



Playing pirate of the Caribbean on the Royal Clipper

Posted on December 1, 2015 in Katherine Rodeghier's Blog



Whenever my friends Pete and Ken invite me to join them on their 38-foot sailboat for a cruise along the Chicago lakefront, I am always quick to say yes. There's something so stimulating about slicing the surface of Lake Michigan, sails taut against the wind. And I'm always sad when sailing season ends here in the Midwest and I must wait months for another chance to get on the water. But this year, I won't have to. I'm heading to the Caribbean for a week-long cruise on the largest, full-rigged sailing ship in the world. Star Clippers operates three of the largest and tallest sailing vessels on the planet and I'll board its biggest, the Royal Clipper. With five masts and 42 sails, this 439-foot vessel dwarfs my friends' sailboat but still promises to satisfy my longing for seafaring.

Plenty of ocean liners crisscross the Caribbean, but few offer the experience of cruising under the billowing sails of a tall ship. I hope to join passengers in playing pirate of the Caribbean by climbing rigging to the crow's nest for a 360-degree ocean view, take a lesson in the art of tying sailor's knots, help the crew raise the sails, practice sailing maneuvers and learn about celestial navigation.

No pirate ever had access to the luxuries of this vessel, though. With a capacity of 227 passengers and staff of 106, the Royal Clipper promises the pampering atmosphere of a private sailing yacht. Along with three swimming pools, a three-deck atrium, fine dining, a spa and health club it has a water-sports deck with plenty of equipment: Zodiac rafts, water skis, paddleboards, wake boards. I'll have free use of snorkel equipment, too. Who knows, I might spot Nemo down below.

My cruise will begin and end in Barbados. En route the Royal Clipper will call at Grenada where I might visit a nutmeg cooperative and cocoa plantation; Tobago Cays for swimming and snorkeling at Marine National Park; St. Vincent where Johnny Depp played Capt. Jack Sparrow during the filming of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" series; Bequia, largest island in the Grenadines; the French

island of Martinique; and St. Lucia where I hope to visit the world's only drive-in volcano, La Soufriere.

Won't you sail away with me?

Chillin' in Barbados

Posted on December 14, 2015 in [Katherine Rodeghier's Blog](#)



Chillin' by the pool in Barbados

I love to cruise. But flying to the cruise port of embarkation is another matter.

For my cruise on Star Clippers' Royal Clipper I was assigned a 5 a.m. departure to Miami with a tight connection to Barbados. From Chicago's O'Hare. In December.

Uh, no.

Seriously, 5 o'clock in the morning? Might as well not go to bed at all. And I've been burned too many times by late flights, missed and near missed connections, especially in winter.

The worst was a flight to Tahiti to catch the former Tahitian Princess. I spent a good part of a wedding reception the night before on the phone with the airline that had cancelled our flight to LAX because an ice storm hit Chicago. The agent worked hard to help us, but our only option was a flight to Orange County because that plane was already on the ground at O'Hare and still scheduled for departure. We took it and booked a ground transfer from John Wayne Airport to LAX. Wouldn't you know, our luggage was the last off the plane and our driver had to race to LAX. We made it with just minutes to spare. I don't think my heart stopped racing until we were halfway across the Pacific.

Sure glad we didn't miss that cruise through French Polynesia. It still ranks as one of our favorites.



Banks the beer of Barbados

So to spare us stress, and my blood pressure, I booked us on a late-morning flight two days prior to embarkation on the Royal Clipper. Instead of a stressful, sleepless slog, we had a glorious day and a half at a three-star hotel at the end of Dover Beach.

As it turned out, I need not have worried. The weather in Chicago was unseasonably spring-like and the arrival gate in Miami was just five away from the Barbados flight.

You just never know.

Still, we have no regrets about our stay in Barbados. The hotel was clean and affordable and well located, just a short stroll down the sand from Sandals Barbados resort. We had a nice walk to St. Lawrence Gap checking out the various eateries for dinner and finally settled on Crave (craverestaurantbarbados.com) because the owner, standing at the entrance, was so charming. I had baby scallops with linguine in a nice cream sauce. My husband, Bill, the fresh fish of the day. Both excellent.

It helped that we arrived in time for happy hour: two-for one drinks. My rum punch(s) hit the spot.

