

CARIBBEAN ADVENTURE

WILLAMETTE INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL ◊ TRIP REPORT ◊ JULY 20-27, 2014

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We spent two weeks island hopping to Saint Martin/Sint Maarten, Anguilla, St. Thomas and St. John USVI. We first traveled to Saint Martin/Sint Maarten. The island both a territory of the Dutch and the French. There is definitely a difference between the two sides of the island, St. Martin on the French side is more developed and has a more European feel, Sint Maarten on the Dutch side is less developed, although this is the side of the island where the cruise ships stop. I was told as many as a dozen ships can be in port at once during high season. Most of the flights from outside the Caribbean land at Princess Juliana Airport on the Dutch side of the island. Many of you may have heard about this airport as it's on the list of the world's scariest runways; it has one of the shortest runways in the world, although you don't really notice when you are landing!

From the time we arrived on the island we felt that the people were very friendly and helpful. We rented a car so that we could explore the island and visit some of the more isolated Beaches, although taxis are plentiful. We stayed on the Dutch side of the island, near Phillipsburg, the capital, this area can be very busy when the cruise ships are in port. The French side of the island is not as busy, and the French capital of Marigot is much larger, with more restaurants, shops, etc and has a very French feel. The island is quite hilly, the views when driving around the island are spectacular.

Anguilla is quite close to Saint Martin/Sint Maarten and there are several options for getting between the islands. One can take a private yacht between the islands, another popular way to get to Anguilla is by public ferry – the ferry leaves from the French side, the ferry terminal is a short taxi ride from the airport. The ferry takes 20-25 minutes. There are also yachts that will take you on a day trip to Anguilla.

Anguilla is a small, low key island with several quiet and secluded resorts. Very lovely uncrowded white sand beaches and beautiful blue water, and many good restaurants are the norm. The island is only 32 sq miles in area and 13 miles long and there are 4 stop lights! Again, we rented a car in Anguilla. They drive on the left side of the road, but one drives from

the normal driver's seat on the left side of the car. Anguilla requires tourists to have an Anguillan Driver's license, which the car rental company can issue to you; cost is \$20.00. Also, there are taxis available; the taxis tend to be expensive. A majority of the accommodations on the island are small upscale properties which have a very welcoming and laid back feel. Many of the accommodations and restaurants are located on the West End of the island. As you would expect, food can be expensive on the island since most all of it is imported.

We flew from Anguilla to St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands, being a major cruise stop there is a lot to do in St. Thomas; shopping, restaurants, night life, as well as some history. St. Thomas has grown a lot since I was last there over 20 years ago; there are many hotels and resorts now and the cruise port is quite developed.

We spent a day on the island of St. John, which is much less developed than St. Thomas, because more than 2/3 of the island is a National Park. There are many places to hike, snorkel and swim. You can get to St. John by passenger ferry from Charlotte Amalie, or take a car ferry (really more like a barge) from Red Hook; a 30 minute drive from Charlotte Amalie and docks at Cruz Bay, St. John. The car barge is an interesting experience - watching the ferry staff squeeze as many cars and delivery trucks on the ferry as they can! The town of Cruz Bay is now a quaint resort town, with small restaurants and boutique shops, although parking in town definitely is a problem.

April/May is a nice time to visit the Caribbean; the weather is mid-80's during the day, not too cool in the evenings, and more importantly not overly humid. Overall we felt that the people on every island were very friendly and made us feel quite at home on each island.

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