

## Title:

Caribbean Stopover at St. Thomas of the U.S. Virgin Islands

## Word Count:

693

## Summary:

Overview of St. Thomas of the U.S. Virgin Islands, one of the most popular cruise ship ports in the Caribbean.

## Keywords:

st thomas, virgin islands, caribbean, cruise, ship, travel, port

## Article Body:

One of the most popular ports of call for Caribbean cruise ships is St. Thomas, one of the U.S. Virgin Islands. On the three Caribbean cruises that I took so far, two of them included a stopover in St. Thomas. On both occasions, there was a consensus among other passengers we met that St. Thomas was one of the nicer islands visited. Although the driving in St. Thomas is on the left hand side, it is still U.S. territory so this Caribbean island features many other conveniences of being American soil. These included easy telephone connections for calls back to the mainland, the use of U.S. currency and English as the main language. St. Thomas is also one of the cleanest of Caribbean islands and the locals do not aggressively hustle the tourists like they do on other islands. Many passengers stated that St. Thomas is a place they would like to come back to in the future.

During my first visit to St. Thomas, I took the Atlantis submarine excursion which took tourists down to see an actual ocean reef. It was a bit pricey but that was expected. Seeing an ocean reef with the marine life up close for the first time during this submarine ride actually influenced me to take up scuba diving. During my second trip to the island, we decided that we would spend some time snorkeling in the local waters since at that time, my partner wasn't a certified scuba diver yet. My advance research suggested that Coki Bay on the northeast side of St. Thomas was a nice place to snorkel. When our cruise ship docked at Charlotte Amalie, the capital city of the U.S. Virgin Islands, we hailed one of the many taxi cabs at the port. It was a \$15 US fare to Coki Beach where Coki Bay is located. It took only about 15 minutes to get there. The scenery along the way was magnificent as we went up a hill and saw our cruise ship in the distant harbor below. The island itself is very lush with greenery everywhere.

At Coki Beach, my partner rented her snorkeling gear for \$20 US (I brought my own). To my surprise, the rental attendant gave us each a hard biscuit to feed the fish while we were in the water. Once we got into the water, dozens of tropical fish immediately crowded around us. I guess they knew the drill quite well. We ripped off small pieces of the biscuits and the fish went for it, even if the food was just inches away from our face masks. The yellowtail snappers, sergeant majors and occasional parrotfish displayed no fear of us at all. At one point, my partner held out a larger piece of her biscuit and some of the fish darted in to nibble at it. After about an hour in the warm water, it was time to say goodbye to our new aquatic friends. This experience at Coki Bay with the fish was one of the factors which eventually influenced my partner to become a certified scuba diver herself.

Another \$15 US cab ride took us back to the cruise ship port where we spend the rest of the day browsing the many duty free shops located there. A similar snorkeling trip arranged through the cruiseship would have cost us double the amount we paid. St. Thomas is definitely not an inexpensive island for either cruise ship passengers or resort tourists staying there but extra comfort and quality of the island are quite noticeable compared to many other Caribbean destinations. From my readings, the other main islands of the U.S. Virgin Islands which are St. John and St. Croix, are more laid back and less commercialized than St. Thomas. I would like to visit them in addition to another return trip to St. Thomas in the future for a multi day scuba diving trip. For those thinking of going on a Caribbean cruise, I would definitely recommend one that has St. Thomas as one of its ports of call. It is one of the better islands on any Caribbean cruise itinerary.