



St. Thomas Food Tour Experience

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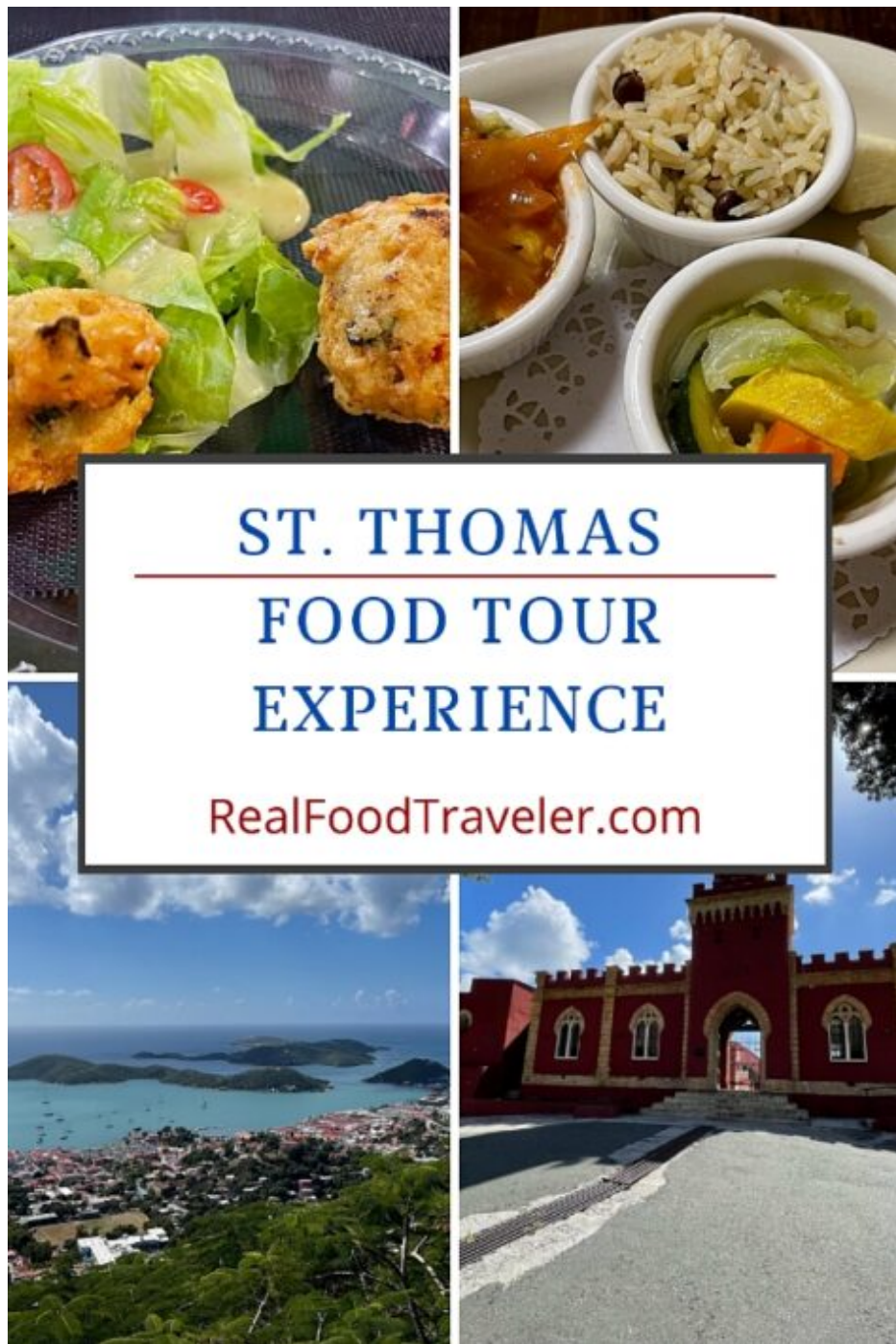


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Here at RealFoodTraveler.com, we believe going on food tours when you're visiting a destination is one of the best ways to discover authentic, iconic foods of the region. In addition, you get to know area restaurants you may want to return to during your visit, and the local purveyors. Here, writer Sandy Bornstein tells us what it's like to tour the St. Thomas food scene in the U.S. Virgin Islands.



