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THIS MONTH

Trash, Crafts, and Renewable Fun on St. John

by Stacy Clark

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Trash, Crafts and Renewable Fun on St. John, U.S.V.I.: An Interview with Eco-Tourism Developer Stanley Selengut



"When families come to Maho Bay, they make friends and memories for life!" Stanley Selengut

On the little island of St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands, there is a special place for family fun. Next time your parents are planning a vacation, you might want to slip them the website address for Maho Bay (www.maho.org), an eco-friendly resort that is anything but dull. Here, families can stay in solar- and wind-powered "tent-cottages," designed by Stanley Selengut, one of the world's first eco-tourism developers. "I built Maho Bay (and its sister property, Estate Concordia) because I wanted families to experience the fun and beauty of island living in a way that was environmentally sustainable!" Stanley recently told E in a telephone interview.



"Families relax and find their own rhythm here," Stanley added. "The tent cottages were constructed with the environment in mind. For example, we used a lot of recycled building materials and installed solar- and wind-powered water heating and electrical systems in each of the canvas-sided platform tents. When families arrive and see how large these eco-tents are, and they see for the first time the views of the trees and the sea from their decks, many people feel like they are in the middle of a Swiss Family Robinson adventure!"



Stanley is proud of the fact that children are fascinated by the place. "At Estate Concordia, children like to monitor their tent's utility meters - the barometers, hot water gauges and electrical storage indicators have lights and gadgets that make the tents feel like island spaceships!" Stanley said. "If they are running low on hot water, they know to take a short shower. If they are running low on power, they don't blow-dry their hair. When the sun comes out or the wind picks up, the power supplies are replenished. It's a constantly variable system that performs well when people work with it and respect it."

Stanley added, "Many families return home and make changes after being here! Sometimes it's as simple as installing low-energy light bulbs. In other cases, I've heard of families installing passive solar systems and even building additions with recycled materials. They come for a break and go home inspired."



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This year, Stanley is especially excited about the "Art of Recycling" celebration – an opportunity for kids and their families to transform used paper, cloth, glass, wood and clay into journals, silk-screened artwork, tie-dyed and batik clothing, paper weights, birdhouses, musical instruments, and ceramic tile mosaics (pieces are fired in a kiln that uses scrap wood pallets as fuel).

Jared Hill, Environmental Resource Manager at Maho Bay, informed E, "This program is continually expanding as our Art Center grows in popularity...The idea that we can take waste and recycle it into art has taken hold and we continually find ourselves presented with new, creative ideas on how to use our trash."



Jared told E about many other activities as well, including Treasure Hunts that feature stops at a Termite Nest, a Maho Tree, and a solar-powered fountain. "This gives kids a great opportunity to see Maho Bay at their own pace." Jason can also arrange for families to join Ranger-led bird-watching walks and hiking trips to Reef Bay and St. John's plantation ruins.



And, of course, there are all the fantastic water activities on Maho Bay's beachfront –snorkeling, sailing, windsurfing and kayaking – a chance to experience the power of the sun and the wind first hand! There is even a nearby beach (5-minute walk) where turtle sightings are common!



Jared reported that at the end of a long day, kids look forward to meeting up at the library, "where all kinds of books about St. John's marine life, birds, and trees are available." They also love the presentations by local marine biologists, astronomers and nature photographers.

If you want to know more about Maho Bay or make reservations, check out the website www.maho.org or call (800) 392 -9004 or (340)776-6226.

Exclusively for EarthBeat readers: Stanley's favorite eco-tents are D-7 and A-12 through 14, all of which overlook the rocky shoreline.

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