

3/21/09

Caribbean Trip

Hi everyone! We just got back from our trip to Martinique and St Lucia. We were guests of friends of one of our fellow travelers on a large catamaran. The couple is a little younger than me and took off from their careers to cruise. He did software for banks, she taught math and computers in high schools in New Jersey. They have three sons, two in college, one older. I will probably speak using English slang for a week or so, because that's where they grew up.

There was a general strike on Martinique when we arrived, making it difficult for Helen to stock supplies as she normally would. We left Port a France right away for smaller anchorages on Martinique. Most of the towns were brightly painted, but quite poor. Most of the population was black, mostly polite, especially for Frenchmen. When Helen and I went to the store in the first town, the shelves were nearly bare. Baguettes were always available and quite good. We were able to get cheap wine that was suitable for evenings, but meats and vegetables were slim pickings.

Several places we went had good snorkeling where we were anchored. So we would go explore town, then get into our suits and jump overboard. We checked out a good variety of reefs with corals, sponges, and brightly colored fish. I saw loads of beautiful sea fans, a spotted eel, things that looked like feather dusters, sponges that looked like organ pipes, sea slugs, and fireworms that looked like large underwater centipedes.

One town on Martinique that I found both especially picturesque and interesting was St Pierre. The town was totally destroyed in the eruption of Mt Pele in 1903. They had a good museum of the event and there were several ruins to be visited. In some areas of town you could see that the current building was built atop the remains of the destroyed one.

Martinique is French and used Euros. St Lucia is independent, had both French and English colonization, and used Eastern Caribbean dollars. Most things were a bit more expensive than here.

The boat is like a floating condo. Steve and Helen's quarters take up one hull, along with storage and a washing machine. The other hull has two staterooms with double beds and their own tiny bathrooms. The center area above the hulls holds the kitchen/ livingroom. We dined outside under the bimini. The boat is quite a handful to sail and doesn't react like the sloops (one hull) that I have sailed before, but it has an excellent autopilot and electric winches. The electric winches are used sparingly as they take a lot of battery power. Instead of being a gas or diesel engine, the propulsion is electric. If you are sailing fast enough, you can actually be charging the batteries. They DO have a generator for when they want to be certain that they will have thrust to maneuver or will be using something that will use a lot of power like the water maker. They also have a bank of solar panels to help charge batteries. Even so, we all were very conservative in our use of electricity and fresh water.

3/9/09 Arrived Fort de France. Hotel looked closed and we had some trouble getting in. You slept with the windows open (no screens). There was a rally going on so it was quite noisy. Not exactly five star, but reasonably clean and definitely centrally located. No restaurants open. We managed to get a chicken sandwich from a street vendor.

3/10/09 Went aboard Dignity and met Helen and Steve, sailed to Petit D'Arlet Bay. Snorkeling not very interesting. Saw lobster traps they use and a fish with huge lateral fins.

3/11/09 Moved to Ste Anne. Shops around town were closed until 3:30 pm. We saw many people beautifully dressed in black and white who gathered on the main square for a funeral in the church.

3/12/09 Snorkeled at a buoy across the bay. Moved to an anchorage at Marin.

3/13/09 Sailed 26 miles across to the Island of St Lucia. We spent the night in the Marina at Rodney Bay. They make you back into the slip. We needed help from shore tying to the dock because you are about 4 ft above the dock. Jim, Bob and I walked to Gros Islet, the older section of town. We went our separate ways for dinner, to give Helen a break from cooking and to give them some time alone together.

3/14/09 Stayed in Rodney bay, but anchored out in the bay. There was a lot of current in the good area for snorkeling and some cloudiness to the water maybe because they were dredging the channel to the marina. Hiked to the English fort on the hill of what is called Pigeon Island. It is no longer an Island, because of the land they created to build a big resort there. A huge sailing yacht anchored there that night. The Erica XII must be owned by someone VERY rich!

3/15/09 Moved to Soufriere. At onside of the bay are two peaks which are the most distinguishing characteristic of the area. They must be volcanic cones and they are right at water's edge. We were moored here. Good snorkeling under the boat. The mooring balls were a bit close together and we got VERY close to several other boats as we swung at different intervals.

3/16/09 Moved to other side of bay. We hiked up to a botanical garden/mineral spa/waterfall. Had an inexpensive barbeque lunch in Soufriere. Snorkeled under the boat in the afternoon.

3/17/09 Sailed from St Lucia back to Martinique to St Pierre. Several squalls. I had to wake Steve to take the helm, because the conditions exceeded my capabilities and I did not want to be the cause of any damage. Dinner ashore in St Pierre. We all ordered steak because they were out of fish, and out of the special. It turned out they didn't have enough steak for all of us and Steve and Jim ended up with duck.

3/18/09 Spent the day exploring St Pierre. Moved in the afternoon to Case Pilote, a fishing village nearer Ft de France.

3/19/09 Sailed past Fort de France to anchor at Anse Marin. There was a large failed resort near the point and smaller hotels nearer the town. No one else liked the snorkeling there, but I did. There wasn't current and the reef was shallow, so I could really get my face up close to the feather-duster worms, shells, coral, and sea slugs. This is where I saw my eel, too.

3/20/09 Sailed back to Fort de France so that we could arrange for a taxi to pick us up early the next morning. The stores were open, so we spent several hours wandering the streets.

3/21/09 Fly back to LA via Puerto Rico.