Anyone who knows Bill knows his fondness for beer and he was quite pleased with Banks, the beer of Barbados. In fact, he persuaded the owner to let him keep the glass for a friend whose last name is Banks.



Sunset on Dover Beach Barbados

We found Barbados to be among the most pleasant Caribbean islands we have visited. Clean and well managed. It's the easternmost of the islands, nicknamed "Little England." Discovered by the Portuguese and then claimed by England, it became independent in 1966.

Another loll by the pool in the morning sun, then off to the cruise terminal. Shops inside are set up in buildings resembling colorful Barbados houses. We had time for lunch before embarkation, but were disappointed to find only one outdoor bar with a limited menu. One good point: more Banks Beer.

Can't wait to board the Royal Clipper, our home for the next week.

Photos by Katherine Rodeghier

All aboard the Royal Clipper

Posted on December 15, 2015 in Katherine Rodeghier's Blog

ABOARD THE ROYAL CLIPPER-“Which way to the ship, the Royal Clipper?”

The worker in the cruise terminal in Barbados looked at me as if I'd lost my mind. "It's right there, madam, in front of you," he said, pointing.

And there it was. I expected the Royal Clipper to be big. It is, after all, the largest full-rigged sailing ship in the world, but the size of it still surprised me. Standing alongside the dock, I could see only a portion of its 439-foot length.

Boarding was a breeze. We filled out the necessary paperwork—health forms and waivers—in the terminal, then joined a short line of passengers waiting to climb the gangway up to the ship where we were greeted by Captain Mariusz, a deckhand offering moist towels, and a server with a tray of refreshing fruit punch. Then onto a lounge to turn over our passports and cruise documents, run a credit-card tab and pick up our room key/ship ID cards. Quick and easy.



Lower deck cabin on the Royal Clipper

Our cabin is smaller than we are used to, but that was expected, too. This is a sailing vessel, not a behemoth ocean liner. Still we found plenty of drawers and niches to store all the clothes and gear we'd brought for two people for a week's voyage. A TV and

DVD player promised entertainment when we could pull ourselves away from on-deck activities. Nice wood paneling and furnishings gave the small space warmth. Two portholes provided a view right at the waterline. Cabins on the higher decks are larger, with windows and verandas, and I'm told these are among the first to sell out.

Next time.

After the compulsory muster drill, given in both English and German, we changed for dinner. Dress on board is casual. The only real rule: no flip-flops or shorts at dinner. I promised myself I would not overdo the food as I have on other cruises. We'll see. But I'm off to a good start, limiting myself to just three courses. OK, four: I had to have the cheese plate as well dessert. To drink a grand vin Bordeaux without at least a few bites of cheese would be a tragedy, right?



Greeted with a refreshing drink

The best part of the day came just after 10 o'clock when the Royal Clipper prepared to disembark. On deck we watched, spellbound, as the crew scurried about, playing out ropes and adjusting rigging, unfurling most of the ship's 42 sails on five masts. The Champagne Bar was open and many passengers sat with flutes in hand gazing up at the taut ivory sails, bright stars filling the dark sky between them. As we pulled away from port we passed an ocean liner whose passengers lined the railings watching us. We must have been quite a sight, and I'm betting more than one aboard envied us.

Out into the open ocean, the ship gently swayed, not enough to make us uncomfortable. On the contrary, we fell asleep under fluffy duvets, rocked like babies in a cradle.

