

May 1, 2009

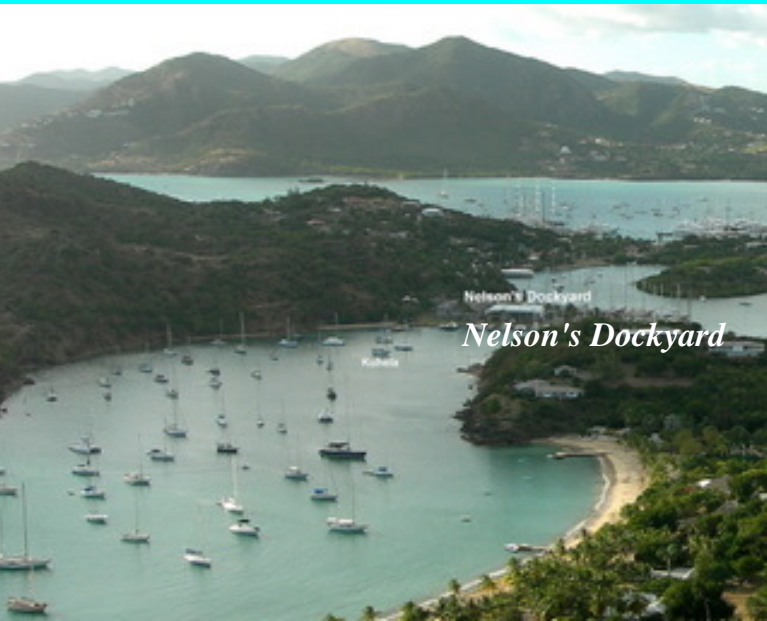
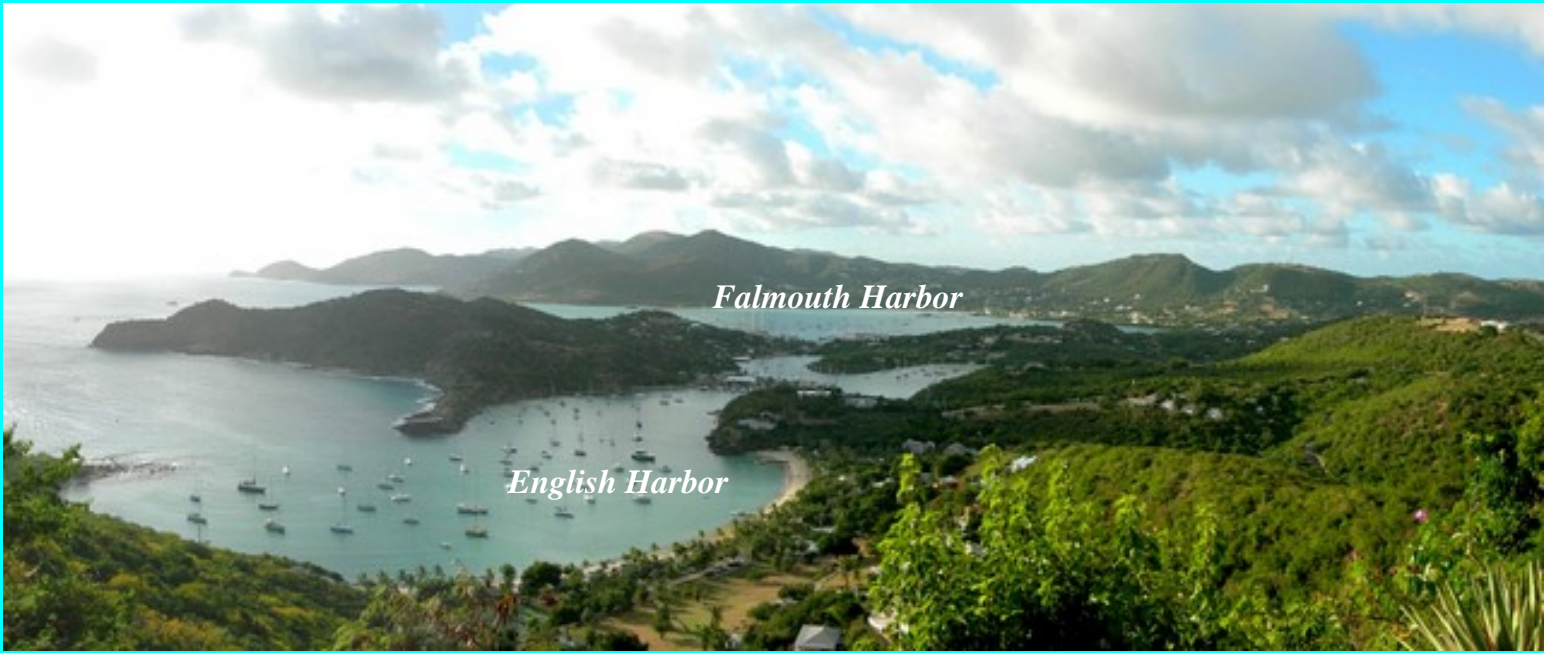
We spent just over 3 months in the Caribbean this season, from January 25 to May 1. During this period we enjoyed the island nations of Antigua, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, and Trinidad, all originally British colonies. We bypassed the French territorial islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique due to general strikes and civil unrest occurring on each of those islands during this period. The following are snapshots and glimpses into some of this season’s fondest memories.

