



PROJECT REPORT
Virgin Islands National Park Volunteer Trip
St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands
February 15 – 21, 2026



Virgin Islands National Park Volunteer Trip Report – February 2026

Executive Summary

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) conducted its fifteenth volunteer trip to **Virgin Islands National Park (VINP)** on St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, from **February 15–21, 2026**. ConservationVIP® Travelers contributed to projects in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS) and **Friends of the Virgin Islands (FOVI)** to restore trails, remove invasive vegetation, and preserve historic plantation sites, while also participating in educational and cultural programs focused on the island’s natural and cultural heritage.

During the week, **ConservationVIP® travelers and trip leaders contributed a combined 234 hours of trail projects and educational engagement on St. John**, including trail maintenance, historic site vegetation removal, and structured educational and cultural programming supporting environmental awareness, cultural understanding, and volunteer enrichment.

In addition, **walk-up volunteers contributed an additional 34 hours** of trail and site projects on Tuesday and Thursday, further expanding project impact.

Beyond on-island field projects, trip leaders contributed an additional **172 hours** of volunteer service for **pre-trip planning, on-site coordination, and post-trip reporting and follow-up**, ensuring safe project execution, strong partner coordination, and compliance with reporting requirements.

Key Highlights and Impact

Key accomplishments included:

- Tree maintenance and **0.2 acres of Caneel Hill** overlook improvement via the **1.3 miles roundtrip and 700 feet ascent Margaret Hill Trail**
- Finishing projects on **0.8 miles and 800 feet descent** on the **Maria Hope Trail**
- Vegetation removal across **0.5 acre** at **L'Esperance Ruins**
- Vegetation clearing across **0.12 acres** within the **Annaberg Sugar Plantation slave quarters**

Key Achievements

- **8 ConservationVIP® travelers and 2 volunteer leaders**
- **190 hours** of trail projects and **44 hours** of structured education on St. John
- **34 additional hours** contributed by walk-up volunteers
- **172 hours** of pre-, during-, and post-trip leadership support

Trail and Site Project Locations

- Margaret Hill Trail / Caneel Hill
- Maria Hope Trail
- L'Esperance Ruins
- Annaberg Sugar Plantation (slave quarters)

Detailed Trip Report

St. John's environment ranges from arid south-shore conditions to lush tropical forest inland. Rapid vegetation growth, combined with steep terrain, heat, and limited shade, requires continuous maintenance. Volunteers removed invasive grasses, coral vine, tan-tan, thorny brush, and overhanging vegetation, improving trail safety, historic site visibility, and visitor

access. Despite challenging conditions, the project was rewarding, and volunteers frequently received appreciation from park visitors and local hikers.

Day 1: Arrival and Orientation (February 15)

The team arrived at Cinnamon Bay Campground and settled into raised-platform tents among tropical foliage. After relaxing and exploring the nearby beach, ConservationVIP® travelers gathered for the orientation.

Trip leaders reviewed park history, hurricane recovery efforts, safety protocols, and the volunteer project plan for the week. Dinner consisted of spaghetti and fresh salad, followed by a short evening walk to Cinnamon Bay Beach and the outdoor restaurant area where educational sessions would take place during the week.



Day 2: Margaret Hill Trail and Turtle Talk (February 16)



After breakfast, **Lila** met the group at camp for introductions and an overview of **Friends of the Virgin Islands** and their role in supporting Virgin Islands National Park. She reviewed safety protocols, including tool use, trail safety, and plant awareness, highlighting both native species and plants requiring caution while in the field. Across from camp, she also showed the group the local plant nursery and shared about the purpose.

The group then drove to the National Park Service maintenance lot and hiked up the **Margaret Hill Trail**, a steep, rocky, rooty route measuring **0.65 miles with approximately 700 feet of elevation gain**.

Upon reaching the upper section, volunteers began clearing overgrown grasses and trees along **Caneel Hill** using weedwhackers and loppers. Part of the group stopped lower on the trail to remove two hazardous overhanging trees with saws, approximately **12 inches in diameter**, with extensive root systems embedded into the hillside that required careful removal. A difficult job, well done.



The group returned to camp early afternoon for swimming and showers. In the evening, after a barbeque chicken/portabella mushroom and baked potato dinner, volunteers attended an educational turtle conservation presentation hosted by FOVI.

Trail Project Metrics

- Distance (round trip): **1.3 miles**
- Total ascent: **700 feet**
- Project type: removing overhanging larger trees and clearing overlook
- Area cleared: **~0.2 acres**

Day 3: Maria Hope Trail, Lameshur Bay, Medicinal Plants, Arts, and Music (February 17)

The day began with the team meeting **Foster**, Lila's assistant, who joined the group for trail projects. The group then drove to the **Reef Bay Trailhead**, descending onto the **Maria Hope Trail**, a **0.8-mile trail with approximately 800 feet of elevation change**.

