How to Get Over the Hill: Exploring the Island Without a Car

By: Leslie Hickerson

Something curious happens when you live on a small island in the sea. For those that have moved from large countries; it is not uncommon to spend an hour commuting to work, or several hours driving to visit family on the weekend.

But when you arrive on a 96-square kilometer (37 square miles) island, even a small trip can become inconceivable. Spend a few years here, and you will hear people start to cancel plans because they can’t make it over the hill’. This phrase refers to the fact that to get from Cole Bay to Philipsburg, or vice versa, it has officially become a trek and heaps of people can’t be bothered to make the journey. We are talking about a seven kilometer (4.3 miles) trip!

To be fair, the traffic into town does make the journey a substantial one, but typically not one longer than you would travel to go to dinner in a big city. Even visitors to our island get comfortable near their lodging and miss out on all the amazing things the island has to offer in additional regions. If you find yourself getting trapped in your area, you are not alone.

Luckily, you have an inexpensive and easy transportation option to explore some other areas of the island: riding the bus.

An amazing thing about St. Maarten/St-Martin is the reasonably priced and very common public transport. To those that are new to the island, it might be intimidating.

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Old Master: The Life of Cynric Griffith

By: Chris Morvan

In an era when styles of painting are increasingly fanciful and seem to adhere to no rules, it is refreshing to come across an artist who still respects the Old Masters.
Letter From the Editor

October 7, 2018

We did it! St. Maarten/St-Martin made it through September unscathed by Mother Nature. While we rejoice in that fact, remember that it is still hurricane season: stay vigilant and prepared.

If this is your first time reading our weekly newspaper, I hope you enjoy! The ST-MAARTEN.COM Weekly Edition has become a favorite way to get all the island chatter and tidbits of information about where to dine, shop and party; allowing you to see paradise through a local’s eyes.

If you are visiting the island, be sure to subscribe to our electronic version to continue hearing the latest about the island by using the QR code provided to the right.

This issue covers hidden treasures sprinkled around the island and efficient ways to reach them. Have fun discovering!

Happy October!

Hilary Grant
Editor

Online Portal

For in-depth information about our island, consult ST-MAARTEN.COM - the official online portal. Please use the convenient QR codes with any smart phone to access individual pages directly.

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Publisher: Jan Thoelke
Email: j.thoelke@st-maarten.com

Editor: Hilary Grant
Email: h.grant@st-maarten.com

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Pirates are frequently described as bloodthirsty, violent lunatics. There might be truth in that, but it is also clear that even the most civilized pirate would need to create an image of ruthlessness to get any respect from his prey.

In reality, the sailing ships operated by pirates needed a well-trained and disciplined crew. It's an amazing achievement that Buccaneers - as they are also called - could establish workable procedures. The men came from all walks of life; some were escaped slaves, others disenfranchised sailors from merchant ships, many were family men who desperately tried to make a living. In order to unite such a diverse group of characters, a set of rules evolved which was eventually accepted on most ships. One of the most startling aspects of the age of the Buccaneers is that they embraced democracy long before it became an established form of state government.

On most ships, captains were elected by the crew. Even though the captain had final say in all actions, he needed to listen to his crew and could not act against an overwhelming vote. Before attacking prey, the crew had to agree by voting in favor of action.

Bedtime was set for 8 PM; and at any given time, the crew had to be ready to fight with weapons clean and prepared. Interestingly, musicians were allowed to play after 8 PM.

Punishment for rule violations was harsh, but it appears that they made sense and were not broken that often. Stealing was a big 'no no'; this included holding back items found on a captured ship.

The complete loot needed to be collected, the value assessed and finally distributed among the crew.

The captain and other officers received a bigger share than a lowly crew member. The real shocker is the fact that the difference in pay between boss and worker was not dramatic: frequently, only a double share went to the captain. Tell the CEO of any modern corporation that pay will only be double of what the workers on the production line earn and she or he will scream "communism!"