We spent 3 weeks in Antigua before sailing south. Two very special memories of ours while in Antigua were attending the Sunday steel band concert at Shirley Heights Lookout and strolling through historic Nelson’s Dockyard.

Part of the Caribbean experience is enjoying the rhythm and sounds of calypso music and steel bands, also known as pan bands. The sounds we heard that late Sunday afternoon at Shirley Heights were simply amazing, the best of the season! With unbelievable rhythm, this steel band played not only calypso music but also classical music, making their drums sound exactly like the various instruments found in a full symphony orchestra.



Shirley Lookout also boasted spectacular views of English and Falmouth Harbors, and from our vantage point it was easy to see why the British during the 18th century had their main naval base and dockyard for the Eastern Caribbean in English Harbor. This harbor, with its narrow entrance, was an ideal port as it was easy to protect, provided a natural hurricane hole, and allowed the British to repair their ships without delay, enabling them to continually keep a squadron of ships in the Caribbean. During the European power struggle for the Caribbean islands, this advantage allowed Britain to maintain naval superiority over the other powers, especially the French, their biggest rival. And today, except for a few islands, most of these Eastern Caribbean Islands were originally British colonies. With our anchorage next to Nelson’s Dockyard, we as cruisers had complete access to this historical park, and walking through it was like taking a stroll back in time to the 18th century.



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The Old Officers' Quarters



These capstans were used to careen a ship in order to work on its bottom. Lines were attached to the top of the masts, then taken around the capstan. Men would turn the capstans and the ship would heel over on its side to expose the bottom.



The old sawpit shed; now a modern sail loft. Originally logs were rolled up the incline into the shed where they were cut into planks and timbers to be used on ships. Using a lumberman's two handle saw, two sawyers would cut the logs with one sawyer above and the other within the pit.



Remains of the sail loft at Nelson's Dockyard. Long boats, carrying sails from the ships to be repaired, would enter this inlet and then hoist the sails up to the sail loft above through a trap door. Today only the pillars remain that once supported the sail loft.

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Upon leaving Antigua, we sailed 106 nautical miles south to Dominica, stopping overnight along the way in two of Guadeloupe's bays. We sailed each day hard to windward, tacking at times, as the winds, 18 to 20 knots, came predominantly from the SE and not the NE as had been forecasted. Every afternoon the winds increased to 25 knots, quite typical for the Caribbean. Thank goodness the seas were just 2 to 3 feet, making for great sails; otherwise these sails would not have been so enjoyable and we would have taken quite a bit of water over our deck.



Sailing along the coast of Guadeloupe



Arriving in Les Saintes (Guadeloupe)

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We spent 2 weeks in Dominica anchored in Prince Rupert Bay just off the town of Portsmouth. With 2977 inhabitants, Portsmouth was the second largest town in Dominica. The island's topography consisted of lush mountainous rainforests, and rain was a common occurrence each day while we were there. With Dominica's heavy rainfall, the island boasted 365 rivers, although most probably could be categorized as streams.



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In comparison to Antigua, Dominica had much less tourism, and as such the island and its people were a refreshing change. People were genuinely friendly, and as Dominica was mostly an agricultural rural island its fresh produce was more abundant and less expensive than in Antigua. It was fun to stock up at the weekly Saturday market. We had a good time in Dominica, and during our stay three memories in particular stand out: carnival, going up the Indian River, and driving around the northern part of the island.