Post and photos by Katherine Rodeghier

Aboard the Royal Clipper: Getting to know you in the Grenadines

Posted on December 16, 2015 in Katherine Rodeghier's Blog

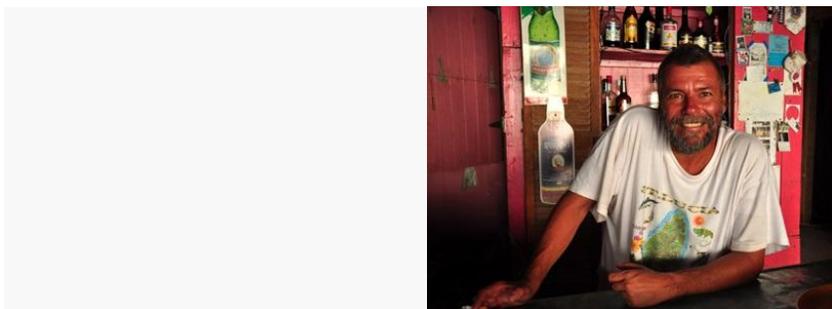
ABOARD ROYAL CLIPPER—One of the advantages of cruising on a small ship is the opportunity to get to know people: passengers, crew and locals. The Royal Clipper has a capacity of 227 passengers, but on our sailing, during the lull between Thanksgiving and Christmas, there are about 130 on board, so faces are quickly becoming familiar. We started off the morning with a more formal welcome by Captain Mariusz Szalek who turned the floor over to Cathleen Donath, our cruise director, for the introduction of the crew. The entire staff numbers over 100, so just the heads of each department came out to greet us, all dressed in crisp, sailor whites, except for the head bartender who sported a colorful tropical shirt.



Beach at Union Island, Grenadines

Someone asked Cathleen to give the native country of each person she introduced and we were amazed by the variety of nationalities among the crew. Captain Mariusz is from Poland and Cathleen is from Germany, hence her ability to quickly switch between English and German as she made introductions and gave us instructions and advice about the events of the day. Executive chef Devon Hodges is from Jamaica. We all joked that next to the captain, he's the most important member of the crew. Maitre'd Franjo Ravljva hails from Montenegro, the ship's musician from Hungary. Massage therapists Bernie and Marichell from the Philippines. Cathleen called the four blond, blue-eyed members of the water sports crew the "Swedish mafia." After introductions, they passed out complimentary snorkeling equipment that we'll keep for the remainder of the cruise.

Our first port of call is described in the cruise literature as "Best of the Grenadines" and the captain has chosen to anchor this afternoon off Union Island for a few hours of beach time. Tenders ran between ship and the secluded beach every half hour. With no dock on shore, the tender crew pulled as close to the water's edge as possible, lowered the front of the bow and helped us jump down to the sand.



Mark, bartender on the beach, Union Island

On our ride over we chatted up a couple from southern England who liked their first cruise on the Royal Clipper so much there signed up for this, their second voyage. Their son enjoyed the experience so much he's applied to crew on the Clipper after he graduates from college in the spring. A Japanese mom and seven-year-old daughter were also aboard, the little girl tugging off her sun hat as the tender pulled away from the ship. A young couple from Sacramento, Calif., told us they chose the Royal Clipper

because friends had talked up their Caribbean honeymoon on the Windjammer so they went online to find an alternative. They proclaimed the Clipper “awesome.”

The age of passengers on our cruise is all over the board. Although most schools are still in session, there are a few children on board with parents and grandparents. Quite a few passengers seem to fall between their thirties and fifties and there appear to be a good number of retirees on board. We're looking forward to meeting more of them.



My wi-fi hot spot on the beach on Union Island

We met a few local folks from the Grenadines on the beach, which was just a secluded strip of sand with goats grazing in the bush behind the few colorful beach shacks where we were greeted warmly by proprietors selling snacks and drinks. Bill ordered his customary beer, this time a Haroun, a former name for the Grenadines.

With so little sign of civilization, Bill made fun of me asking about the availability of Wi-Fi, the ever-present obsession of a writer trying to connect with readers. But during a walk along the beach and a stop at another beach shack—for a beer—of course, I asked again about an internet connection and was surprised when the owner's brother said “I can fix you up.”

While my laptop was booting up we chatted with Mark, the bartender, who told us he left the corporate world in the States to wander the world and ended up here in this tiny speck of Caribbean. He directed us to a 24-minute YouTube video of his colorful life story. I bookmarked “Mark’s Story” (<https://youtu.be/6weQig4li-c>) and promised to watch it next time I had a good internet connection.

Photos by Katherine Rodeghier

Aboard Royal Clipper: Working out the kinks in Grenada

Posted on December 17, 2015 in Katherine Rodeghier's Blog

ABOARD ROYAL CLIPPER-I jumped ship in Grenada.



St. George's Grenada

The Royal Clipper offered some very appealing shore excursions, but I had already seen the nutmeg and cocoa production operations there on a previous visit. And the eco-trek to Bamboo Falls seemed too challenging for my gippy knee.