ST. THOMAS FOOD TOUR EXPERIENCE

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Save this article about the St. Thomas food tour experience to Pinterest. Top right, Gladys's Sampler; bottom right, Fort Christian meeting place for tour; bottom left, St. Thomas' harbor area from an overlook; top left, Teahouse salt fish cakes. Photos by Sandy Bornstein. Graphic by RealFoodTraveler.com.

Savor food and Culture During a St. Thomas Food Tour

Under a shady tree near the 17th century, red bricked [Fort Christian](#), a St. Thomas U.S. Virgin Islands landmark located in the Charlotte Amalie Historic District, we met our tour guide, Jane DiCola. After relocating from South Africa, she started a business and became entrenched in island culture. In addition to her business pursuits, she escorts [St. Thomas Food Tour visitors](#).

While waiting for a few other people to join our group, Jane shared morsels of local history. The island was part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Route. This segment of the route primarily included Denmark, Africa, and St. Thomas. Nearly 300,000 slaves were sold at the nearby Emancipation Park. Pointing to a stone tower perched on a nearby hill overlooking the city, she mentioned a few facts about pirate history as well as the nearby historic homes and famous 99 steps (actually 103 steps) built by the Danes in the 18th century. [Blackbeard's Castle](#) was forced to close after the 2017 hurricane and has yet to set a reopening date. The United States did not gain control of the island until World War I when the island was purchased from the Danes to prevent the Germans from taking control of the region.

After learning a few basics about St. Thomas, we started walking. Our initial steps took us through the nearby [Emancipation Garden](#) adorned with statues, a gazebo, and a commemorative bell, and then passed by the 19th century Grand Hotel which was converted into the Grand Galleria, a building housing an assortment of shops and restaurants. Along our route, we witnessed how European culture influenced the architectural styles.

St. Thomas Food Tour Stops

E'S GARDEN TEAHOUSE AND THINGS

Our first stop was at [E's Garden Teahouse and Things](#) located on Commandant Gade or Garden Street. After we entered the spacious green walled restaurant, we were warmly greeted by Judith, a retired educator. After living in St. Thomas her entire life, Judith wanted to be part of the revitalization of the area bordered by Government Hill. An impressive assortment of imports, tea blends and local herbal teas are listed on one wall and in a printed menu.

Our dry mouths were instantly quenched by a blend of raspberry hibiscus tea slightly sweetened with agave syrup. After sampling this beverage, I wish we could have tasted more teas. Instead, our palates were introduced to an island favorite, salt fish cakes. Our small plates included two salt fish cakes lightly fried and served with a small salad. Traditional salt cakes are a mixture of cod, seasoned breadcrumbs, pepper, and a bit of vinegar.



Salt Fish Cakes at the Teahouse.

[Hungry for more? Read about the food tour experience in Juneau, Alaska.](#)

Since 2015, this small restaurant has been used as a culinary arts training facility for at risk youth from 16 to 24 years old. The [MBW Café & Bakery](#) is affiliated with the 501(c)3 charitable corporation, My Brother's Workshop, Inc., which offers, a multitude of programs—mentoring, counseling, education job training, and job placement, supported by donations.

During our visit, we munched on coconut drop cookies, a regional favorite. These coconut, raisin, and dairy creations had a texture like a British scone, but more flavorful. When we were getting ready to leave, we were handed freshly baked slices of a loaf cake saturated with rum. Our sweet teeth were satisfied as we headed to our next location. The café also offers breakfast bites, sandwiches and wraps, salads, and drinks.



The food counter inside MBW Cafe in St. Thomas.

Hungry for more? Read about Sandy's food tour experience in Hong Kong.

