

March 2010

7day/6nite rate was \$2195 each (\$4390 total). Rate drops 15% for repeat cruisers. It really was a sensational trip and we'll do it again. We went with ten other couples from our yacht club. All were repeaters, except us, with two couples making their fifth trip.

We got back home late Monday night after spending 12 days in the Caribbean. On the way to Miami (2/18), we flew just off the coast and I could see that Florida has a serious smog problem. As we let down for landing in Miami, a thick, dirty haze layer about 2000 feet thick topped out at 10,000 feet. When we were at altitude, I could see all the way across Florida, once in the smog, everything beyond five miles was obscured. The pilot on our Embraer regional jet touched down in Miami and then executed a go-around. Not knowing why he applied power when we were already on the runway, gave me a very uncomfortable feeling. He didn't say anything until we almost finished the downwind leg, then said "Sorry folks, we bounced the landing." Hmmm.

On the legs to/from the USVI, we saw many of the Bahamas' chain of islands and the complex intermix of water depths with deep blue, green, turquoise, sandy brown and white showing among brown and green land masses. It's obvious that navigation must be a challenge in those waters.

We spent a few days in St. John before boarding a huge sailboat (Arabella) and two days afterward in St. Thomas. The week on Arabella, a 160' three-masted schooner, was an excellent experience. The boat was formerly owned by Kelly McGillis. When she sold it, the new owners lengthened the boat with a 30 foot plug and added the third mast.

Arabella was spotless and is superbly well-maintained. Except when going ashore for dinner or shopping, we were barefoot and casually dressed in tee shirts and bathing suits. With only 20 cabins, max passenger load is 40. We had 38 on our trip. Every day we had the opportunity to snorkel and kayak in some very pretty spots, including the caves on BVI's Norman Island. Robert Louis Stephenson wrote Treasure Island while living there and used it as his model.

On Vieques, Puerto Rico, we anchored by the small town of Esperanza. At night, we swam in the island's bioluminescent bay, where little organisms glow when the water is disturbed. Even the fish leave about a 2 foot trail of white as they swim. Also had a great meal at Club Seabourne on Culebra – grouper and rice/vegetable mix. I have to learn how Puerto Ricans prepare their rice and veggies. The rice had a yellow color, veggies were crisp and the combo was delicious.

With 4 male and 4 female, mostly New England, crewmembers; Captain and First mate – both with 150 ton Masters licenses, a cook, engineer, able seaman, and 3 gals who ran the hotel services, the service, food, organization and friendliness were unequalled. We anchored every night and transferred ashore in a 21' rigid inflatable. Coffee was ready for early risers before 6AM and I enjoyed sitting on the fantail with a cup, watching the sunrise. We ate breakfast, lunch and one dinner aboard. The other five nights we ate ashore at some very nice places in Culebra, Puerto Rico, Caneel Bay Plantation on St. John, Tortola, Norman Island and Foxy's (a well-known sail-boater's hangout) on Jost Van Dyke.

After staying on St. John for 3 nights before the cruise and St. Thomas for 2 nights afterward, we got a good feel for life in the US and Brit Virgin Islands. Everything in the Virgin Islands is

VERY costly, except bottles of booze. The British Virgin Islands are prettier, and better maintained, than the USVI. Driving and crossing streets can be a challenge because everyone drives "Brit style" ... keeping to the left side of the road.

Prices we paid while vacationing in any of the Hawaiian Islands were probably 40-50% less expensive than in the USVI and BVI. Only difference is that you have a much longer plane ride to Hawaii.

It was 85 when we left St. Thomas and was 42 when we got home. Today, it is snowing. I can feel my tan fading already!

Norm Blinn