

TRAVEL

Dianna Hunt
817-390-7084
dhunt@star-telegram.com

THE ITINERARY

Compiled by Dianna Hunt



Poolside cabanas await at The Shores.

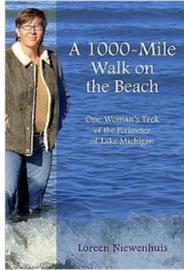
Shores Resort & Spa

Military gets special rate at The Shores resort

The Shores Resort & Spa in Daytona Beach Shores, Fla., wants to help members of the military and their families enjoy a Florida beach vacation. The Central Florida resort is offering a special rate starting at \$99 for active military members through the end of 2011. And through Sept. 30, military guests can also send a free care package to military men and women abroad. The resort includes private poolside cabanas, oceanside fire pits, a spa and a year-round kids' club. Use promotion code MILTSH to book. 866-934-7467; www.ShoresResort.com.

Book details long walk on the beach, life lessons

In 2009, Battle Creek, Mich., writer Loreen Nieuwenhuis walked 1,000 miles — all the way



around Lake Michigan. It took seven months, with breaks every 60- to 100-mile stretch. It cost her about \$4,500. She recounts her trip in the new book *A 1,000-Mile Walk on the Beach: One Woman's Trek of the Perimeter of Lake Michigan* (Crickhollow Books, \$16.95). It's a

tale of sand and beauty — and grim things, too. In fact, the most harrowing part is her account of walking the first 125 miles between Chicago and South Haven. She walked past pollution, oil refineries, a nuclear plant and Gary, Ind., all with a pack on her back and her feet in blisters. See more details at www.laketrek.com.

— Ellen Creager, *Detroit Free Press*



The characters of Jake and Neytiri in *Avatar*. AP

'Avatar' exhibit in Seattle

A music and pop culture museum in Seattle is banking on fans of the Oscar-winning film *Avatar* to take in a new exhibit detailing how director James Cameron brought Pandora and its inhabitants to the big screen. The exhibit at the Experience Music Project and Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame opened recently, the first of its kind to showcase artwork and props from the film. Forty artifacts are on display, including the skeletal robot weapon or "Amplified Mobility Platform," and the motion-capture suit worn for filming by one of the actors. Also included are the original sketches and models of the Na'vi people and creatures that guided the animators, from models of the heads of the main characters to intricate headpieces and necklaces. The exhibit is expected to travel to other museums in the United States and Canada after it finishes its run in Seattle in late 2012. Museum admission is \$18; there's no extra charge for the exhibit. Open daily 10 a.m.-7 p.m. 206-770-2700; www.empmuseum.org.

— The Associated Press

FUN FACT

Cleanliness is next to...

Cleanliness trumps personal safety, at least from hotel guests' perspective. According to a survey conducted on behalf of the Chubb Group of Insurance Cos.:

- 43 percent of Americans said cleanliness was a top priority when choosing a hotel
- 23 percent picked price
- 19 percent ranked location first
- 11 percent chose security as one of the most important factors

"Travelers should take safety precautions more seriously, and hotel security should be higher on their checklist than cleanliness," said Jim Villa, a Chubb senior vice president. "It seems that more people are concerned about bedbugs than security."

The survey contacted 1,000 Americans by telephone in June.

— Los Angeles Times



Bolongo Bay Beach Resort is on the island of St. Thomas, a popular destination in the Caribbean.

Gary Felton

Island ease

The only passport you'll need to visit St. Thomas and St. John, two Caribbean beauties with American ties, is a plane ticket

By **Debra Dunning Brouillette**
Special to the Star-Telegram

ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — As we climbed into our taxi outside the Cyril E. King Airport on the island of St. Thomas, we saw an American flag waving in the breeze.

We had landed in St. Thomas, more than 1,100 miles south of Miami and the most popular destination in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The island and its sisters, St. John and St. Croix, are territories of the U.S., and are known for duty-free shopping, world-class beaches and Danish history.

It was a tropical destination made easy — no passport required.

Island time

After my husband and I checked into a beachfront room at Bolongo Bay Beach Resort, our St. Thomas hideaway for the next five nights, my eyes settled on the hammock near our patio, stretched between two extra-tall palms.

I made a silent vow to spend some time "limin' " as the islanders call it. Chilling out. Being on "island time."

