

Monday 16th April . . . farewell St John's, Antigua

So, we really feel we're on our way now – just 5 days before our final shore day in Ponta Delgada, Azores, having enjoyed our last two days in the Caribbean. And nine days to Southampton!



Situation on board is a little concerning. Having managed the first three or four weeks without physical issues we appear to have some sort of gastric bug aboard so last evening we were a third or a quarter fewer at dinner. To prevent the spread, Fred acts fast. No more help yourself buffets – one is served by a waiter with plastic gloves to avoid sharing tongs/spoons. No more salt 'n' pepper pots or jugs of milk – all cartons ... and ever more vigilance with anti-bacteria hand wash – even our plastic embarkation cards are wiped down before and after being swiped. If you do suffer, even the suggestion of a gastric issue, you are cabin-bound for 24/48 hours. Even the jigsaws have been cling-filmed over. What if the bridge playing is

stopped? So many people are involved - beginners, improvers and the experienced – there could be a mutiny with five sea days coming up if they aren't allowed to play!!

Yesterday, we spent the day in Phillipsburg on St Maarten. We caught the water taxi from the harbour to the town. For the first time since the Pacific Islands, we had brilliant turquoise blue seas. The town has a wide sandy beach, overlooking Great Bay. Although it was Sunday many of the touristy shops were open. We walked the beach, we had coffee (always better than on the boat), we looked for a bus that would take us to the French side of the island but didn't find one. It's a fascinating place, as Phillipsburg is on the smaller Dutch side of the island with its language, government, police, health provision, education (Dutch and English taught) while the French side (with just French in schools) is, likewise entirely independent. And strangely, this in a small, triangular island, something like twenty miles, east/west and north/south, at its widest.



We had a lazy afternoon, apart from Nick going back into town to make contact with home, and coming back delighted that

young Joe, who was just stringing a few words together when we left, has been asking how many sleeps before granddad is home. This was followed by a grand leaving-port party at eleven last evening which was great as we came out of the harbour, but as we hit the open sea it became rocky. One very tall lady was enjoying the party so much, she tumbled into the band and I see, today, that she has her arm in a sling. By the time we packed up there were three people dancing and we made up two thirds of that number!



Unusually, I was the one up to see us approach St John's, Antigua. I figure this might be the last time I pass this way again so I'm making the most of it.

However, we were both up, breakfasted, and in town before ten . . . where there was huge competition for trade to *do* one of the popular circuits of the island. We found ourselves being used as 'bait' to lure others to join the mini-bus taxi. Sonny was so anxious to completely fill the

vehicle that 4 people bailed out and he lost two fifths of his income for the day. He very nearly lost us too!

However, once on our way with Sonny and a charming local girl, the tour was well worth it and half the price of one we could have booked on board (tho' the Black Watch lot did get a tot of rum!)

We travelled to the English Harbour – the safest place for boats in storms, though, in fact, most of the sailing boats

we saw in the harbour will be safely across the Atlantic and in the Med by the time the hurricane season starts. We stopped to look at a charming Anglican Church in one village, part breeze block, part stone, part brick, with a corrugated tin roof and simple diamond-stained glass windows: simple, but clearly a much loved and cared for place of worship. Then we continued through the rain forest where pineapples grow by the roadside, also bananas. Mangos were just starting to swell and ripen and there were also the bread fruit trees we had seen on the Pacific Islands. Then we passed a number of beautiful beaches I had previously spotted from the boat as we sailed in this morning – yellow sand, palm trees and shades of turquoise sea. We were back on board for lunch and an early sail-away. First, a steel band from ashore played for us and were given a warm reception. Then the Black Watch Orchestra played us out and there was a real party atmosphere and interaction with guests on the mammoth boat alongside.

We are now 'on our way' and rockin' and rolling along. I am having to get used to sleeping with creaks and groans again (from the boat, not Nick) as it's been so calm for the last week or more. Nick has slept for the afternoon. His sight went funny this morning – a precursor to a migraine - and he's feeling a tad out of sorts. We are deciding whether or not we need to declare his state of health to the doctors. Watch this space!

