



# Foundation Document Overview

## Christiansted National Historic Site

U.S. Virgin Islands



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*CHRISTIANSTED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, preserves, protects, studies, and interprets the 18th and 19th century Danish historic structures and surrounding landscape that represent the multiple economic, social, and cultural exchanges of the Caribbean's colonial history, including the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the international sugar exchange.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Christiansted National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The landscape and historic structures of the Christiansted National Historic Site are one of the most complete and best preserved assemblages of 18th and 19th century Danish colonial administrative buildings and military fortifications found in the New World.
- Christiansted National Historic Site preserves and interprets the site where tens of thousands of enslaved Africans were transported to the Caribbean, disembarked, and sold at auction, serving as a tangible link and witness to the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.
- Christiansted National Historic Site reflects St. Croix's colonial legacy, formerly one of the wealthiest islands in the West Indies, whose economy relied on sugar production, international trade, and a labor system of enslaved Africans and their descendants. The national historic site provides an exceptional opportunity to study and interpret the complexity of West Indian society resulting from ownership/colonization by several nations, and most recently the transfer from Denmark to the United States in 1917.
- The Christiansted National Historic Site museum collection contains a wide range of materials representing the rich history and culture of the U.S. Virgin Islands, including artifacts and archive materials critical to understanding Danish colonial activity at Christiansted National Historic Site, the Folmer Andersen Collection, a world-class archeological resource collection documenting St. Croix's Amerindian cultures, and natural and cultural collections from Buck Island Reef National Monument and Salt River Bay Historical Park and Ecological Preserve.
- Fort Christiansvaern and the surrounding grounds, preserved by Christiansted National Historic Site, were one of three Virgin Island venues for the ceremony that transferred the Danish West Indies to the United States of America on March 31, 1917, thereby creating the United States Virgin Islands.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Fort Christiansvaern and Stable Yard Building**
- **Danish West India & Guinea Company Warehouse**
- **Scale House**
- **Danish Customs House**
- **Steeple Building**
- **Bandstand**
- **Cultural Landscape at Christiansted**
- **Connections to the Community**



Christiansted National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Archeological Resources**
- **Museum Collection**
- **Government House**
- **Historic Fish Market Site**



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Through the Transatlantic Slave Trade, tens of thousands of captive Africans endured unimaginable suffering and loss. Despite these hardships, enslaved people maintained their cultural identity, and through their survival and human spirit they forever changed the island of St. Croix.
- No matter how they got here, diverse groups of people have influenced and defined life on the island of St. Croix through a rich exchange of beliefs, customs, and cultures that continues today.
- The growth and production of sugar on plantations throughout the island not only fueled a complex global economy that brought international trade and commerce to St. Croix, but also served as the financial backbone for the local community struggling to make a living in Christiansted.
- Reflected in the colonial administrative buildings that controlled commerce on the wharf, and in Fort Christiansvaern that protected the wealth of the Danish West Indies on St. Croix, Christiansted was an influential center of power for both the administration and defense of Denmark's interest on the global stage of the Caribbean.
- The transfer of the islands of the Danish West Indies to the United States of America had political and economic consequences both internationally as well as locally, allowing one to reflect on St. Croix's colonial past and what it means to be a U.S. territory today.
- Although their functions and uses have changed over time, the historic structures and Danish colonial architecture at Christiansted National Historic Site are a unique chapter of our national heritage that continues to play an important role within the community of St. Croix and beyond.

# Description

Christiansted National Historic Site is located in the historic town of Christiansted on the island of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. St. Croix is the largest of the four U.S. Virgin Islands, which include Water Island, St. John, and St. Thomas. The U.S. Virgin Islands are part of the Lesser Antilles and lie on the boundary between the Greater and Lesser Antilles island chains of the Caribbean, making this location an important crossroad in the settlement and colonial history of the New World. Due to this strategic location, the United States acquired the Danish West Indies from Denmark on March 31, 1917 for \$ 25 million in gold coin.

Established by Secretarial Order as Virgin Islands National Historic Site on March 4, 1952, the park was the result of civic-minded citizens who petitioned the federal government to protect the fort and its associated buildings. The park was redesignated as Christiansted National Historic Site on December 24, 1960, through a memorandum of agreement between the United States Government and what was then the Municipality of St. Croix, Virgin Islands. The establishment order and associated memorandums of agreement identified important historic structures for protection within Christiansted and recognized this location for its “national historical significance as an excellent example of the Danish economy and way of life in the Virgin Islands.” The National Park Service, within the Department of Interior, was named as the federal agency tasked with management, interpretation, and stewardship responsibilities for this national historic site, which is the first NPS unit in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Over the years a series of additional memorandums of agreement have further outlined and broadened the role and responsibilities of the National Park Service in the management of Christiansted National Historic Site.

The national historic site consists of approximately seven and one-half acres on the waterfront of Christiansted Harbor in the town of Christiansted. Currently, Christiansted National Historic Site includes several important historic structures that reflect the 18th and 19th century Danish colonial rule and life on the island of St. Croix.

Situated on this cultural landscape are key historic structures that include Fort Christiansvaern and Stable Yard Building, Danish West India & Guinea Company Warehouse, Danish Customs House, Scale House, Bandstand, and Steeple Building. All Christiansted National Historic Site historic buildings are on the List of Classified Structures. Christiansted National Historic Site is the anchor for the larger national register historic district of the same name that commemorates 18th century Danish urban colonial development of the island and is managed by the St. Croix Historic Preservation Committee.