I sank my toes into the fine, golden sand, and felt the stresses of life fading fast. A few feet away, a large iguana basked in the sun, one of several that became like pets during our stay. I could tell I was going to like this place.

Nearly everyone we met who lives on St. Thomas is from the States and had an interesting story to tell about how he or she ended up here. Bolongo Bay's now-retired owners, Dick and Joyce Doumeng, are New York natives who first visited as vacationers before deciding to purchase the resort, re-opening it in 1974 with 36 rooms. Family-owned ever since, it is now in its second generation, with the third generation in training.

Bolongo Bay was the first resort on St. Thomas to offer an all-inclusive option, and it has been included on the best all-inclusive lists in recent years by *Travel & Life*, *Sherman's Travel* and *About.com*. Those who wish to dine and drink to their heart's content may do so without leaving the resort. Two sailing excursions are included in the plan.

Although we did not go the all-inclu-



Make time for "limin' " in the hammock at Bolongo Bay.

Special to the S-T/Debra Dunning Brouillette

sive route, we enjoyed meals at its two restaurants — the open-air Lobster Grille restaurant, and Iggie's beach bar, a favorite nightspot with guests and locals. Carnival Night on Wednesdays features an all-you-can-eat West Indian buffet, live Calypso music, stilt dancers and a limbo show. Mim's Seafood Bistro, another excellent dining choice, is a short walk down the beach.

Touring St. Thomas

We left our cozy beachside retreat one day to explore the island, beginning with a historical walking tour of Charlotte Amalie. Although it is one of the most heavily visited cruise ports in the Caribbean and is known for having the best duty-free shopping, there is another side to be discovered in the narrow streets and alleyways of the downtown shopping areas. Our Danish tour guide, Simon Larsen, was the perfect person to help shed light on the history and culture surrounding us.

As we strolled through the Danish-named streets, called *gades* (guh-DUZ), we learned from Simon that the U.S.

paid Denmark \$25 million in gold in 1917 for what had been known as the Danish West Indies since that country's occupation in 1733. Danish settlements had first cropped up nearly a century earlier, and much of the architecture and remnants of St. Thomas' Danish past remain.

One such landmark is the 99 steps. There are actually 103, one of several step-streets built by the Danes. The bricks were brought from Denmark as ballast in the holds of trade ships. We climbed to the top (with a bit of difficulty), rewarded ourselves with a cold ginger ale, then went on to view the stone remains of an old tower said to be used by Blackbeard the pirate as a lookout and actually used by the Danes as a vantage point to spot enemy ships. It is now a small hotel, the Inn at Blackbeard's Castle.

We met up with our taxi driver, who continued our tour of St. Thomas' mountainous interior with brief stops at various overlooks until we reached the highest point on the island, at 1,542 feet above sea level. Mountain Top, the summit of St. Peter Mountain, overlooks Mogens Bay, included among the top 10 most beautiful beaches in the world by *National Geographic* magazine, and several of the British Virgin Islands in the distance. After capturing the view, we walked through the large gift shop and bar, which claims to have the original and best banana daiquiris on the island.

By late afternoon we arrived at the St. Thomas Skyride, across the street from Havensight Mall. Three continuously running trams make the 7-minute, 700-foot ascent to the top of Flag Hill's Paradise Point, where tourists can take in unparalleled views of Charlotte Amalie's harbor. Visitors can stay to walk nature trails, grab a bite and drink in the view with a beverage at the restaurant/bar, open daily 9 a.m.-10 p.m. Many congregate here for drinks at sunset.

Water, water everywhere

We checked in at the on-site dive shop, St. Thomas Diving Club, one morning for a half day of diving at the nearby reefs. Most exciting was our dive at Cow

More on CARIBBEAN, 14E

Festival packs more melodies into Music City

➤ The three-day event will feature lessons in culture and history through song and dance.

By **Joe Edwards**
The Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Nashville has no theme park, no beach and no casinos.

But it has music. Lots of it. The National Folk Festival, which arrives in Nashville over Labor Day weekend, caps off several months of major events held in the city that validate Nashville's self-proclaimed moniker "Music City USA."

The free folk festival Sept.

2-4 is to feature more than 250 of the country's finest traditional performers and craftsmen, with simultaneous performances on six stages throughout the Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park. An estimated 60,000 to 80,000 attendees are expected.

