

Walking Tour Christiansted, St Croix, USVI

Start: The Visitors Bureau.

Finish: Christiansted's harborfront.

Time: 1 1/2 hours.

Best Times: Any day from 10am to 4pm.

Worst Times: Monday to Friday 4 to 6pm.

The largest town on St. Croix, Christiansted still has many traces of its Danish heritage. Constructed by the Danish West India Company, the heart of town is still filled with many imposing old buildings, mostly former warehouses, from the 18th century. Today they are registered as a U.S. National Historic Site. Across a small park stands **Fort Christiansvaern**, which the Danes built on the fortifications of a 1645 French fort. From its precincts, some of the best views of the harbor can be seen. Christiansted is best seen by walking tour.

1 The Old Scale House

This yellow-sided building with a cedar-capped roof is located near the harborfront. It was originally built as the Old Scale House in 1856 to replace a similar structure that had burned down. In its heyday, all taxable goods leaving and entering Christiansted's harbor were weighed here. In front of the building lies one of the most charming squares in the Caribbean. Its old-fashioned asymmetrical allure is still evident despite the mass of cars. Inside is an information center and a bookstore and gift shop.

With your back to the scalehouse, turn left and walk through the parking lot to the foot of the white-sided gazebo-like band shell that sits in the center of a park named after Alexander Hamilton, who spent his adolescence on St. Croix. The yellow-brick building with the ornately carved brick staircase is the:

2 Old Danish Customs House

This is currently the headquarters of the National Park Service. The gracefully proportioned 16-step staircase was added in 1829 as an embellishment to an older building dating back to 1734. During the island's Danish occupancy, this is where merchants paid their taxes. (There are public toilets on the ground floor.)

Continue climbing the hill to the base of the yellow-painted structure, which is:

3 Fort Christiansvaern

This is the best-preserved colonial fortification in the Virgin Islands. It's maintained as a historic monument by the National Park Service. Its original four-sided, diamond-shaped design was in accordance with the most advanced military planning of its era. The fort is the site of the St. Croix military museum, which documents police work on the island from the late 1800s to the present with photos, weapons, and other artifacts. The admission price of \$3 also includes admission to the Steeple Building. The fort is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. For information, call tel **340/773-1460**.

Exit from the fort, and head straight down the tree-lined path toward the most visible steeple in Christiansted. It caps the appropriately named:

4 Steeple Building

Completed in 1753, the Steeple Building was embellished with a steeple between 1794 and 1796. For a time it served as the headquarters of the Church of Lord God of Sabaoth, the island's first Lutheran church. The original

structure can still be visited. Inside is a National Park Service museum with exhibits on plantation life on the island. Admission is included in the \$3 ticket for Fort Christiansvaern.

Across Company Street from the Steeple Building is a U.S. post office.

5 The Danish West India & Guinea Warehouse

The building that houses the post office was built in 1749 as the warehouse for the Danish West India and Guinea Company. The structure was once three times larger than it is today and included storerooms and lodging for staff. Go to the building's side entrance, on Church Street, and enter the rear courtyard. For many years, this was the site of some of the largest slave auctions in the Caribbean.

From the post office, retrace your steps to Company Street and head west for 1 block. On your left, you'll pass the entrance to Apothecary Hall, 2111 Company St., which contains a charming collection of shops and restaurants.

6 Luncheria

If you need refreshment, try Luncheria, Apothecary Hall Courtyard, 2111 Company St. (tel 340/773-4247). The bar's tables are grouped in a courtyard shaded by trees. The owners are margarita specialists, stocking more types of tequila (15-plus) than any other bar in the neighborhood. Luncheria serves burritos, tostadas, enchiladas, and tacos, as well as daily specials and vegetarian meals.

Exit Apothecary Hall and turn left onto Company Street. Walk across Queen Cross Street (Dronningens Tvergade). A half-block later, you'll arrive at the island's largest outdoor market:

7 Hendricks Square

The square was rebuilt in a timbered, 19th-century style after the 1989 hurricane. Fruits and vegetables are sold here Monday through Saturday from 7am to 6pm.

Retrace your steps a half-block along Company Street, then turn left onto Queen Cross Street. Head downhill toward the harbor, walking on the right-hand side of the street. Within a half-block, you'll reach an unmarked arched iron gateway, set beneath an arcade. Enter the charming gardens of:

8 Government House

This grand Danish Colonial building was formed from the union of two much older town houses in the 1830s. It was used as the Danish governor's residence until 1871, when the Danish West Indies capital was moved to Charlotte Amalie, on St. Thomas. The European-style garden here contains a scattering of trees, flower beds, and walkways. The gardens are open Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm. The Virgin Islands Tourism Office is located downstairs.

Exit the same way you entered, turn right, and continue your descent of Queen Cross Street. At the first street corner (King St.), turn left and you'll see:

9 Lord God of Sabaoth Lutheran Church

This neoclassical church was built sometime before 1740 and was originally the site of the Dutch Reformed Church; it was turned over to the Lord God of Sabaoth congregation in 1834, when a Gothic Revival tower was added. Much inside predates the Lutheran occupation, including the tower bell, cast in Copenhagen in 1793, and an impressive 18th-century picture frame fashioned of local mahogany that resides behind the altar.

Continue walking southwest along King Street. Within 2 blocks is the:

10 Limprecht Gardens & Memorial

For 20 years (1888–1908), Peter Carl Limprecht served as governor of the Danish West Indies. Today, an occasional chicken pecks at seedlings planted near a Danish-language memorial to him.

At the end of the park, retrace your steps to Queen Cross Street, and go left. One very short block later, turn right onto Strand Street, which contains some interesting stores, including at least two different shopping arcades. The streets will narrow, and the pedestrian traffic will be more congested. Pass beneath the overpass belonging to a longtime bar and restaurant, the **Club Comanche**.

Continue down the meandering curves of King's Alley. Within 1 block you'll be standing beside:

11 Christiansted's Harborfront

End your tour here by strolling the boardwalk of the waterside piers and watching the sailboats bob in the harbor (and perhaps a seaplane touching down).