

Caribbean Update: These Hurricane-Hit Islands Are Now Welcoming Travelers

By Bob Curley 2.20.2018



Courtesy of the Zemi Beach House Hotel
Anguilla's posh Zemi Beach House Hotel—and the gorgeous stretch of sand it fronts—reopened February 15.

As the region continues to recover from hurricanes Irma and Maria, find out which islands are ready to welcome travelers—and which ones aren't. Updated February 2018.

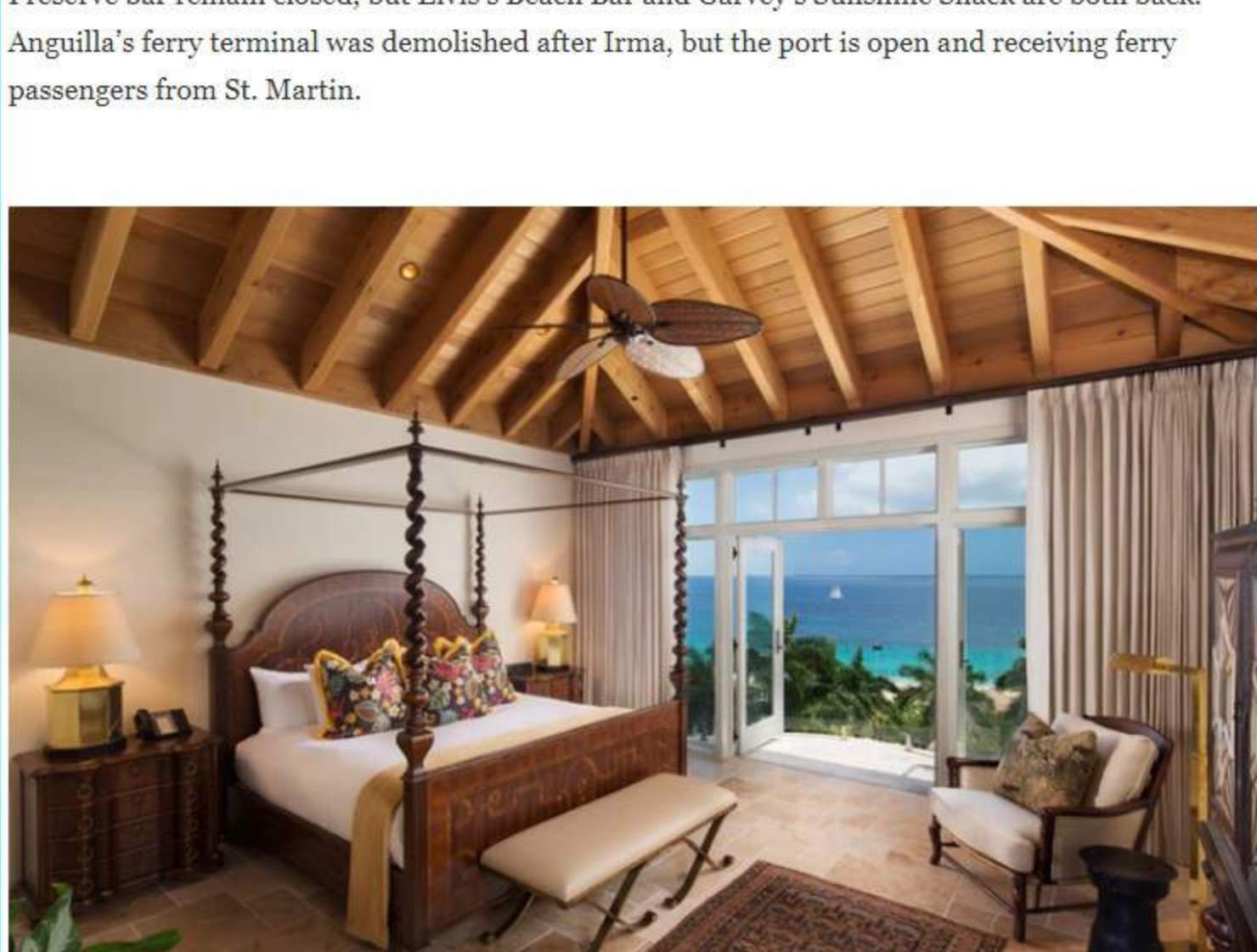
An unwanted shade of blue was added to the Caribbean last fall: the bright royal tarps covering roofs ripped away by a pair of hurricanes. You'll see them as you fly into San Juan's international airport, a reminder that recovery is still underway in Puerto Rico months after the Caribbean was smacked with a one-two punch by Irma and Maria.