Joined by several walk-up volunteers, the group completed finishing projects on the already well-established but rocky and rooty trail. Volunteers used loppers and a weed whacker, cleared roots where needed, and removed overhanging brush to further improve trail safety and accessibility. The project was completed ahead of schedule by **11:00 a.m.**, and the FOVI trails leader confirmed the project was complete for the day.

Trip leaders then took the group on an educational drive to the south side of the island, stopping at **Lameshur Bay** to highlight the island's drier climate and contrasting ecosystems. Along the way, volunteers observed goats, local donkeys, and a notably large group of migrating flamingos. The afternoon concluded with a swim at the bay.

The group returned to camp for a hearty macaroni chili dinner with dessert, followed by a **Medicinal Plants and Traditional Art** session led by **Ital Delroy Anthony**, and an open mic night at **Johnny Lime** in Coral Bay.



Trail Project Metrics

- Trail length: **0.8 miles**
- Elevation change: **~800 feet descent**
- Project type: light lopping, root clearing, and overhanging brush removal
- Included **walk-up volunteers**

Day 4: Rest Day at Maho Bay and Cruz Bay (February 18)

February 18 was a designated rest and educational day. Volunteers spent the morning at **Maho Bay**, snorkeling and observing reef fish and turtle feeding behavior in calm, clear waters.

In the afternoon, the group traveled to **Cruz Bay**. The evening concluded with a chicken fajita dinner followed by drumming and singing led by **Ital Delroy Anthony**, providing a meaningful cultural experience and strengthening group connections.

Day 5: L'Esperance Ruins and Local Music (February 19)

The project focused on the **L'Esperance Ruins**, a historic plantation site in the Coral Bay area dating to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Volunteers used weed whackers and hand tools to clear dense brush and grasses **up to 10 feet around the ruins**, as well as within interior areas, significantly improving visibility, safety, and preservation of the historic site.





After an early “all you can eat” dinner, the group visited **Miss Lucy’s** in Coral Bay, enjoying local food, music, and an authentic cultural setting. One of our returning ConservationVIP® travelers joined the open mic opportunity with two wonderful songs.

Trail Project Metrics

- Area cleared: **~0.5 acre**
- **Project type:** lopping removing vegetation
- Included **walk-up volunteers**

Day 6: Annaberg Sugar Plantation and Bird Walk (February 20)

The day began with an early morning **bird walk at Francis Bay**, led by Laurel Brannick, retired Chief of Interpretation for the National Park Service. Volunteers observed the black faced grass quit (a lifer for one of our travelers!), checked pintail, black necked stilt, yellow warbler, and the mangrove cuckoo.



The group then drove to the **Annaberg Sugar Plantation**, where volunteers maintained the site in and around the former **slave quarters**, removing encroaching vegetation to expose remaining stone walls and structural remains. Lunch was enjoyed near the **windmill**, with sweeping views of Leinster Bay, while **Lila** provided historical context about the plantation and the island's history.





In the late afternoon, the group enjoyed a thank you **sunset catamaran sail with Captain Karl and Darcy**, joined by their one-month-old goat, **Darla**. The group celebrated the birthday of one of the trip leaders, with celebratory drinks, music and cake provided onboard!

The evening concluded at **Cinnamon Beach Rain Café** with a farewell dinner and the weeks debrief and feedback session.



Trail Project Metrics

- Area cleared: **~0.12 acre**
- Project type: lopping in and around the slave quarters



Day 7: Departure Day (February 21)

On Saturday morning, volunteers departed throughout the morning, cleaned tents, and shared facilities, and left the campground in excellent condition.

Before saying goodbye, the group gathered in a closing circle, holding and raising hands and listening to the Closing Circle Farewell.

Closing Circle Farewell

*We came together as strangers.
We leave as friends.
We shared work, laughter, and purpose.
We gave what we could, and it was enough.
As we stand here in a circle,
hand in hand,
we acknowledge what we've built together
and the place that brought us here.
Now, as we lift our hands,
we send one another forward—
with gratitude for what was shared,
strength for the road ahead,
and the hope that our paths will cross again.
Until then,
go safely,
and carry this circle with you.*

(anonymous)

Summary

The February 2026 volunteer trip made measurable contributions to trail maintenance, historic site preservation, and visitor experience within **Virgin Islands National Park**. Travelers contributed across diverse landscapes and cultural sites while participating in educational and cultural programming that deepened understanding of the island's natural and historical heritage.

We extend sincere thanks to Virgin Islands National Park, Friends of the Virgin Islands, our partners with Virgin Magic Charters and Budget Rental Car, and most of all, **the dedicated travelers whose effort, flexibility, and teamwork made this trip a success. Thank You!**