So Bill and I did our own thing. We took a taxi from Grenada's cruise terminal to LaLuna, a 16-cottage resort overlooking Morne Rouge Bay, the next beach over from Grand Anse when coming from the capital, St. George's. The resort's Italian owner built the cottages 15 years ago as an adults-only retreat.

Each has a king-size bed, indoor/outdoor shower and small plunge pools. Use of kayaks, Hobie Cat sailboats and paddleboards is free as are Pilates and yoga classes offered in a very Zen outdoor pavilion.



Capt. Nemo spa

The big news is LaLuna Villas just up the cliff from the cottages. These five-bedroom, five-bath, 8,000-square-foot villas are still being sold, so far to English owners, including racecar driver Louis Hamilton. When the owners are away, the villas are rented to guests. Families mostly. Each has an infinity-edge pool, full kitchen and a private jetty at prestigious Port Louis Marina for one's yacht.

Since we had our own yacht for a week, the Royal Clipper, we didn't need to check in. We came just for lunch in the LaLuna restaurant, specializing in Italian cuisine with a Caribbean twist. I had a tasty gazpacho, then octopus salad. Bill downed a salad Nicoise before moving on to a cheeseburger. He had beer, of course, this time the local Grenada brew, Stag. My cocktail, the resort's signature LaLuna Mist, was a vision in blue thanks to Curacao liqueur. Picture worthy.

The restaurant is open to all, not just resort guests, as is the resort's Bali-inspired spa, making LaLuna a destination for cruise passengers who plan ahead to do their own excursion.

We were booked for a couple's Balinese massage, an hour of bliss that worked out the kinks in our muscles and joints (\$237 U.S.) We were so relaxed, I think I dozed off for a bit and heard Bill snore from the adjoining room.



LaLuna spa

We could have stayed on the Royal Clipper and had massages, too. The spa on board has a menu of massages, each around 80 euros for an hour. Massage therapist Bernie Marichell said the traditional massage is the most requested, but the Hawaiian, incorporating the fragrances of frangipani, ylang-ylang and orange blossoms, is gaining in popularity. In addition to the one-hour massage, you can book the full Hawaiian spa ritual, two hours and fifteen minutes including a peel, wrap and massage for 150 euros.

The Royal Clipper spa has one unusual feature, though, that not many spas can match. Its Captain Nemo Spa is underwater. That is, it's on a low deck below the water line with portholes looking out under the aqua Caribbean. There's a fitness room, too, so while you are lifting weights or running on a treadmill you can gaze at the shifting shades of the sea and any marine life that happens to be swimming by at the time.

Article and photos by Katherine Rodeghier

Aboard Royal Clipper: Under and on the sea

Posted on December 18, 2015 in [Katherine Rodeghier's Blog](#)



Snorkeling off the beach

ABOARD THE ROYAL CLIPPER-Access. It can make the difference in so many things in life. And on a cruise it's the difference between going with the pack or charting your own course. The Royal Clipper, at 439 feet, can poke its prow into places the big cruise ships can't manage to go.

Places like Tobago Cays.

This sprinkling of islands in the Southern Grenadines doesn't get a lot of cruise traffic aside from the sailboats and yachts that meander its aquamarine waters. This morning the Royal Clipper anchored amid them and sent its tender ashore to set up camp for the day on a secluded beach of white sand fringed by palm trees. Local fishing boats painted in bright colors bobbed along shore, one loaded with live lobsters that would end up on some lucky person's dinner plate. A few chartered sailboats anchored a few yards away and Zodiacs zipped from shore to a catamaran ferrying passengers on shore excursions.



Royal Clippers beach for the day Tobago Cays

I was one of them. Bill and I signed up for the Royal Clipper's Discover the Southern Grenadines, a snorkeling trip to the Grenadines' Marine National Park (64 euros per person).

Our skipper dropped anchor 100 yards from Horseshoe reef, since vessels the catamaran's size are not allowed to come too close to the protected waters. We swam for it and snorkeled a few feet above the coral. I spotted a nurse shark lying on the bottom, parrot fish pecked at the coral and dozens of other varieties of marine life flitted in and above the reef.