If any crew member became crippled in action, they received a substantial cash settlement.

The term Buccaneer is based on the Arawak word 'bucan' - a wooden installation to smoke meat. The Arawaks were an Amazonian people who settled throughout the Caribbean and were later replaced by the aggressive and more warlike Caribes. Originally it was freelance hunters who were called Buccaneers because they sold their meat to pirate ships as provisions. Eventually, the term was used for pirates as well.
Catching the Bus to Get Over the Hill

Continued from Page 1

But, the bus system is a budget-friendly and straightforward way to get almost anywhere on the island. Once you know where you can travel to and some simple bus etiquette, traveling around our paradise becomes easier and less daunting.

How to Choose your Bus:

One reason the bus is scary for beginners is that they do not look like public transportation seen around the world. Change your expectation! On our island, the busses can be any brand of a multi-passenger van. Small, large, old, or new; the vans themselves can vary in countless ways, but there are a couple of identifying markers.

First, on the Dutch side, the license plate will say the word BUS and the vehicle’s license numbers. Along with this, you will see an identifying marker that states the driver’s route. Most commonly this will be a sign in the front window that indicates the start and end points the bus travels to. Some bus drivers that are members of the United Bus Association have their routes painted and color coded on the front of their vehicle to make them easier to distinguish.

Catching a Ride:

Now that you can identify the bus you need, getting on board is a simple process. Riders can be picked up anywhere, the only necessity is that there is room for the driver to stop and load safely.

You can also look for the new bus stops that have sprung up around the island to wait in the shade but beware: Busses are not under obligation to stop at every one.

To get the bus to stop you need to wave them down as they near. Make sure you are standing on the correct side of the road for your destination and watch for a bus to approach.

Some routes overlap, so make sure you have the correct one and simply put your hand up in the air and move back to give the driver room to pull over. If the bus is full or the driver is off duty, they might not stop.

When you get on it is general bus etiquette to greet with, “Good Morning” “Good Afternoon” or “Good Night”. In fact, this is excellent advice for any time you enter an establishment in St. Maarten.

Do not slam the door shut. Be courteous to other guests and no eating or drinking on the ride.

Drop Off and Payment:

Just like when you board you can be dropped off anywhere that the driver can stop safely. When you see your destination approaching tell the driver, “Stop for me please.” Have your fare ready and hand it to them on your way out the door. Make sure you carry small change for the ride, especially in the mornings when they might not be able to make change yet. Exact change is always preferred. Again do not slam the door.

Rates/Routes:

The routes around the island have set rates that are based on your pick up and drop off locations. During daytime hours rates from one town on the island to the next are $2/per person or less. You might have to take more than one bus to reach your destination. For example, to get to Grand Case from Philipsburg you would have to go from Philipsburg to Marigot ($2) and then Marigot to Grand Case ($2).

On the other hand, you might have to use a half route to get your destination. To get to Simpson Bay from Mullet Bay, you would take the Mullet Bay/Philipsburg Bus and then if you stop before the Simpson Bay Draw Bridge the cost would be ($1.50). The buses cover areas including Philipsburg, Marigot, St. Peters, French Quarter, Orient Bay, Grand Case, and several others.

Extra Info:

Busses generally start running early, before 7 AM, and take fares until approximately 8 PM. But the drivers make their own hours, so this varies. If you catch a very late bus the regulated rates increase after midnight.

Children under the age of three ride for free.

In general, if you are new to the bus system, some drivers or friendly riders can give you advice for getting around. Some drivers might take you farther than the end of their route for an extra fee, or tell you where to get off to find a certain location.

Make sure to tip for those that go out of their way as the rates are so low they are always pressed for time and need to get the bus filled with passengers to earn their living. And don't slam the door!
The Unique St. Maarten Crossword Puzzle

Here is the nineteenth edition of the St. Maarten Crossword Puzzle. You will notice that all of the questions are rooted in the Caribbean hemisphere and might take a bit of research to answer if you haven't spent much time here. It also means that the answers are valid for St. Maarten/St-Martin and for the neighboring islands.