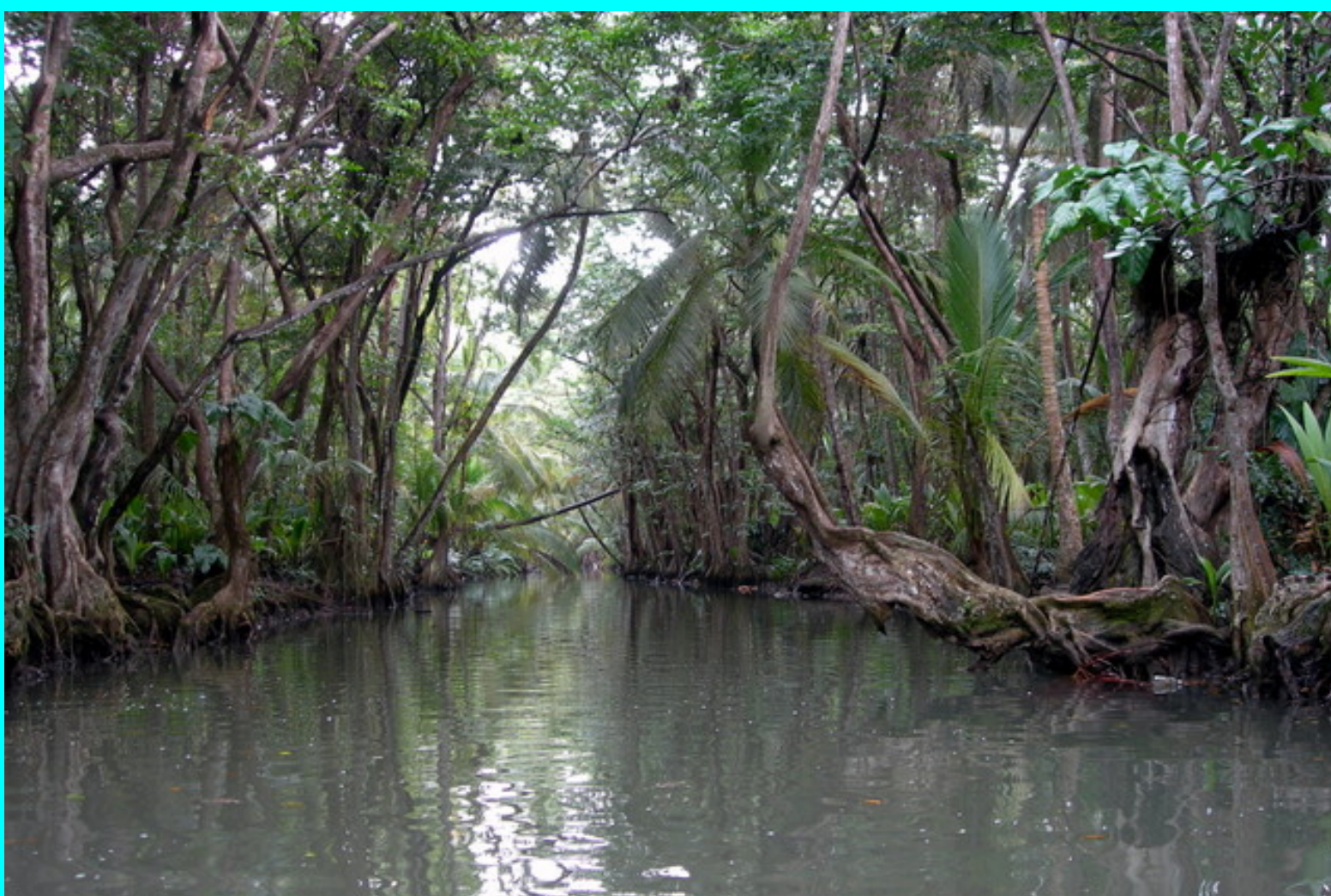


Dominica did not celebrate carnival before Lent elaborately with beautiful costumes, music, and fanfare like in Trinidad and elsewhere, and in that way it was a disappointment. Instead, Dominica's carnival was a very local, simple, spontaneous holiday event, especially in the small town of Portsmouth. For two days, both in the mornings and late afternoons, locals celebrated dancing in the streets to music coming mostly from loudspeakers on a flatbed truck. Many of the costumes were created using long, thin strips of plastic, and anyone who wished could join in the fun. It was the watching of the locals having pure spontaneous fun that was special.



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Early one morning we took a guided rowboat trip up the Indian River. Seeing the part of the river where Calypso's house had been located during the filming of Pirates of the Caribbean was the highlight. Swamp bloodwood trees with their massive twisted buttress root systems lined the river's sides, making the setting most eerie. That evening we watched again Pirates of the Caribbean, Dead Man's Chest and recognized immediately those shots.



Before leaving Dominica, we took a day's tour around the northern half of the island. About one-third of Dominica's labor force presently worked in agriculture, and during our drive along Dominica's north coast we saw a few banana farms. (Currently, all bananas are being shipped to Great Britain.) We also traveled through Carib Territory located on Dominica's east coast and saw the traditional cassava bread being made from the root of the manioc plant. At this time, around 3000 Caribs (or Kalinagos), the indigenous Caribbean people, resided on this land. Later, we took a refreshing swim in one of Dominica's many fresh waterfall pools.



