

# St Croix Snorkeling Tips to Know Before You Go



1. **Don't touch the reef.** It damages coral and can kill whole sections of reef. Most ocean-goers know by now not to touch a reef with your hands, but also be mindful of your feet/fins. We've all had that leaky mask situation and had to tread water to reset the mask. Be careful you don't accidentally sweep a section of reef with your fins while treading water.
2. **Use reef-safe sunscreen.** Some islands have gone so far as to make this a law. For example, Hawaii has outlawed all sunscreens that contain oxybenzone and octinoxate. Humans are finally realizing the impact that tourism has on these fragile

underwater ecosystems. Do your part to help stop the destruction of the world's coral reefs!

3. **It's illegal to touch sea turtles.** Observe from a reasonable distance, too. A crowded turtle doesn't feel safe enough to surface to breathe. Especially if you're snorkeling directly over them. Give them space to eat, swim, and surface, and never touch a sea turtle!

4. **Use a dive flag when snorkeling without a tour.** Make sure passing boats can spot you if you choose to go snorkeling without a tour. This is especially true for snorkelers that swim out from a beach and don't have a boat anchored nearby to tip off other boats that there may be people in the water. If you stick pretty close to shore, this isn't as big an issue, but it's always better to be safe than sorry.

5. **Watch your feet.** Rocks and urchins go hand in hand, and many good snorkeling beaches have rocky spots. If you don't have fins, wear water shoes to protect your feet. Always watch where you're stepping.

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## **The Top 5 Best Snorkeling Spots in St Croix, USVI**

### **1. Buck Island Reef National Monument**

**Hands down, the best spot to snorkel in St Croix, and one of the top spots to snorkel in all of the US Virgin Islands!**

Buck Island is only 1.5 miles off St Croix's north shore, a perfect day trip away from Christiansted. As a **national monument**, the entirety of Buck Island is protected but the real show-stopper is the reef around the island.



An **underwater snorkel trail** identifies many of the coral types and numerous fish that make the reef home. The amount of sea life you'll see here is overwhelming; it's a thriving and busy ecosystem!

Sea turtles use Buck Island as a nesting ground every year, so visitors in early summer are highly likely to see turtles!

Bring your **GoPro** and take lots of pictures and videos. You'll want to share the experience with your friends and family when you get home!

This reef system has been federally protected since 1961 when President Kennedy declared it a National Monument, and it has made quite the comeback since the National Park Service (NPS) stepped in.

**Boating in the area requires an NPS permit**, and there are specific anchorage points to ensure no damage to the reef.

The NPS has contracted with several local companies as concessionaires to provide boating and snorkeling trips out to Buck Island from nearby Christiansted. Buck Island Tours are the **most popular must-do St Croix experience** so book ahead!

## **2. Cane Bay Beach**

Home of The Wall!

This long, narrow beach is next to a shallow, sandy-and-rocky bay until the sea floor suddenly drops off, creating **“The Wall.”** Be warned that this requires a bit of a swim out to see the wall, but it’s worth it for the chance to see some bigger fish and sea creatures.



This is the 2nd most popular spot for snorkeling (and diving) in St Croix. The nearby dive shop can provide scuba rental gear and advice on the best spots in the bay, and St Croix, for snorkeling.

Amenities in this area are pretty great. Several restaurants will keep you and the fam well fed and watered, no matter how long you stay. Plenty of parking, shade on the beach, and restrooms complete the scene.

### **3. Isaac Bay & Jack's Bay Beaches**

**Secluded and beautiful**, Isaac Bay and Jack's Bay Beaches provide a great spot for new snorkelers as well as seasoned pros looking to see a lot of fish.

Isaac Bay and Jack's Bay both **require a short hike to reach**. It's not too strenuous of a hike; it's just far enough to create blissful seclusion.



From Point Udall, hike down and around the hillside to Isaac Bay. Jack's Bay is another short trail away on the far end of the beach at Isaac Bay. Both have good snorkeling!

The beach areas are narrow and sandy, and the bays turn to sea grass pretty quick to house all that ocean life. Trees line the shore if you need some shade.

These beaches are never crowded, and there's an above average chance **you'll have the beach to yourself**. These hidden gems are some of the best quiet snorkeling spots in St Croix.

#### **4. Frederiksted Pier (if no ships are in port)**

When there aren't any ships in port, the Frederiksted Pier can be a really cool snorkeling opportunity.

Sea life clings to the pier pilings, and fish are used to hanging around in this area. The deeper water also encourages bigger fish and sometimes turtles to come hang out as well.



The downside to this location, of course, is **it's unavailable when a ship is in port**. Check the port schedule upon arrival to pick a day to come snorkel at the pier. Or better yet, stay in Frederiksted and head over whenever you see an empty dock.

Access is easiest from Frederiksted Beach on the other side of the giant, red Fort Frederik from the pier. Note that this beach is **enormously popular on weekends and with cruise ship guests**.

Watch out for fishermen from the pier, too. We recommend a snorkeling flag when snorkeling here to help the fishermen and any unexpected boats see you.

## 5. Dorsch Beach

Just south of Frederiksted, Dorsch Beach is **one of western St Croix's best snorkeling spots**. It's more readily available than the Frederiksted Pier when there's a ship in port, making it one of the go-to beaches for cruisers looking to snorkel without straying too far from the ship.

This beach is wide and sandy, but also a bit rocky; typical of many St Croix beaches. There are sandy entry points, but you may have to look for them after staking out your spot on the beach.



You may be unsure of the rocky entry into the water, but the rocks are where all the fish live! That's what makes Dorsch Beach such a good snorkel spot.



It's also fairly shallow here, **great for beginners** that are unsure of themselves. However, if the wind picks up the shallow depth makes visibility difficult.

There is some parking if you have a car, but there are no rental facilities or restrooms.

However, Sandcastle on the Beach hotel is on the south end of Dorsch Beach. Grab a bite at their lovely open-air restaurant on the beach, and you can use their restroom.

***Pro Tip:** Dorsch Beach, Sandcastle Beach, and West Beach are all in the same general area and often confused as the same beach. They are actually three different beaches. Dorsch is the closest to Frederiksted, Sandcastle is named for the hotel, and West Beach is south of the condos on the strip of land between the ocean and the saltpond.*

**Every guided catamaran snorkeling adventure will include snorkeling gear.** If you're staying at a resort, there's also a good chance that it rents snorkel gear for free to its guests. If you only snorkel once or twice a year and you're comfortable with using their gear, then that's a cheap and convenient solution.

For me, I can't get over the reusing of the mouthpiece. **I'd just rather have my own and not share.**

The advantage to buying your own snorkel gear is you can purchase gear that you know will fit. One size fits all masks are a LIE, and blisters from fins that don't fit aren't fun, either.

## **St Croix Snorkeling Tours**

If you only have time for one snorkeling adventure in St Croix, we **HIGHLY RECOMMEND booking a catamaran tour out to Buck Island.** It is the best St Croix snorkeling spot, bar none.

All of the companies below are National Park Service concessionaires for Buck Island, and you'll have a great time with any of them.

- **Big Beard's**
- **Jolly Roger**
- **Caribbean Sea Adventures**