But Puerto Rico and other storm-affected islands are already welcoming visitors, and those who visit will find the beaches open, some great deals on airfares, and **opportunities to lend a helping hand** if you want to give back while you're enjoying a Caribbean winter getaway.

Conditions vary widely from island to island, however—even within individual destinations.

ANGUILLA

The reopening of the **Zemi Beach House Hotel** this month is a sure comeback sign for an island best known for its luxury hotels. Plus, Anguilla has the first brand-new post-hurricane hotel to open, the **Quintessence**, which debuted on January 1. The historic Pumphouse and the Dune Preserve bar remain closed, but Elvis's Beach Bar and Garvey's Sunshine Shack are both back. Anguilla's ferry terminal was demolished after Irma, but the port is open and receiving ferry passengers from St. Martin.



Courtesy of the Q Hotel
Billing itself as a "tropical grand mansion," the Quintessence is the first new post-hurricane hotel on Anguilla.

ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

This is truly a tale of two islands: Antigua was basically back up and running two days after Maria hit, but the sister island of Barbuda was brutally pounded and remains essentially off-limits. For tourists, the good news is that the vast majority of hotels, resorts, and attractions are on Antigua. The cruise terminal at St. John's on Antigua is open, but the small port on Barbuda is closed indefinitely.

THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Hurricane Maria in September scored a direct hit on most of the BVI but landed only a glancing blow on the archipelago's lowest-lying island, Anegada. As a result, the **Anegada Beach Club** was the first major resort in the BVI to reopen. Currently, a yacht charter via Moorings, Horizon, or Sunsail is the best way to tour the BVI, visit the Baths on Tortola, and wade in for a drink at the Soggy Dollar bar on Jost Van Dyke. Tortola's port, served by British cruise line Marella, is open for business.

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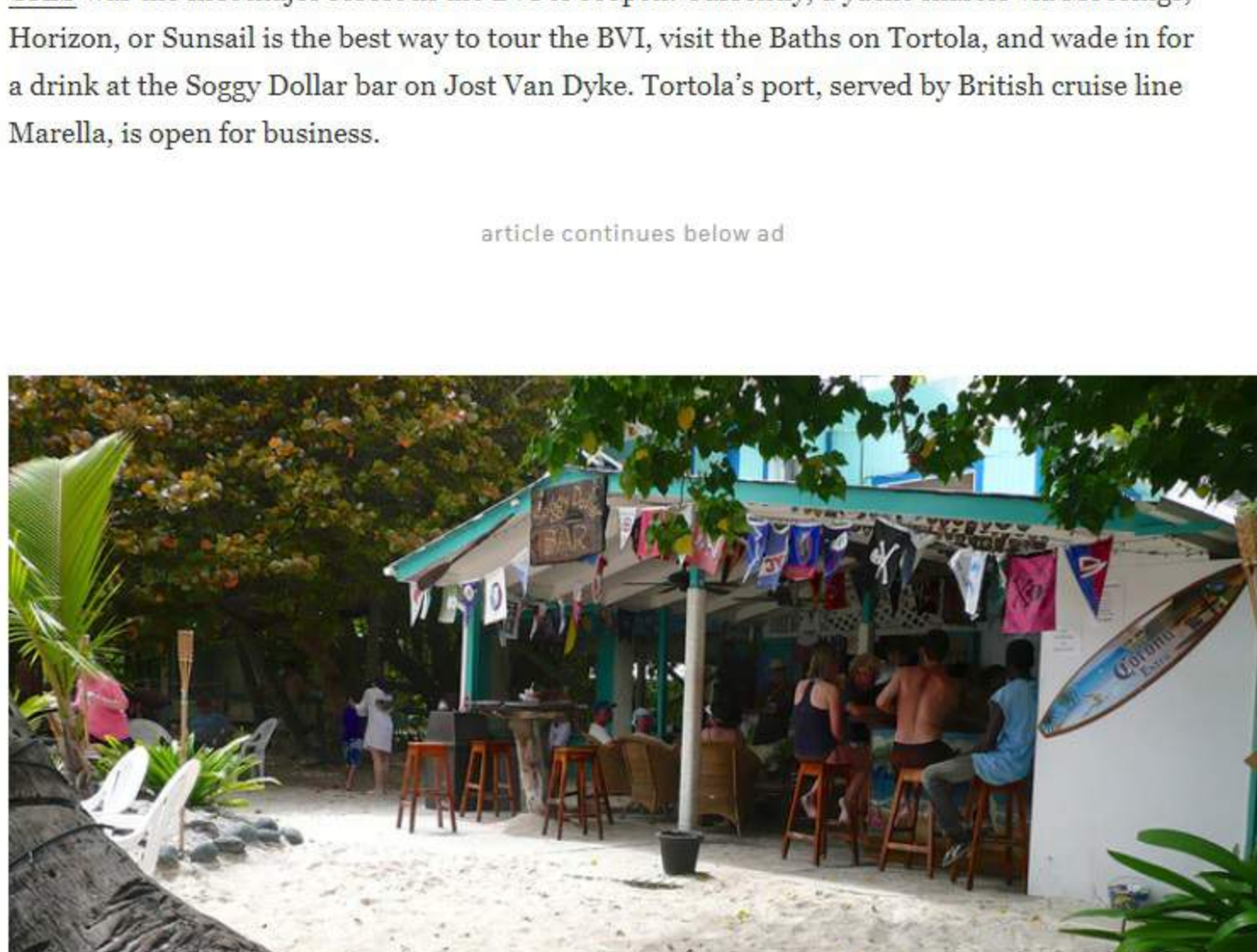