Back on the boat, we lolled on the deck drinking rum punch as we cruised around Mayreau and Canouan islands. Mustique was off-limits, a crew member told me. Though all beaches in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are public, money talks and the rich and famous here somehow manage to keep us plebians away. Mick Jagger, Michael Jordan, Tommy Hilfiger, Puff Daddy and Britain's Princess Margaret are among the celebrities who have, or had, homes here. No matter. We dropped anchor at Salt Whistle Bay on Mayreau and spent a half hour or so swimming in crystal clear water before boarding the cat again for more rum punch and a ride back to the beach where the Royal Clipper crew had set out a barbecue on the sand. What a spread. Along with hot dogs and burgers there was fish, chicken, ribs, a whole table of salads and another of sweets.



Kayaking Tobago Cays

After a rest to digest we were back in the water snorkeling among rays and grouper. I spotted an eel slithering along the bottom trying to hide from my camera by wedging itself in a conch shell.

The Royal Clipper's sports staff had carted bright yellow kayaks to the beach and I couldn't resist the chance to explore more of the island under my own power.

A fellow passenger, Paul from Toronto, described the setting as postcard perfect, the kind of beach that many people imagine when they think of the Caribbean, but almost never see: secluded, uncrowded, clean, pristine.



Marine National Park

He's been on the Star Clippers three times, he told me, after discovering the cruise line while killing time in a mall by flipping through brochures in a travel agency. Traditional cruises, with gambling in casinos and dressing up for dinner, aren't for him, he said. The Star Clippers vessels offer a different experience: not cruising, but real sailing.

The line's two other ships are excellent, said Paul, but the Royal Clipper is bigger. The other ships don't have the Royal's three-story atrium ringing the dining room and piano lounge. The ceiling appears to be a skylight, but it's really the bottom of one of the ship's three sundeck pools. You can sit comfortably inside having a meal or a coffee or a cocktail and see people kicking and paddling above you. Snorkeling in reverse.

Photos by Katherine Rodeghier

Aboard Royal Clipper: Seafaring in Bequia

Posted on December 19, 2015 in Katherine Rodeghier's Blog



Royal Clipper in Admiralty Bay Bequia

A good guide can make all the difference in how you experience a port of call. I lucked out in Bequia with Donnaka O'Fionnalaigh. "Call me D," he said in greeting Bill and me at the marina on this island in the Grenadines.

The Royal Clipper had not planned organized shore excursions for the few hours we were on the island, choosing instead to send separate tenders to the beach and marina for passengers to explore on their own. We'd had a lot of beach time the day before, so I wanted to do some touring and came upon D and his company, hiking-bequia.com, in some online research.



Bequia

An Irishman by birth, D had spent a few years doing aid work in Africa and in St. Vincent where he married a local woman. He went back to Ireland for a few years, then returned to SVG and has been here ever since. With a long, blond ponytail and blue eyes, D proved to be something of a Renaissance man with vast and varied knowledge in subjects from carpentry to geology to photography to history all of which he shared during our hike on the island.

We started with a taxi ride—which in Bequia is a bench seat on the back of a pickup—to a headland. D chose this point for its excellent view of the Royal Clipper sitting resplendent at the mouth of Admiralty Bay and helped me set up just the right shot as the sun gleamed off the crossbars on the ship's five masts.

The circle of cannons atop the headland got him started on a history lesson. The French and British fought over these islands, he said, but, though well armed, Bequia never saw a battle. The pirate, Blackbeard, made a name for himself here, however, when he commandeered a slave ship, hauled it into Admiralty Bay and quickly converted it into his man of war vessel "Queen Anne's

Revenge.” He gave himself the title of commodore of the fleet and went on a tear up through the Caribbean before finally sinking his ship off Charleston, S.C.



Model Boat Shop Bequia

I looked down at the Royal Clipper imagining such a voyage as an 18th-century passenger. There was probably plenty of rum on board but none of the Royal Clipper's niceties like king-size beds, flat screen TVs, Wi-Fi, a spa and big lunch buffet ending with an entire table of desserts. Chocolate mousse, anyone?

As we started our hike down the headland, D explained how the Caribbean islands formed when the glaciers that covered much of North America melted, how two Indian tribes fought for prominence before being wiped out after Columbus brought news of the New World to Europe sparking colonization. He even played a guessing game with us, linking a prominent figure in early U.S. history to Bequia. I won't spoil the surprise by giving the answer; you'll have to book D's tour and learn it yourself.



