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WEEKEND BREAK

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BEAUTY & DESTRUCTION



St. Croix has sandy beaches and clear blue water. The island is a popular travel destination that was widely damaged by Hurricane Maria, a Category 5 storm that hit the region in September 2017. Photos submitted by Samantha Jones

Family from Warrenton experiences joy, challenges of life in the Caribbean

By ANNAMARIA MORRILL
For The Daily Astorian

Moving a family with seven children and three cats to a region of the world with a different culture takes courage and a leap of faith.

Samantha (“Sam”) and William (“Bill”) Jones, a couple in their 30s, were ready for a change and moved from Warrenton to St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands in February 2015. Their daughters — whose ages ranged from 1 to 12 — were allowed to take only what fit in their suitcases. Most of the family’s belongings had to stay behind, but less is needed, they soon learned, for their new life in the Caribbean.

The Jones family has adjusted to the island lifestyle. They have learned to live simpler than before. They enjoy outdoor activities and spend lots of time at beaches and tide pools. The girls have found sports teams and dance classes. Their life has changed for the better.

“The best thing that has happened since we moved here was my children being able to be outside and play,” Sam said in an email interview. “I love all the friends that we have made and how much we have learned about all the different Caribbean cultures.”

St. Croix is said to be the Virgin Islands’ hidden treasure, with a perfect combination of nature, history and adventure.

The clear, blue water, white beaches and sunshine make it a coveted travel destination. It is also known as one of the best diving locations in the world. Travel magazines praise the weather and culture, the food and friendly people.

The Joneses have learned to enjoy new meals, such as salted fish with mashed potatoes, curry chicken with vegetables, and goat. But the food is often expensive. They had to learn where to find certain foods for the best price. Sometimes they need to visit a few stores to be able to prepare a meal. Some foods are expensive — a gallon of milk, for example, can cost \$5.99.

The U.S. Virgin Islands has only 50,000 residents. The island is similar to the continental U.S. but also has many differences. On top of the tropical climate, Crucian dialect and loud “soca” music, newcomers must get used to left-side traffic and a confusing address system, in which residential areas are “lumped” into estates.

Something had to change

A couple of years ago, Sam lived through a challenging season. She had returned to work at Starbucks at Warrenton’s Fred Meyer when her youngest child was six weeks old. Her husband, Bill, was working at ITT Technical Institute in Portland and could not return home daily.

Sam was taking care of the house and their children, including keeping up with their after-school activities. Without her mother-in-law helping with the younger ones, Sam would not have been able to keep up with life’s demands. All other family members lived elsewhere in Oregon or in Washington state, where Sam and Bill are originally from.

“All I wanted was to have my husband home every night,” Sam said. The children also missed their father.

Sam and Bill knew something had to change, but Bill wasn’t able to find work in his field closer to the North Coast.

It became clear that there weren’t many local options, and the couple started talking about moving away. Sam and Bill had taken a vacation to St. Croix in September 2014; they both loved the weather, the people and the relaxing island lifestyle. They knew it would be a great place to raise their family, Sam said.



William and Samantha Jones with their seven daughters. This picture was taken in June 2016, almost a year and a half after they moved to St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands.



The Jones children are active in sports and dance. In this photo, the oldest daughter, Bria, is wearing a madras costume after performing for cruise ship tourists. She is with her younger sister, Olivia.



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