Photo by Jay Colbath / Flickr
Yes, you can scratch your Painkiller itch again: The Soggy Dollar bar on Jost Van Dyke in the BVI is open.

DOMINICA

Lush Dominica is less green than it was before the storm, but the foliage is growing back and the island has a few hundred guest rooms available. Most parks on the island are open but not the Waitukubuli National Trail. Adventurous travelers may want to consider an early visit to Dominica; others probably should wait until the recovery is further along. It is worth noting that although daily ferry service between Dominica and St. Lucia is running, Dominica's cruise port remains closed to ships.

PUERTO RICO

A typical Puerto Rico trip might include a stay at a San Juan hotel, a tour of Old San Juan, and a visit to the El Yunque rain forest. The first two are no problem: the hotels of Condado, Miramar, and Isla Verde are open, the restaurants and salsa clubs in Old San Juan are full, and the nightlife in Santurce beats on. El Yunque, however, is closed, but you can **volunteer to help clear trails**. Generally, coastal areas in Puerto Rico have recovered faster than the interior. San Juan's busy cruise port is open for business.

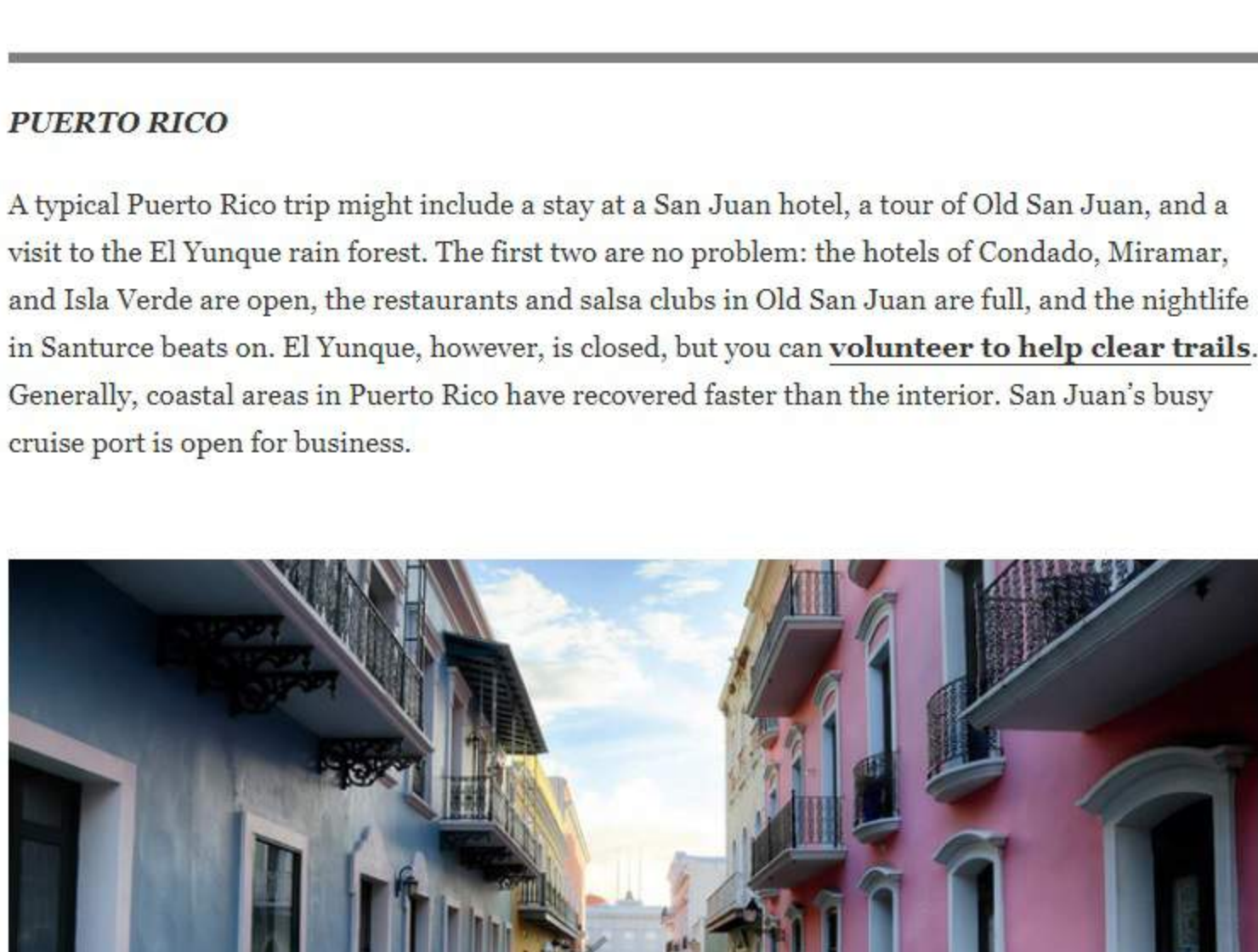


Photo by Daniel Gillaspia / Flickr
Many parts of Puerto Rico are still struggling to recover, but things are picture-perfect in Old San Juan.

ST. MARTIN/ST. MAARTEN

Parts of this split French/Dutch island remain heavily storm damaged, but the roads and beaches are all open, along with most bars and restaurants. On the Dutch side, you can once again stroll the Front Street boardwalk and Back Street, home of the famous Guavaberry store. Open attractions include Loterie Farm and the Rainforest Adventures park. Although the Princess Juliana International Airport has been open to commercial flights since October, the main terminal suffered extensive wind and water damage in Hurricane Irma, necessitating a complete interior demolition. As such, the airport is receiving flights—notably from JetBlue, American, and Delta—through a somewhat less efficient temporary terminal. The cruise port at Philipsburg on the Carnival side is open and receiving ships from Viking Sea, Marella, Royal Caribbean, and Carnival.