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Logs of the Sailing Vessel

"Kuhela"

Pictures and a Narrative of our Travels

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01/31/2009 Passage Canary Islands to Antigua

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09/10/2008 Departing Med West

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10/15/03 East Coast Panama; Caribbean

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06/04/03 Zihuatanejo, Mexico to El Slavador

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05/11/03 Puerto Vallarta to Zihuatanejo Mexico

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04/06/03 La Paz to Puerto Valarta, Mexico

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03/15/03 Ensenada to La Paz, Mexico

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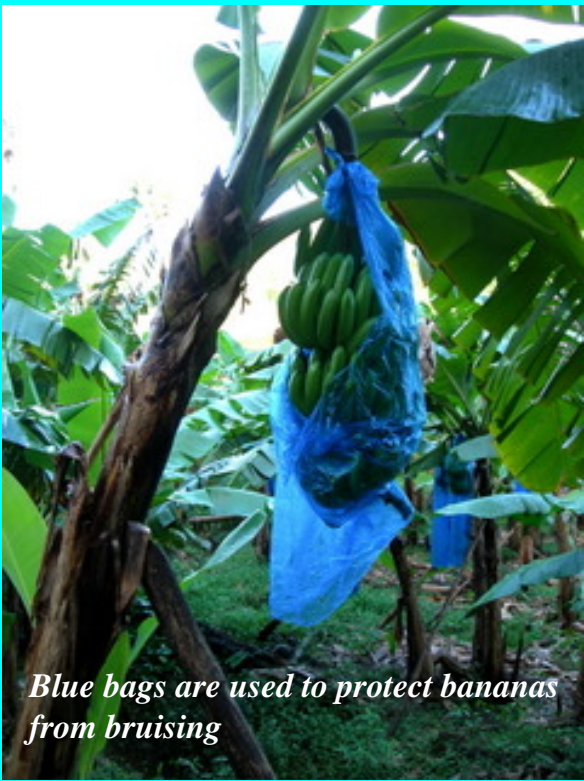
03/01/03 Ventura, CA to Ensenada, Mexico

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11/15/02 Passage: San Francisco to Ventura

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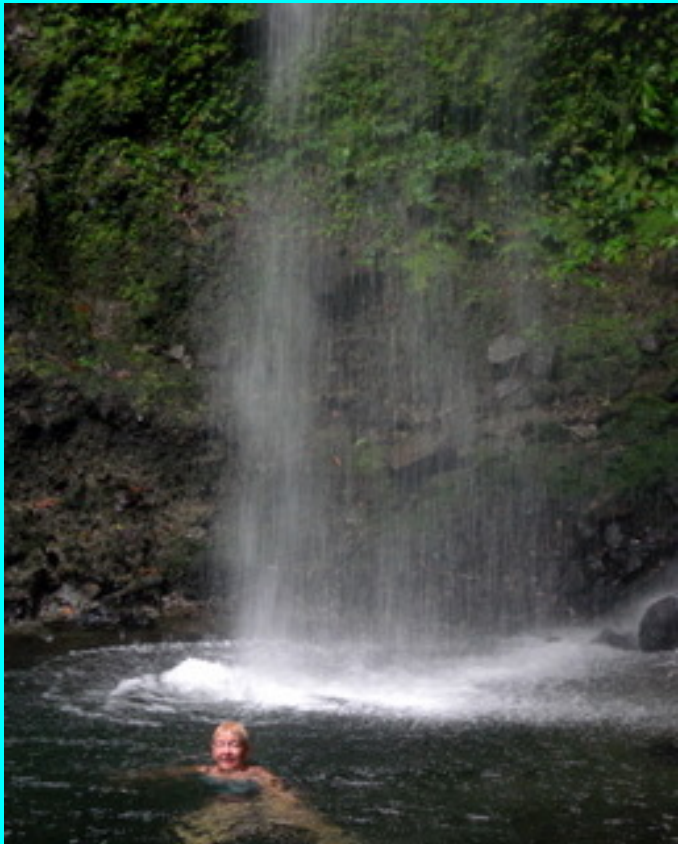
10/03/02 Bellingham to San Francisco