Even though our arrival was anticipated, we needed to wait for a space to become available at this popular, [award-winning restaurant](#) serving authentic Caribbean entrees and fresh fruit drinks for breakfast and lunch. Had we not been led to the doorway; we may have missed the hidden location down a stone alleyway in the Royal Dame Mall. Decades ago, the owner started cooking island favorites. A recent fire caused the restaurant to relocate to larger space. Currently, she is assisted by her children and extended family members.

The carnivores in our group tasted a chicken curry entrée while our vegetarian sampling had a few plantains along with three small bowls—peas and rice, fresh sauteed vegetables, and fungi, a local cornmeal side dish. The fungi bowls were topped with Glady's red sauce, a combination of tomatoes, peppers, onions, and spices. To enhance the mild flavor of the rice and vegetables, Jane suggested that we try some of Glady's homemade spicy sauce sitting on the table.



The interior of Glady's Cafe.

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ICE CREAM SHOPPE

When we approached this tiny shop near the waterfront (Veterans Drive) next to the Green House, everyone thought that we'd be indulging in another sweet treat. Instead, Miss Janet served us journey cakes or Johnny cakes. To accommodate our dietary wishes, we were served a soft, flaky dough filled with a spicy salt fish pate. Johnny Cakes are a traditional Caribbean snack made from purple flour, baking powder and lightly flavored oil, and usually filled with ground beef with Caribbean spices. While seasoned slightly different from the salt fish cakes at our first stop, this version was equally delicious. In addition to ice cream indulgences, this small shop specializes in on the go handheld snacks.



Fish pate is loaded inside a Johnny Cake.

AMALIA CAFÉ BAR

We concluded the tour at a free-standing bar in the Palm Passageway adjacent to [Meson Amalia](#). The oval-shaped wooden bar has ample seating for individuals looking for a quick drink or have more time to sip a tropical drink. I was introduced to a painkiller, the signature alcoholic beverage of St. Thomas, while Ira enjoyed the non-alcoholic version. The basic ingredients are rum, pineapple juice, coconut, and orange juice. Since this was my first tasting, it is not possible to compare. Jane, our local expert, believes it stands out from local competitors due to the creamy coconut ingredient and the fresh ingredients.

This two-and-a-half-hour food tour offered a leisurely way to learn about St. Thomas's history, culture, and food. It is an excellent launching point for exploring the island in further depth.

The owner of the tour company, Gerard Sperry, moved from Boston 15 years ago. He stepped away from the world of Boston magazine publishing to begin his retirement by sailing, swimming with his pups, and sampling rum. The lack of daily challenges caused him to search for more substance in his life. A 2017 Craigslist posting for a part-time tour guide connected him with the founder and owner of the company. He was attracted by the ad which called for someone who loved people, food, and history.

Eventually, Gerard purchased the business. He upgraded the restaurant partners and placed an emphasis on showcasing authentic food tastings. Gerard is not planning to change the current tour format. He wants future participants to enjoy "fab food and fun facts".



The Painkiller cocktail served on the St. Thomas food tour.

Visitors who would like to attend a food tour can reserve a spot online. Tour times are limited to 12 guests. The website shows the number of available spots. Larger groups should consider booking in advance of arrival. To learn more about visiting the U.S. Virgin Islands, visit their [website](#).

– Story and photos by Sandy Bornstein, *The Traveling Bornsteins*

Please note, the United States Virgin Islands Department of Tourism hosted The Traveling Bornsteins' food tour.

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by Sandy Bornstein | Feb 3, 2022 | Charlotte Amalie Historic District, fish cakes, food tour, Fort Christian, johnny cakes, painkiller cocktail, salt fish cakes, Sandy Bornstein, St. Thomas, St. Thomas Food Tours, U.S. Virgin Islands, Virgin Islands



Author: Sandy Bornstein

Sandy has visited more than 40 countries and lived as an international teacher in Bangalore, India. Sandy's award-winning book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, is a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Sandy writes about food, family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences, historical sites, and Jewish culture and history. You can follow Sandy on Facebook and Instagram.

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