

Revive

GETAWAY

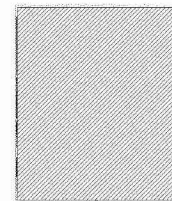
FRESH START

After the U.S. Virgin Islands were hammered by two hurricanes in a span of six weeks, The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas looked on the sunny side of a stormy situation. *BY ANNA DUNN*

What's the best way to describe the U.S. Virgin Islands? It's a U.S. territory where the temperature hovers at that sweet spot of 75 to 80 degrees year-round. You won't even have to check the forecast before you embark. It's almost always sunny, and the locals are as authentically welcoming as the weather is warm and inviting. With the USVI trifecta of St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas, you really can't go wrong when choosing where to park your beach chair—but if you're looking for pure paradisaical luxury, head to The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas.



The well-appointed fire pit area with sparkling Caribbean views sits between restaurants Allora and Bleuwater at The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas.



Clockwise from top: The newly renovated lobby at The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas welcomes guests with luxe Caribbean-inspired design elements; the brand-new Alloro showcases authentic Sicilian cuisine and innovative cocktails; a pristine ocean view is just one of the perks of a presidential suite; a well-appointed master bedroom and balcony in one of the presidential suites.



The 180-room resort sustained significant damage from back-to-back storms (hurricanes Irma and Maria) in 2017. After a two-year, \$100 million renovation of the entire property, it's back and more chic and accommodating than ever, which is evident the second I walk onto the property. The open-air lobby sits in a pale robin's-egg blue house, and the front porch is outfitted with cozy rocking chairs. "We wanted Adirondack chairs originally, but when they brought these they were perfect," says Ian McPhee, director of operations. I can't help but agree. The welcoming entrance is just a glimpse of what's inside the resort, which sits on 30 acres propped on a hillside overlooking the Caribbean.

As part of the renovation, the facade underwent a face-lift from a salmon shade to a more classic cream color, and the toned-down results allow the buildings to truly pop against the vibrant tropical landscape. The resort's exterior isn't the only thing to get an upgrade. Its four restaurants were also improved, and the addition of Italian hot spot

Alloro is a welcome one, with sleek interiors that are both crisp and inviting. The dinner-only menu offers a mix of true-to-Sicily favorites and local seafood, like maltagliati with scallops and frutti di mare pizza, as well as a substantial wine list and innovative cocktails—all served while overlooking the sea. For a more casual experience, the open-air Sails is open for lunch and has a lively bar area where I belly up for a tasty tuna poke bowl and the St. Thomas-signature Bushwhacker

cocktail. There's also a tasty ceviche and burger, plus frozen drinks with panache. Ask for the off-menu Toasted Almond boozy milkshake made with plenty of rum and vanilla ice cream—and topped with a cherry, of course. Sails also services the 11 private poolside cabanas, which can be reserved prior to your trip or on-site and come with a minifridge stocked with sparkling and still water, a breezy ceiling fan and two chaise lounges. Excellent service is a Ritz-Carlton trademark,

but it really shines at the cabanas. A staff member notices my sunburn from the day before and, unprompted, brings chilled lemongrass towels and cucumber slices for a much-needed refresh. He also cleans my sunglasses when they get streaked with sunscreen fingerprints—and that's after delivering a fresh fruit platter and Champagne to my secluded sanctuary. Aah, pure bliss!

While I would certainly classify myself as a "pool person" rather than a "beach person," The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas caters to both. Nonmotorized beach activities are included, so snorkeling and stand-up paddleboarding are great active ways to spend an afternoon. Also along the resort's private stretch of beach is 55-foot luxury catamaran Lady Lynsey, which accommodates daily snorkeling tours and cruises, including a delightful sunset sail with (a very generous) open bar and tranquil views.

Even at full occupancy, the resort feels spacious and uncrowded. With rooms spaced out among six buildings (all pleasantly named after local flowers), you're only a breezy golf cart ride away from the pool, beach, restaurants or spa. And trust me, the latter is one spot you'll want to stay awhile. Spend an afternoon with a tension-releasing *Island Stone* massage or an invigorating vitamin C facial—or both. Or if you prefer in-room relaxation, the deep soaking tub in your suite should suffice. Another extension of your stay is the club lounge, a well-appointed space with a dedicated concierge. It also serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, plus snacks, as well as happy hour with plenty of top-shelf spirits and wine on tap.

The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas feels like a world away on its island perch, but as part of the U.S., you won't have to travel far for ultimate pampering and luxuriating on island time. *Suite rates from \$1,149 per night, with club lounge access.* ritzcarlton.com ◉