Blue bags are used to protect bananas from bruising



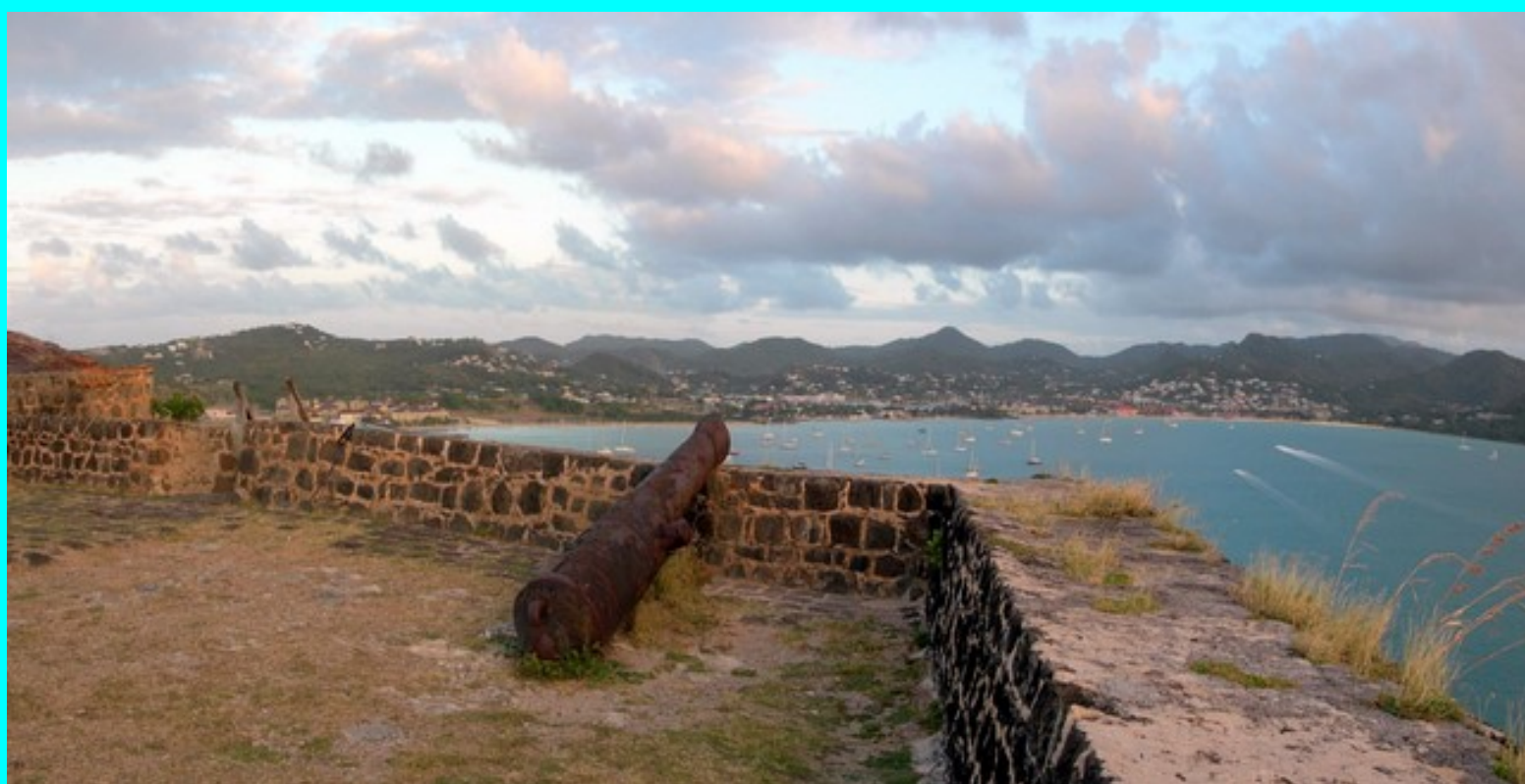
Preparing bananas for export



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After Dominica, we traveled 100 nautical miles south to St. Lucia, stopping overnight in Martinique. Both days we sailed on a close-haul. The first day across the Martinique Passage the seas were 6 feet, and we took lots of water over our deck. Thankfully the seas across the St. Lucia Channel were just 2 to 3 feet, making for a great sail that day. By the time we arrived in St. Lucia, we had only 6 weeks left before we needed to be in Trinidad. Although we had been enjoying the southern Caribbean, we had generally been disappointed in the number of protected anchorages since departing Antigua. Both Dominica and St. Lucia each had only one good anchorage, and the anchorage in Rodney Bay was prone to surge. Due to this and the fact that we wanted to spend 2 to 3 weeks in the Grenadines, we stayed only 8 days in St. Lucia. Like in Dominica, the people of St. Lucia were friendly, and the island as a whole had a good feel to it.

Most interesting during our stay in Rodney Bay was our visit to Fort Rodney on Pigeon Island. Once a separate island, it was now joined to the main island by a causeway. During the colonial period, either due to war or as a result of treaties, Caribbean islands were exchanged occasionally between European colonial powers. St. Lucia hit the all-time record as it changed hands 14 times between the French and the British. Standing on top of Fort Rodney, it was easy to visualize the two navies at one time playing “cat and mouse” around this small island. Also of interest was the fact that for awhile during World War II the United States had a squadron at Fort Rodney, as it was feared that the Germans might expand the war to the Caribbean.



