

A “How To” guide to plan a trip for Scouts to an exotic locale - Top Tips from our Scouting trip to the Wall Scout Camp – St. Croix USVI

The US Virgin Islands offer scouts amazing opportunities to learn about another culture and experience a tropical paradise in a safe and friendly US territory. This article will offer tips on how you can leverage curiosity, imagination, and Scouting to experience an incredible journey of discovery, friendship and adventure of your own.

The Florida Seabase is a long way from Southern California – around 5 hours flying time to Miami and then a 3 hour drive south to get to the Keys. My son and I wanted to go, but it seemed like an awfully long trip for a one week fishing expedition, so I started looking around for a scout friendly destination to extend the adventure to another week.

Planning that additional week taught me a lot about how to pull off taking a group of scouts to a destination from home. I learned some valuable tips that I want to share with you. So here they are – my top tips on planning and leading a trip to an exotic scouting locale.

TIP 1 – PUT THE WORD OUT TO EVERYONE ABOUT YOUR TRIP AND ASK FOR HELP

It is amazing what happens when you ask for help. When I first started dreaming up this trip, I made some announcements at our local District about my plans for a trip to the Florida Sea Base and extending the trip with another week in the Caribbean. I had some ideas like the Bahamas or Puerto Rico, but I always ended with a plea that I was open to suggestions and welcomed for anyone with any scouting connections in the Caribbean. It turned out that a new leader in our troop Jeff Bozanic, had a connection with a local in St Croix who was scout friendly. He suggested I check out the US Virgin Islands.



TIP 2 – TAKE ADVICE FROM A LOCAL

Well, the US Virgin Islands sounded great, so I read a few articles online and decided we would stay in a National Park on St John. I made reservations for our group to camp for a week in a public campground in the national park. Cost would be around \$90 per night – not bad when you divide by 8 people. Then my cell phone rang and it was Hank Tommecher – a local from St Croix. I told him my idea about St John and he said “Why aren’t you staying at Wall Scout Camp on St Croix?” – to which I replied ... “Ummm... don’t know. Couldn’t find much about it on the internet”. He then proceeded to set me straight and got me in touch with Michael Dow, the local boy scout District Executive in the Virgin Islands.



TIP 3 – USE THE STAFF OF THE LOCAL SCOUTS ORGANIZATION

Working with the local scout executive or scouting organization is KEY to making your adventure a success. The USVI is lucky to have a leader like Michael Dow. Michael is the local District Executive and partnering with him helped transform all of my fuzzy ideas into concrete and actionable goals. He knew all of the ins and outs and was able to offer invaluable advice on activities and logistics.



TIP 4 – LEVERAGE THE RESOURCES OF THE LOCAL PROFESSIONAL SCOUTERS AND ORGANIZATION

Michael Dow suggested we use the local Scout base – Howard M. Wall Scout Camp - on the southeast side of the island as our base. This proved to be ideal since it was a beautiful and safe environment to camp. It had cooking and camping equipment including tents, a stove and range, eating/gathering area and bathing and bathroom facilities – everything we needed at a very great scout rate!



TIP 5 – ASK FOR HELP FROM THE LOCAL SCOUTS AND SCOUTS STAFF

We wanted to go to Buck Island National Monument for some snorkeling and hiking. Visibility can be over 100 feet underwater and we really wanted to go. After making numerous phone calls, the best we could do was \$70 each person for a 3 hour trip – not so good. We started asking the local scouting professionals for help and once again, the professional scouters came through. The ranger at Wall Scout Camp, Enrique Santos (Santos) is a retired police officer who now manages the Wall Scout camp as a resident ranger. I asked him (remember ask everyone) if he could help and within 3 minutes, I was talking to the local Police department who offered to take us out to the Island on their high speed pursuit boat at no charge. It was one of the highlights of our trip that we may have missed if we had not kept asking for help.