Bequia waterfront

For PBS nerds like Bill and me, D was a walking delight, encyclopedic in his knowledge but never boring or pedantic. And the hike was good exercise helping us work off some of the calories we'd been consuming on our cruise.

On our way back to the marina we stopped at a model boat shop where craftsmen create wonderful replicas of sailing vessels, including Britain's legendary Britannia. I wondered if they had thought of building a replica of the Royal Clipper. I'd buy it as a lasting memory of this unforgettable voyage.

Article and photos by Katherine Rodeghier

Aboard Royal Clipper: Garden strolls

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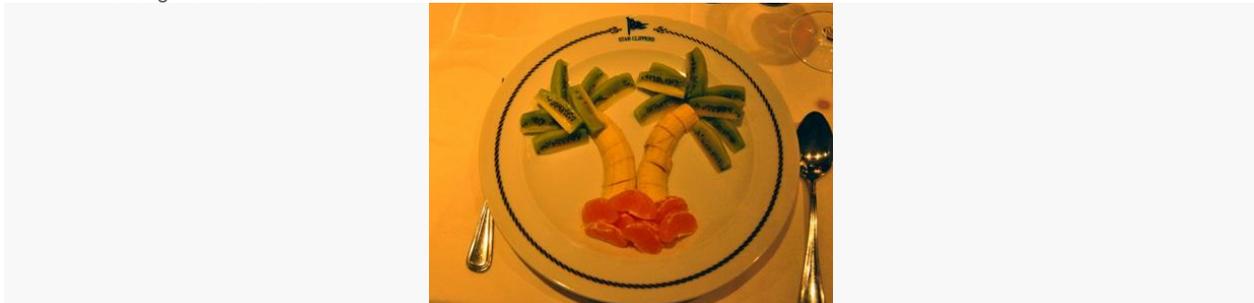


Guide Ingrid at Montreal Gardens

ABOARD ROYAL CLIPPER-Dinner aboard the Royal Clipper is a white tablecloth affair with fresh, tropical flower centerpieces. At buffet breakfasts and lunches, towers of fresh fruit share the stage with salads and hot dishes of fish, meat and veggies. For one passenger on a very restricted diet, the kitchen crew created colorful fruit plates with a touch of whimsy.

For a look at where these foods and flowers come from, I took a pair of shore excursions one on St. Vincent, the other on Martinique.

The Garden of Eden tour (47 euros) began with a scenic drive through the Mesopotamia Valley, or Marriaqua Valley, of St. Vincent, often called the island's breadbasket. Banana plantations, nutmeg, cocoa, breadfruit, coconut and a variety of root crops have thrived here for generations.



Fruit plate on the Royal Clipper

Near the highest point of the island, at about 3,000 feet, stands one man's dream, Montreal Gardens. As Ingrid, our guide, lead us through the lush tropical foliage owner Timothy Vaughan, in work clothes and boots, stepped onto our path to say hello. The Welshman told me he came to St. Vincent on holiday and was so taken with the terrain and the lifestyle that he bought an old fruit plantation and has spent the last 20 years transforming 7.5 acres into a show garden. He sells flowers to offset his costs. We passed beds of bright red anthurium like those gracing dinner tables on the Royal Clipper. Paths were lined with variegated coleus and stands of wild ginger. An African tulip tree and nutmeg tree prompted several in our group to pull out cell-phone cameras. Ingrid held up the leaf of a trumpet tree and explained its medicinal properties. Good for sufferers of diabetes and high blood pressure, she said.



Governor's Secret

On the way back to port, Ingrid continued her lecture on the health benefits of St. Vincent's fruits holding up photos of each. Mangoes, high in fiber, good for the colon and beneficial to men with prostate cancer. Pineapple, good for eyes. Road apple (also called plum rose) for digestion. Star fruit to lower cholesterol and cure hangovers and prickly heat. All appear on the Royal Clipper's buffet, but I never thought of them as natural pharmaceuticals.

On the French island of Martinique, known as the "Island of Flowers," guide Rafael led us on the Botanical Gardens of Balata tour (42 euros). After a quick stop at Sacre Coeur de Balata, a one-fifth scale replica of the famous Sacre Coeur of Montmartre in Paris, we continued on to the gardens. Landscape gardener Jean Philippe Thoze began collecting plants as a hobby before opening his garden to the public in 1986. It's now the second largest botanical garden in the Caribbean and the most visited attraction in Martinique.