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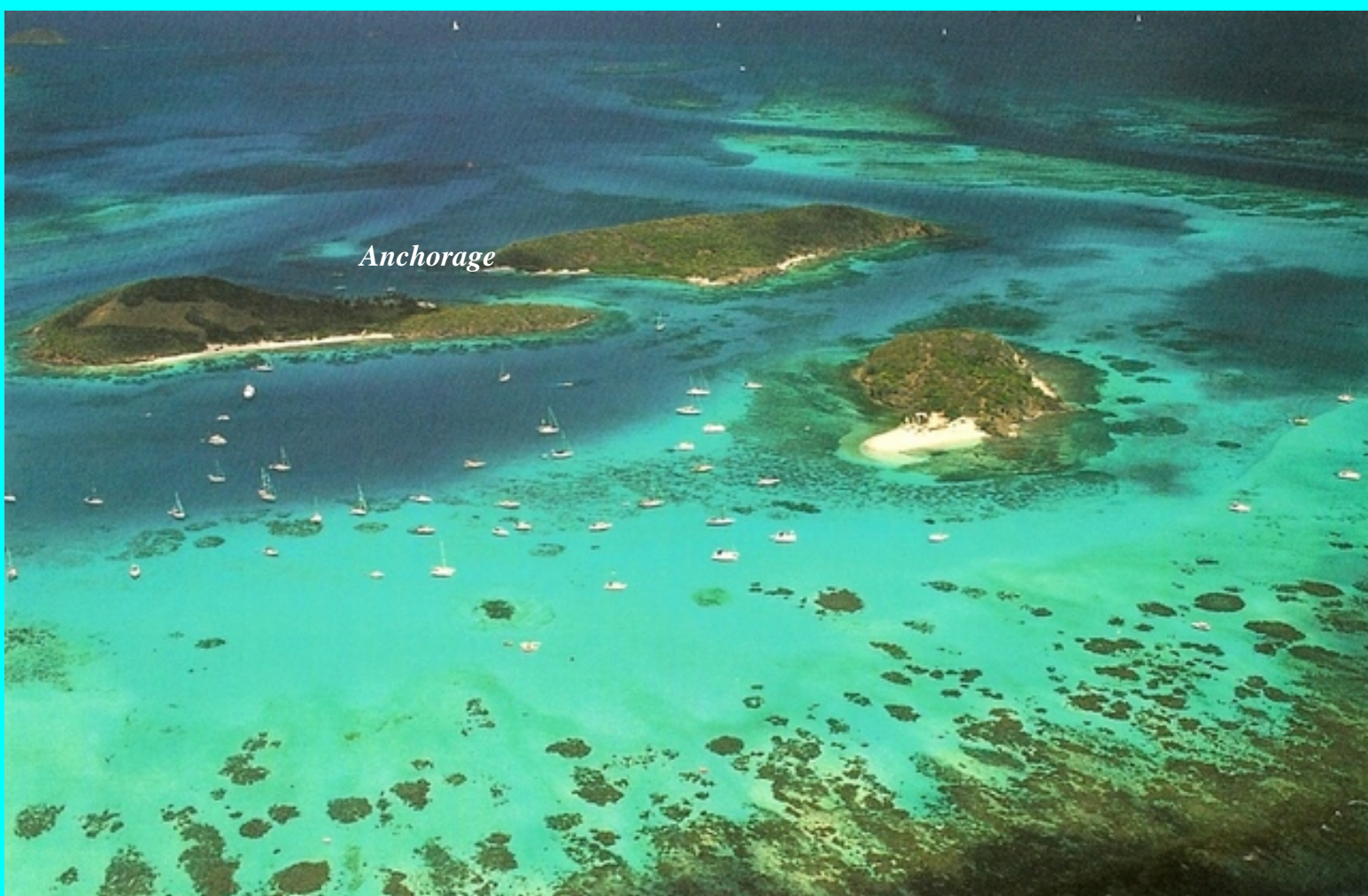


Located in southern St. Lucia, the Pitons were St. Lucia's most famous landmark. We were lucky to be able to anchor just one night in Soufriere with a ringside view of the Pitons before heading on to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. These two peaks were indeed breathtaking!