Audiences will be treated to authentic blues, gospel, jazz, cowboy, bluegrass, klezmer, Cajun, rhythm and blues, mariachi, Western swing, zydeco, and more. Even polka. Yes, in Nashville, the city famed for fiddles and fringe.

More on NASHVILLE, 15E



While at the music and arts festival, visitors can also check out exhibits at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

AP/Mark Humphrey



Trams make the 7-minute, 700-foot ascent to the top of Flag Hill's Paradise Point on the St. Thomas Skyride, where tourists can take in views of Charlotte Amalie's harbor.



Trunk Bay Beach on St. John is known for its underwater snorkeling trail.

Special to the Star-Telegram/Debra Dunning Brouillette

Caribbean

Continued from 13E

Rock, known for its swim-through maze that includes the "champagne cork" at the end, providing an exhilarating underwater high as the diver is launched up through the hole. The cost of scuba diving is extra, but guests have unlimited use of non-motorized water craft, including paddleboards, Hobie Cats, kayaks, wind-surfing rigs and aqua tri-cycles, as well as snorkel gear.

On another day, we boarded Bolongo's 53-foot catamaran, *Heavenly Days*, for an excursion to nearby Buck Island. Swimming and snorkeling with sea turtles was the main attraction, and we weren't disappointed; we lost count at 20. On the return sail, we chatted with the crew, including a handsome young guy named Matt Holland from the Fort Worth area, who has worked as a deckhand for the past year.

Limin' time

Finally, it was time for limin' in the hammock. After three active days spent snorkeling, island touring

and scuba diving, we were ready to hit the beach.

Chairs with umbrellas are strung along the sand, just steps from our room. Access to tropical drinks is less than a minute's walk in either direction. While we relaxed, happy to observe the activity around us, others pedaled the aqua trikes or tried the newest watersport trend, stand-up paddleboarding.

At the recommendation of Bolongo's concierge, we savored French-influenced cuisine on our last evening there, at the historic Oceana restaurant on the tip of the Frenchtown peninsula, just outside Charlotte Amalie. It was the perfect way to say *au revoir* to St. Thomas.

St. John and Caneel Bay

After five days on St. Thomas, we taxied to Red Hook for a 15-minute ferry ride to the smaller, more secluded island of St. John, a popular hideaway for celebrities and our stop for the next two days.

Passenger ferries operate between St. Thomas and St. John every hour from Red Hook, on the east end, and from Charlotte Amalie. Car barge service is also available for those who have rented a car on

St. Thomas and want to spend the day on St. John.

Our destination was Caneel Bay, a resort that has become synonymous with St. John since its opening in 1956. Laurance Rockefeller, son of John D. Rockefeller, sailed into Caneel Bay four years earlier and was utterly smitten, not only with the pretty cove but with the entire island of St. John. He purchased the property that has become the 170-acre resort of today — originally a sugar mill plantation — and also ended up buying close to two-thirds of the island, which he donated to the U.S. government for the establishment of Virgin Islands National Park.

As we approached Caneel Bay, I immediately noticed how its natural setting had not been obscured by the resort, thanks to Rockefeller's desire that guest accommodations and other structures blend into the landscape. As he once said, "The artwork is outside the window."

Rubbing elbows

A golf cart tour of the sprawling resort allowed us to see the rooms and suites available, and to view its seven secluded beaches. Cottage 7, originally built as the Rockefeller family residence, is six spacious suites, often reserved by famous guests.

Over the years, the guest list has been a "who's who" of the rich and famous, including President Nixon, Carol Burnett and the Aga Khan. We learned Vice President Joe Biden had visited two weeks earlier, and celebrity names in the entertainment and sports world are also frequent Caneel guests, with Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie among them.

We were fascinated to see feral donkeys and whitetail deer roaming the grounds, while mongooses, introduced centuries ago by the Danes to control the rat population, skittered across the paths.

American style

On our first evening, we dined at the historic Equator restaurant, formerly a sugar mill. I couldn't resist ordering Anegada lobster, a prime specimen of the Caribbean spiny lobsters that are caught in pots off Anegada, the northernmost of the British Virgin

Islands. After a short moonlit walk, we were back at our room, where we slept soundly, ready for the next day's scuba adventure.

Caneel's on-site scuba operation, Patagon Dive Center, was our host for the morning's dives. Both were shallow reef dives off Lovango Cay, where healthy coral, sponges and an abundance of fish and reef creatures thrive. Our dive guide and his assistant took care of our equipment and navigated the reefs for us so that we merely had to take in the scenery.