Botanical Gardens of Balata

Those arranged his plants according to the continents they come from, laying them out around the 18th-century Creole cottage that was his grandmother's home. Some of 42 varieties of palm trees are represented along with a bed of bromeliads, water lilies and the heavy porcelain roses geishas wear in their hair. Everyone chuckles when the group stops at a plant called Governor's Secret, named for the island's last governor who was just a little insecure about a certain part of his male anatomy. The plant's waxy red flowers, five or six inches long, stand erect on cluster of leaves.

Farther along the garden path Rafael points out a series of rope and cable bridges suspended between trees and encourages us to climb up for a walk through a canopy of leaves. Two persons at a time on each bridge, please.

It reminded me of the rigging on the Royal Clipper that passengers climb to reach the crow's nest. But instead of a sea of green, the view is a sea of blue.

Article and photos by Katherine Rodeghier

Aboard Royal Clipper: Winding up and winding down in St. Lucia

Posted on December 21, 2015 in Katherine Rodeghier's Blog



View from the crow's nest

ABOARD THE ROYAL CLIPPER – As the ship sailed into Marigot Bay on St. Lucia it began to rain and my heart sank. It was the last day of the cruise and I hadn't booked a morning excursion because I wanted time to explore parts of the ship I hadn't yet seen and take part in activities I hadn't found time for.

Highest on my list was the opportunity to climb to the ship's crow's nest, but with the rain coming down, and deck and rigging wet, I was afraid most climbing would be canceled. So I paced the deck, scanned the books in the ship's library, had a coffee in the piano lounge and browsed the Royal Clipper logo clothing in the shop. Rain pockmarked the ship's three pools. Netting stretches out from the ship's prow and passengers are allowed to climb across it for a thrill ride high above the waves, but none were keen to do so on this wet morning.



Mud baths in St. Lucia

Around noon my luck changed. The sun broke through the clouds and the sports' crew brought out the safety harnesses for climbing. And up I went, one foot at a time on a rope ladder, my hands grasping cables tied to one of the ship's five masts. It was easier than it had looked. The trick is not to look down. Once safely inside the railing of the crow's nest I did look down—and up and all around, taking in the view from all angles from my perch high above the sundeck. What a thrill!

It was raining again by the time my afternoon excursion set off for Soufriere on St. Lucia's opposite coast, but I was determined to make the most of it. Thelma guided us on a tour of St. Lucia's drive-in volcano. Its magma chamber collapsed into a caldera 12 kilometers wide, she told us, big enough to contain roads and buildings. Our driver, James, took the winding road up from the dock, past the island's iconic pair of pitons and into the volcano, parking next to a steaming pool of boiling mud. The water from the sulphur spring running through the caldera reaches 212 degrees Fahrenheit, Thelma told us, and local people once used it to boil eggs and cook fish.



Royal Clipper at full sail

Thank goodness it cools enough farther downstream to allow us to take a dip in the volcano's mud baths. I'd visited Iceland's Blue Lagoon a year ago and the experience is similar here, but instead of a bright blue pool and white silica mud, the water flowing from the volcano is the color of slate and the mud various shades of gray. We donned bathing suits and jumped in, slathering on the mineral-rich mud to exfoliate our skin.

On our drive winding back down from the volcano, James stopped at a lookout point so we could take photos of the Royal Clipper anchored in the harbor.



Deck crew waving from the prow

Back on board, the captain announced he was sending the tenders out for a photo op. Passengers were free to board and cruise around the ship as the crew raised the sails for our last departure of the week. Dozens of us lined the railings of the tenders shooting photo after photo as the little boats circled the big ship, the sun slowly dropping toward the horizon and lighting up its ivory sails. The deck crew stood along the beam of the prow, smiling and waving their farewell. It was a postcard-perfect moment.

The Royal Clipper is the largest of the Star Clippers fleet but may be surpassed in size soon. Star Clippers is currently building a fourth vessel at a shipyard in Split, Croatia, that will launch sometime in 2017. It will be similar to the Royal Clipper, but with more verandah rooms. Its name will be announced in January.

Stay tuned.

Article and photos by Katherine Rodeghier

<http://allthingscruise.com/tags/KatherineClipper/>