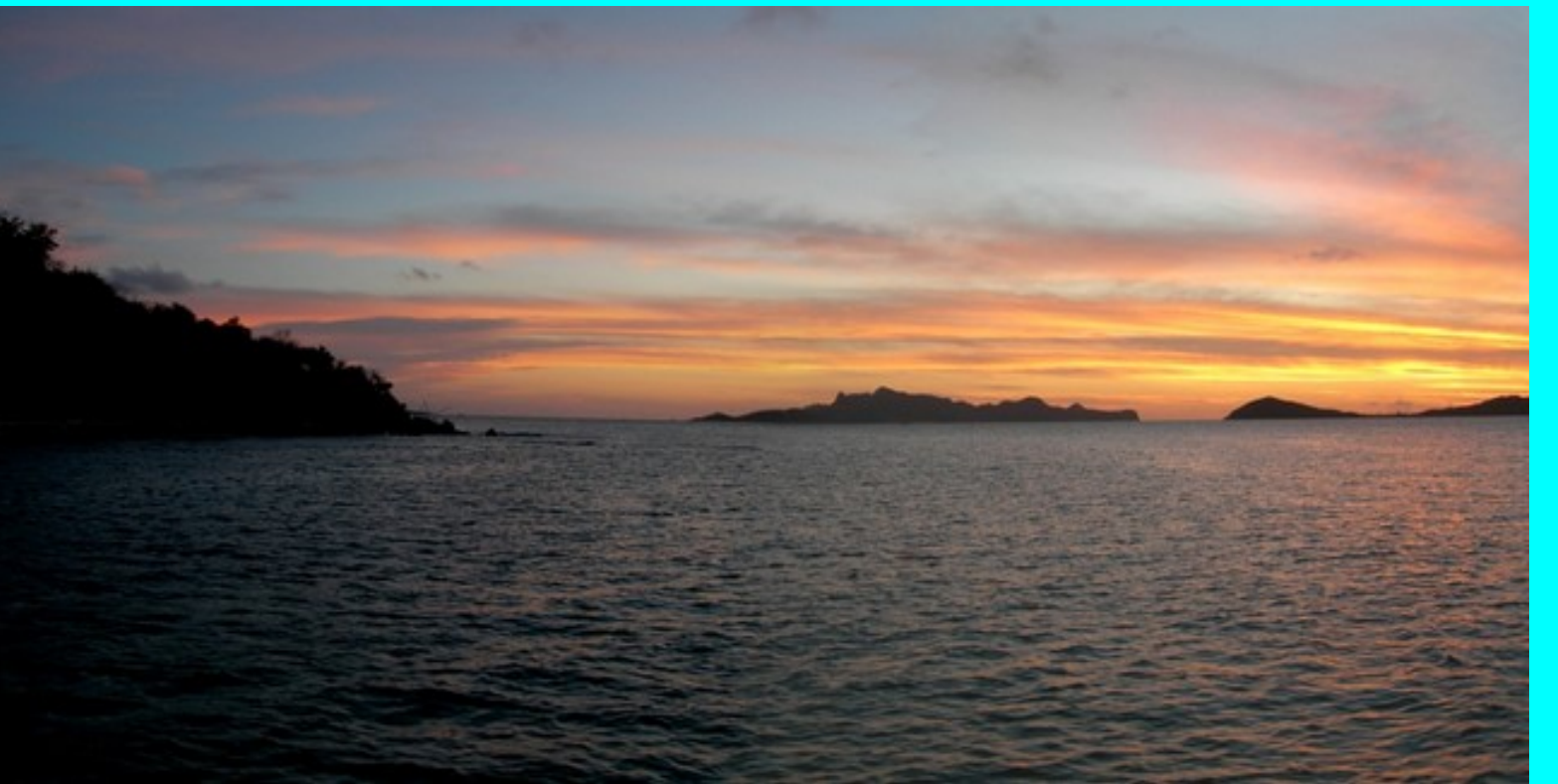


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With relatively calm seas, sailing first on a broad reach and then on a close-haul, we had a great passage across both channels from St. Lucia south to Bequia in the northern Grenadines, 55 miles away. After a week in Bequia we sailed 25 miles south to the Tobago Cays in the southern Grenadines, stopping overnight in Canouan. Before arriving in the Caribbean, we had always imagined small islands, crystal-clear turquoise water, white sandy beaches, and beautiful sunsets. This Caribbean picture finally became a reality in the Tobago Cays. These five uninhabited islets, now a marine park, were beautiful. Taking advantage of good weather, we timed our visit to the Tobago Cays just perfectly, making our visit most memorable. Surrounded by reefs, the snorkeling was good (although much coral had been damaged by hurricanes), with the highlight being our observation of the Green turtle. Afterwards we enjoyed anchorages in Mayreau and Union Island before heading south to the island nation of Grenada.



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Clifton Harbor Union Island



Janti's Bar



Janti's Bar on Happy Island. Janti built the island out of couch shells using the reef as a base