TIP 6 – PLAN A LOCAL SERVICE PROJECT

Our crew volunteered for a local service project at Whim Museum, a former plantation. We got



the opportunity to work with local staff and inmates of a local incarceration unit setting up large tents for an annual celebration –Come Home to St. Croix. This was one of our most rewarding days, and we got the chance to get to know people from all walks of life in this Caribbean territory. We all thoroughly enjoyed the hard work, team-work , and the chance to meet local prisoners who gave us some meaningful life lessons to consider. It was a great feeling to be able to “give back” to St Croix.

TIP 7 – EAT LOCAL

I made it a rule that we could not eat any “fast food”. We prepared our own breakfasts and lunches and then had great dinners at local cafes. We enjoyed trying Bull Foot Soup (real bull foot in the soup), Turkey Wings and Pigeon Peas, Barbequed Chicken, and Man Soup, prepared by former scout leaders on the beach. This soup contained lobster, conch, shrimp, whelks, crab, octopus, fish and ground provisions. The food was delicious, healthy, nutritious and we often got a discount because we mentioned we were scouts. Eating locally also introduced us to the culture and characters of St Croix. Including Maggie of Maggie’s Snackette.



TIP 8 – CONTACT LOCAL PARKS AND GOVERNMENT

We took a hike through the rain forest with Dr. Coles of the US Fish and Wildlife service, watched 65 Leather Back Turtles hatch out of the sand and help to release them into local waters with local Fish and Wildlife staff. We also toured the legislature of the US Virgin islands to learn about how the territory is

governed and what it is like to be a territory of the US. Best of all, every one of these activities was free.

TIP 9 – TELL EVERYONE YOU ARE SCOUT

You will be amazed at how many doors will open to you if you just advertise that you are a scout leader working with a group of scouts and leading them on an adventure.

Scouting is well respected around St Croix, and everyone we met was thrilled to learn we were scouts. They

opened their homes, hearts, and kitchens when they learned we were touring the area. Be proud of your scout group – tell everyone you are a scout and you will learn that many, many people are scouts or are affiliated with Scouting.



TIP 10 - USE THE INTERNET

Bing and Google are your friends. I used the internet to research activities, find contacts, and shop for deals. Guide books are also helpful to get you started, then use the internet to dig into details and read what others thought about the activities you are considering. We also used the internet to meet one another.

I booked the Sea Base adventure with only 2 scouts and posted a message on the Sea Base website that I needed another adult and more scouts. We ended up with a crew of scouts from Colorado, Missouri, Northern California and Southern California. We are all scouts and it was easy to get along and have a great trip – even though we had never met before. Scouting truly is an international movement of like-minded individuals.

BONUS TIP – BE A TRAVELER

Travelers work hard every day they are travelling. They cram in activities, seek out local cuisine, offer to pitch in and help as needed, meet locals and try to embrace and absorb the local culture. They are adventurous, able to roll with the punches, and don't plan everything. Vacationers like to be waited upon, live in a cocoon, sleep in, plan out every minute, don't tolerate unexpected changes or delays, and eat the same food they can get at home. BE A TRAVELER. TEACH ALL YOUR SCOUTS TO BE TRAVELERS and you will spend a lot less, have a lot more adventure, and make friends for a lifetime.



Conclusion

Now it is your turn. I hope you can be inspired from our trip and use these tips to plan adventures of your own. I want to personally thank Bill Wibberg of Troop 4 in Jefferson City, Missouri for having the adventure and gumption to help lead this trip, William Wibberg Jr, Rob Greedy, Will Farmer, Alex Wang, Caleb Griffith, and Dylan Chennault for being great scouts and adventurous travelers. Hank Tommecher, Dr. William Coles, the staff at Whim Museum - including Michael and Sonia, Luz, Anthony, and the staff of the local fish and wildlife service. Finally I want to thank Michael Dow and Enrique Santos of the Boy Scouts of America Virgin Islands for helping us realize our dreams and sharing their Scouting spirit with us.

