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Travel Talk

St. Thomas

By Maxine Silverstein

If you're like most Jewish travelers, you may not be aware there are hundreds of places in the world that combine the characteristics of a great vacation destination with an area or event that has a strong Jewish feeling.

In each of my TRAVEL TALK articles, I will tell you about a different destination that has both the lure of a vacation resort and the opportunity for the Jewish traveler to learn more about their faith.

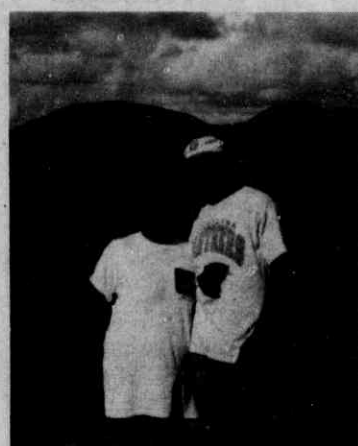
And, an excellent and timely place to begin is on the island of St. Thomas, in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Reached by an easy connecting flight from the nonstop Charlotte to San Juan route, St. Thomas is not only one of the world's greatest vacation lands, but is also home to the Western Hemisphere's second-oldest synagogue.

The Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas, founded in 1796, built the Synagogue of Brachah V'shalom Ugemilut Chasidim in downtown St. Thomas in 1833. A 10-month celebration marking the bicentennial of the congregation is planned for 1995-1996.

Last October, another couple, and my husband, Gary, and I visited St. Thomas and the synagogue. St. Thomas is a wonderful place to vacation in any season with average temperatures between 77 degrees and 82 degrees year-round. In addition to the sun, the crystal-clear, Caribbean water, the sand beaches, and the lush tropical vegetation, St. Thomas offers world-class accommodations, dining and shopping.

The St. Thomas Synagogue is located in downtown Charlotte Amalie and is included on the Tourism Board's historic walking tour. Located on the very steep street, Crystal Gade, the Synagogue is a hike up from the center of town. One of the better-selling items in the gift shop is a T-shirt proclaiming, "I CLIMBED SYNAGOGUE HILL!"

But the view from the Synagogue is worth the climb, and the visitor immediately sees why this location was chosen. The original congregation was formed by Sephardic Jews from Portugal, Brazil and Holland who were fleeing Spanish persecution.



Maxine and Gary Silverstein enjoy the beauty of St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The small synagogue they built in 1833 still has the original chandeliers and menorahs, ornamental silver work and mahogany pews. A sand-covered floor symbolizes the exodus of the Jews

In addition ...
St. Thomas offers world-class accommodations, dining and shopping.

from Egypt. Outside, the synagogue's white pillars contrast with rough stone walls.

The Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas is planning a big celebration for the bicentennial. Starting in September, 1995 and continuing for ten months, the festivities will include highlights such as a speech by Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a performance by violinist Itzhak Perlman, an art exhibit by St. Thomas native, Camille Pissarro, "the father of French Impressionism," and a Sephardic Service as it would have been performed 200 years ago.

For more information about 1995 Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas Bicentennial Events, call the USVI Division of Tourism at 1-800-USVI-INFO.

American Zionist Movement(AZM) Letter to Senators

Editor's Note: The following is the complete text of a letter sent U.S. Senators by AZM. The letter was signed by Seymour D. Reich, president of AZM and Karen J. Rubenstein, executive director.

January 15, 1995

"We are writing to express the views of the American Zionist Movement on the subject of U.S. troops on the Golan.

"The American Zionist Movement is an umbrella organization of 21 national Zionist organizations representing one million American Jews. At our recent biennial convention with representatives in attendance from 19 of our organizations, the delegates, on January 10, 1995, overwhelmingly adopted a resolution which urges the U.S. Congress not to take any action at this time with respect to the issue of an American presence on the Golan Heights until the function of such a peace keeping or monitoring presence is known.

"Our delegates believe that while this issue is certainly a subject to be discussed by the American people and debated by the U.S. Congress, a debate at this time is premature, divisive and seriously prejudicial to the possibility of an Israeli-Syrian accord.

"We believe that the parties to the process, Syria and Israel, should be permitted to discuss the issue of a peace-keeping or monitoring force between themselves, without prior limitations. Once the parameters of an agreement are in place it would certainly be appropriate for the Administration and the Congress to determine what role American personnel should have.

"Even though there is concern both within Israel and the United States about the fragility of some of the agreements negotiated, we must support the efforts of all of the parties, in this case Syria and Israel, to resolve their difference and not place impediments in their path."

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