An afternoon island tour let us see firsthand how unspoiled and undeveloped St. John truly is. Hairpin turns up the mountain led us to spectacular views of nearby islands, Annenberg Plantation ruins (once an active sugar-producing factory) and St. John's most famous beach, Trunk Bay, known for its underwater snorkeling trail.

We ventured off the resort property that evening to nearby Cruz Bay, the main town and port of St. John, for a bit of browsing in the shops before dinner at the highly recommended La Tapa restaurant. Strolling past the U.S. Post Office on the way was a reminder that yes, indeed, we were, in many ways, still in the United States.

Geographically Caribbean, officially American: I'd say it is the best of both worlds.

If you go

St. Thomas/U.S. Virgin Islands

■ **Duty-free:** Each U.S. resident (including children) can take home \$1,600 worth of duty-free goods, double the \$800 limit from other islands. Five cartons of cigarettes and five liters of liquor, such as Virgin Islands produced Cruzan Rum, are also allowed. If your Caribbean travel includes the U.S. Virgin Islands and another country, the \$1,600 allowance still applies, but at least \$800 worth of goods must be from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

■ **Passport policies:** If you are among the majority of U.S. citizens (about 63 percent) who do not have a passport, you may travel to the U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix) without one by showing an official government-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license or state ID card, plus proof of citizenship, such as a certified birth certificate. Many visitors to the U.S. Virgin Islands also like to visit the neighboring British Virgin Islands, which requires a passport. Anytime you leave U.S. soil, you will need a passport.

■ **Cellphone-friendly:** No roaming charges apply when calling to, from or within the U.S. Virgin Islands using an AT&T, Sprint or T-Mobile cellphone with nationwide calling. Verizon users must currently pay roaming charges.

■ **Postcards home:** Mailing a postcard home will require a 29-cent stamp, the same as mailing it from within the U.S.

Travel details

■ **Resorts:** Bolongo Bay Beach Resort, St. Thomas, USVI, www.bolongobay.com; Caneel Bay, St. John, USVI, www.caneelbay.com. Check websites for special offers.

■ **Dive Operators:** St. Thomas Diving Club, USVI, www.stthomasdivingclub.com; Patagon Dive Center, USVI, www.patagondivecenter.com.

■ **More info:** www.visitus-vi.com

Other options

In addition to the U.S. Virgin Islands, U.S. citizens may travel without a passport to other U.S. territories, including Puerto Rico, Guam, Palau, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands and several other Micronesian islands.

— Debra Dunning Brouillette

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Wedding bells

The bamboo arch was being decorated with tropical flowers as we walked to lunch. There was going to be a wedding! We were about to witness from afar a midday wedding on Bolongo Bay's beach on the island of St. Thomas, one of the most popular wedding destinations in the Caribbean. As a U.S. territory, St. Thomas does not require passports for the wedding party or guests, and the prices start at \$1,000 (half-off for active-duty military personnel). It makes for an easy, hassle-free destination wedding.

Lorena Leonard,

Bolongo's romance director (yes, that's her title), told me later that the 16-member wedding party had been transported to Bolongo Bay from their cruise ship for the nuptials, then returned to the ship for the reception. Leonard frequently arranges this type of ship-to-beach wedding, coordinating details with the ship's wedding planners.

Most couples, however, book directly with Bolongo Bay.

"We average 12 to 15 weddings a month, but never more than two a day," Leonard said. "From a barefoot-on-the-beach wedding to saying 'I do' at sunset aboard our catamaran, *Heavenly Days*, we customize everything. Every bride becomes like my own daughter. There is no cookie-cutter approach." According to Leonard, it takes eight days to get the paperwork to the courthouse, with no blood test or waiting period required. Most preferences can be met, from a nondenominational Christian minister to a Jewish rabbi.

Vow renewals are also on the rise. "One couple honeymooned here 30 years ago, their daughter later married here, and the whole family recently returned for a vow renewal ceremony," Leonard recalled. The five-night "Forever Again" vow renewal package is \$1,446 per couple, available for travel through Dec. 22.

For more information, visit www.bolongobay.com, send an e-mail to leonard@bolongobay.com or call 800-449-1577.

— Debra Dunning Brouillette



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