Its a rough life



Main Square, Clifton, Union Island



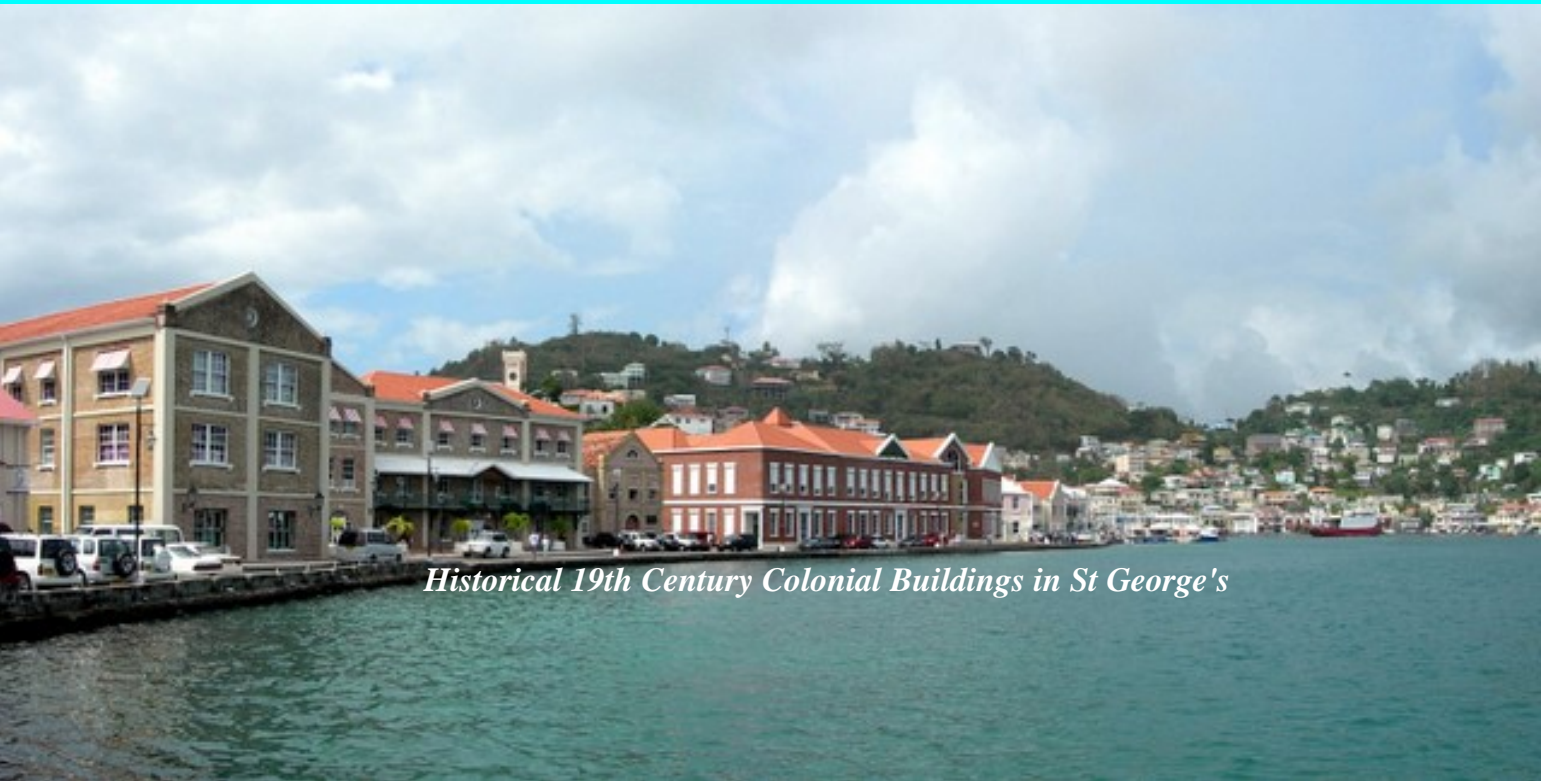
A Traditional Caribbean Schooner

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From Union Island to the southern end of Grenada was 43 nautical miles. We stopped for a few days in Tyrrel Bay on the island of Carriacou, enjoying an evening of local pan music, before sailing south along the windward side of Grenada to St. David's Harbor, a secluded cove on the southeast coast of Grenada. At this time, we just wanted to enjoy some peaceful days relaxing onboard our boat in some beautiful remote sheltered cove before heading south to Trinidad. We knew that once we arrived in Trinidad our life would become quite busy as we prepared Kuhela for our six month departure. Looking at the chart, the southern end of Grenada seemed like it had a few possible anchorages that met our criteria. Hence, our intention was to anchor first in St. David's Harbor, check it out, and then continue on west to some of the other anchorages. Well, we never left St. David's Harbor; it met our criteria and we fell in love with it. We stayed for a few days.



We had a wonderful relaxing time in Grenada, but two unusual “local” experiences will always be remembered. One day we took the local bus into St. George's, the capital. Basically, when a Grenada bus is filled to capacity there is still room for one more person, making our bus ride that day a very “squeezed” experience. Another day we took a long walk over to the next bay. This day we learned the “true” meaning of the Caribbean phrases “just there” and “just now.” These words essentially mean any distance and any time between now and an hour from now. To say the least, we were tired upon our return to the boat.



Historical 19th Century Colonial Buildings in St George's

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Late Tuesday afternoon, April 14, we departed Grenada and sailed overnight to Chaguaramas, Trinidad, a distance of 83 nautical miles. With winds E at 15 knots, we had a good sail across the channel, although due to a strong westerly setting current we mostly sailed on a close-haul. After clearing customs, we moored our boat at Coral Cove Marina. On Thursday, April 30, we hauled Kuhela out of the water, and on Friday, May 1, we flew home for our younger son's graduation from the University of South Florida at St. Petersburg.



We return to Trinidad on November 1. Before departing Trinidad, we would like to see some of the island and hopefully attend one of Trinidad's steel pan competitions, as these competitions are supposedly the best in the Caribbean as calypso music and pan bands originated in Trinidad. Once leaving Trinidad, we will sail the boat northward through the eastern Caribbean islands, hopefully exploring further the islands of Grenada, St. Vincent, and St. Lucia, and finally visiting the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Our plan is to arrive back in Florida in late May or early June 2010.

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