Marina.

One of the best operators is **Mile-Mark Charters** (☎ 773-BOAT) which has both sail and motorboat trips from \$35 and up. Don't worry if you have never snorkeled before or even if you can't swim. They've handled people from Nebraska who've never even seen the sea before! If you're unsure of your abilities just wear a flotation cushion and hold on to the life preserver towed by the guide.

A popular boat is Capt. Heinz's **Teroro II** (☎ 773-3161/4041), a 42-ft. trimaran.

Big Beard (☎ 773-4482) is also well-equipped and has a good reputation.

<http://www.bigbeards.com>
info@BigBeards.com

NOTE: When planning your trip, consider your priorities. For example, do you wish to sail or motor, do you want a glass bottomed boat or not, and how long do you want to spend on the island? All tours stop at the underwater nature trail for around 45 min. The differences between the trips lie in other particulars. You should ask if the boat will dock at Buck Island or merely anchor off-shore. If you want to hike the nature trail, allow for an hour ashore.



Tours to Buck Island may not include water, so buy your own supply in advance.