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Andrew Cohn

The Mafolie Hotel.

By JEREMY W. PETERS
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The talk on St. Thomas these days is about the tony new marina in Charlotte Amalie Harbor, where condos sell for \$2 million, and a gated beach club on the West end, where lots start at about \$1 million. Buying a home in this compact but densely developed [United States](#) territory may not be cheap, but vacationing can be. If you're willing to skip the lobster dinners and swap an oceanfront room along the island's rocky coast for more modest quarters in the verdant hills, your budget can be met.

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On an island where Marriott and Wyndham are among the priciest hotels, it is just as easy to stay somewhere that won't set you back \$450 a night. The **Mafolie Hotel** MAP (7091 Estate Mafolie; 800-225-7035; www.mafolie.com) has some of St. Thomas's most reasonably priced accommodations and a view that the even the top resorts can't rival. The hotel clings to the side of Mafolie Hill, overlooking the harbor and downtown. The pool deck or the canopied restaurant aren't to be missed at sunset when [cruise](#) ships set out from port, and the lights on the surrounding hillsides flicker on. A standard room goes for \$89 until Nov. 14 (\$129 in winter high season).

The **Island View Guesthouse** MAP (11-1 C Contant; 340-774-4270; www.islandviewstthomas.com) is smaller and more laid-back. Rooms start at \$87 and have remarkable vistas of the harbor. If you want something to eat, just ask the hotel staff and they'll fix it for you. Want a drink? Make it yourself, then mark it down on the blackboard behind the bar.

When renting a car, local companies are generally cheaper than the big chains like Avis and Budget. **Dependable**

Car Rental MAP (214 B-1 Altona and Welgunst; 800-522-3076; www.dependablecar.com) has compact cars starting at about \$50 a day.


Where to Eat

An island as small and steeply sloped as St. Thomas has little room for farmland. That means a lot of food has to be shipped in and costs more than it would on the United States mainland. But eating on a budget can be done. [Shinsen](#), a new sushi bar at **Indigo Bar and Restaurant** MAP (Magens Bay Road; 340-776-0474), has generous rolls with little [Caribbean](#) twists like jerk seared tuna. Rolls stuffed with king crab or fresh tuna or tempura hamachi are \$6 to \$15. With sake, a dinner at Shinsen can cost less than \$35 a person.




For lunch, the **Frenchtown Deli** MAP (24A Honduras; 340-776-7211) has \$5.50 "half" sandwiches that are meals in themselves, including the Beefeater, with roast beef, melted Cheddar, A1 sauce and horseradish mayo. **Hook, Line and Sinker** MAP (62 Honduras; 340-776-9708), a good spot for Sunday brunch to gaze out on the harbor from

Frenchtown, specializes in overstuffed omelets for about \$10. One with lobster will set you back \$14.75, a bargain considering that finding lobsters anywhere else on St. Thomas for under \$25 is pretty hard to do.


Free Beaches

Magens Bay on the north side of St. Thomas is one of the Caribbean's most photographed and visited beaches. To escape Magens's crowds — and its \$3 entrance fee — visit [Lindquist Beach](#)  MAP on the island's east end. It's not on many maps and difficult to spot from the road. To get there, follow Smith Bay Road out of Red Hook in the direction of the Sapphire Beach Resort. Once you pass Sapphire, look on the right for an aluminum fence overgrown with weeds. An opening in the fence leads to a short, washed-out dirt road that ends at the edge of an idyllic crescent of fine white sand and clear turquoise water.

Where to Party

If there's one thing St. Thomas offers cheaply, it's vice. So you can safely assume your bar tab will be one of your smaller expenses. Night life ranges from quiet dockside bars to pulsing dance floors. For a sedate evening, try [Latitude 18](#)  MAP (9C Vessup Lane; 340-777-4552) on the **Vessup Point Marina**, which features live [music](#), often local cover bands, nightly in season. If you want to trade Van Morrison and Eagles tunes for Shaggy or [Beyoncé](#), head to [Duffy's Love Shack](#)  MAP (6500 Red Hook Plaza; 340-779-2080; www.duffysloveshack.com), which has a two-drinks-for-the-price-of-one happy hour between midnight and 1 a.m. on weekends. Closer to downtown in Frenchtown, on the west side of the harbor, is [Epernay](#)  MAP (24A Honduras; 340-774-5348), a bistro good for a glass of wine or two. And once you're in Frenchtown, there are a half dozen other restaurants and bars within walking distance if you wish a change of venue.

What to Do

Activities have a way of finding you on St. Thomas. It's hard to walk through downtown Charlotte Amalie without someone offering you an afternoon on a motor scooter or a cruise in a submarine. For something a little more unusual, go to Hull Bay on the island's north side, where [Homer's Scuba & Snorkel Tours](#)  MAP (10-1 Hull Bay; 340-774-7606; www.night snorkel.com) rents [kayaks](#) and other water toys from a beach shack. A two-person kayak is \$50 for a half day, plus another \$10 for a mask and snorkel. Two islands sit about an hour from shore, depending on how solid your kayaking skills are. The far side of Inner Brass (the closer of the two) has a pristine and secluded strip of beach that faces Outer Brass, which has caves on its far side that are great for snorkeling.

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What to Buy

Shopping on St. Thomas is like a fire sale on all things indulgent — diamonds, gaudy watches, chocolate, cigarettes and liquor. Some of the best deals can be found on liquor. In downtown Charlotte Amalie, **A H Riise**  MAP (37 Main Street; 340-776-2303; www.ahriise.com) has the widest selection. Just fill out a chit indicating the bottles of your choice (you can bring back five liters back to the mainland as long as one is a local brand), and a store clerk will pack them up for you securely in a travel-ready case.

If liquor isn't your poison of choice, try the locally made hot sauces. **Carabana**  MAP (30 Main Street; 340-776-2779) carries a few of the best ones like Pepper J. and Jerome's — or you can try to buy it directly from Jerome himself, who is known to carry bottles with him when he goes out on the town.

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