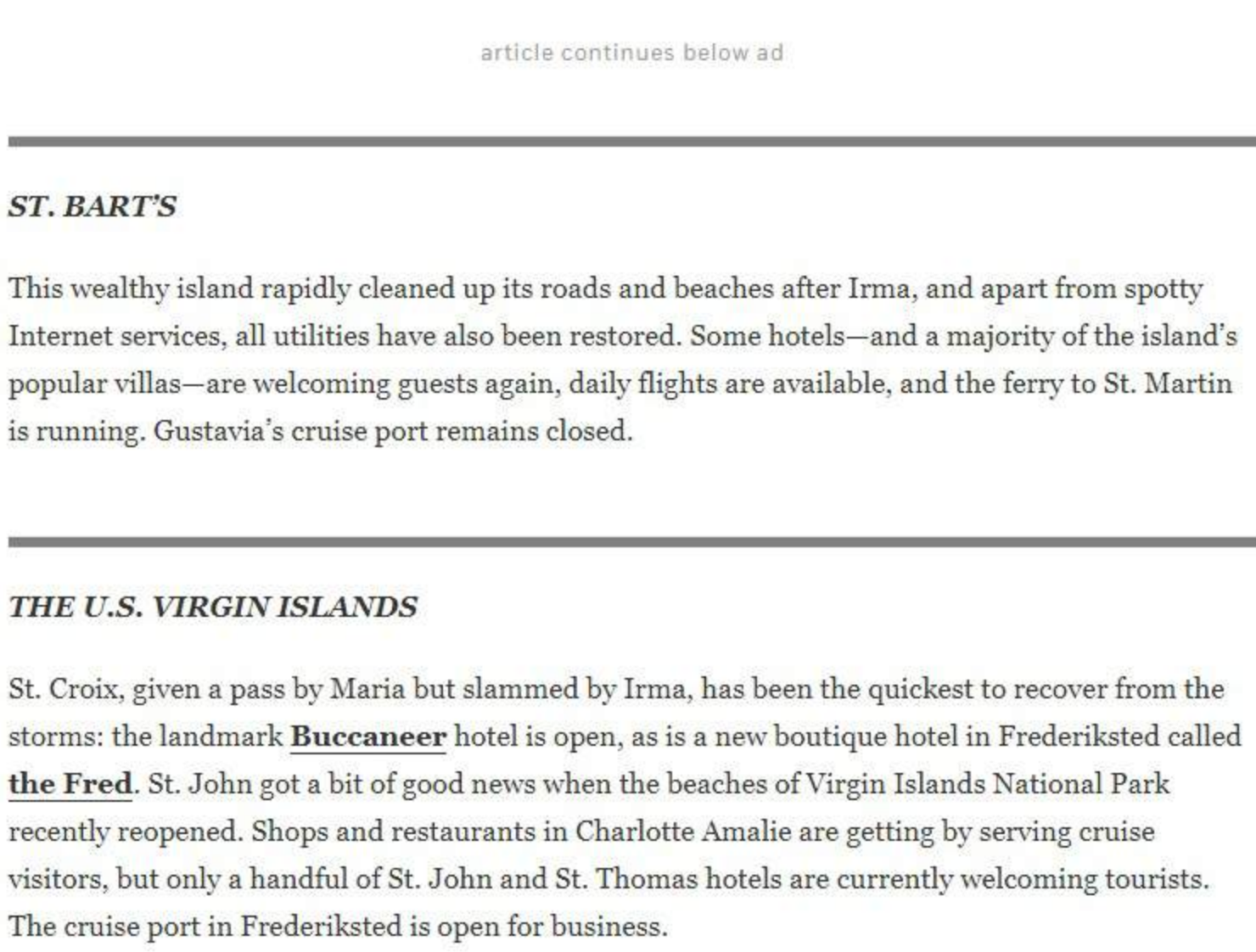
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ST. BART'S

This wealthy island rapidly cleaned up its roads and beaches after Irma, and apart from spotty Internet services, all utilities have also been restored. Some hotels—and a majority of the island's popular villas—are welcoming guests again, daily flights are available, and the ferry to St. Martin is running. Gustavia's cruise port remains closed.

THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

St. Croix, given a pass by Maria but slammed by Irma, has been the quickest to recover from the storms: the landmark **Buccaneer** hotel is open, as is a new boutique hotel in Frederiksted called **the Fred**. St. John got a bit of good news when the beaches of Virgin Islands National Park recently reopened. Shops and restaurants in Charlotte Amalie are getting by serving cruise visitors, but only a handful of St. John and St. Thomas hotels are currently welcoming tourists. The cruise port in Frederiksted is open for business.



Courtesy of The Fred
The Fred may be the hippest hotel in the USVI's most underrated town, Frederiksted, on St. Croix.