For example, if we are asking for an island to the North of our location, it can only be Anguilla.

For simplicity's sake, the answers are written as one word and without spaces or special characters.

Example: Mario's Bistrot would become MARIOSBISTROT as the crossword answer. And 'Beach at airport runway' would be answered as 'MAHOBEACH'.

If you are a visitor to our island and get stuck answering the crossword questions, don't be shy to ask a local.

Mistakes do happen, even though our puzzle is produced right here on island. If you detect a mistake, don't be shy and drop us a line! But, be aware that some of the questions are a bit tricky purposefully. Good luck!

Cheating? Find solution to the puzzle on Page 14
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Old Master: The Life and Work of Cynric Griffith

Continued from Page 1

Cynric Griffith grew up learning from what he saw of those legendary European artists of around the Renaissance period, including the one he mentions specifically, Rembrandt.

A living legend in his own right in the Caribbean, Griffith is what some would call a “proper” painter, one whose work doesn’t appear to need interpreting or decoding. When he shows me a sketch of a tree-covered hill, it is the one that looms over the property where we are sitting, the White and Yellow Cross Foundation’s home for the elderly at St John’s.

As regards portraits, admirers of Griffith’s work speak of his ability to reveal the soul of his subjects, and one of his best-known pieces, Mother in Trouble (of which there is more than one version), is powerful in its simplicity as the woman glowers enigmatically into the distance or out at us.

Griffith – that is how he refers to himself, although some people prefix it with Mr – was born in St Kitts on 1 January 1919, which makes him 99, so one might expect him to be taking it easy. But no – as he sits outside the building where he now lives, enjoying the shade while the going is good before the afternoon sun descends towards that hill and bakes the place – he is working.

“I went crazy,” he says, “making all kinds of sketches. It was like a virus.” Inspired by illustrations in books including the Bible and hymn books, he sketched everything from animals to cowboys.

He came to St Maarten in 1956 and began to establish himself as an artist while sometimes doing other work to make ends meet. He developed his talent, put on exhibitions and his fame grew to the extent that he met the Queen twice, and on the second occasion she said, “Haven’t I seen you before?”

There was also a period of teaching at an academy, but always he returned to trying to make a living doing what he loved.

Along the way, he was married twice and has a son and two daughters. The small collection of paintings in his room demonstrate his range, with a bunch of grapes and a conch shell rubbing shoulders with a sturdy woman marching up a path with a distinctive St Maarten hill in the background.

He works in pastels, watercolors, and has a distinctively light touch with oil.

The pen and ink pieces that he is currently working on are like forests of tiny black lines building into images, and he will sometimes translate them into paintings. A current work in progress of a woman in a landscape in black and white, for instance, is very similar to the completed oil painting mentioned above, although he declines my request to photograph the new one on the grounds that it is not yet complete and may well end up looking quite different.

Undoubtedly the elder statesman of St Maarten painters, Griffith continues to mine the rich seams of his talent and in doing so to perpetuate the memory of his influences, those great figures from the past, many of them Dutch, whose unfashionably straightforward approach remains, for many, the core of this thing called art.

Born to a young seamstress but brought up by his grandmother, a baker, Cynric Griffith says he was “a sickly child”, although his longevity tells a different story. He began painting at an early age and was soon selling his work, bringing in much-needed income for his poor family.
Orange juice is a refreshing beverage that many indulge in to start their day or to mix with their favorite rum. To establish the guidelines for finding and awarding the best orange juice on St. Maarten/St-Martin, we need to set the parameters.

First, it must be freshly squeezed. Second, squeezed from tasty ripe oranges and last but not least, priced at a fair value.

Hot contenders for great juices are two of the most popular breakfast spots in the Simpson Bay area, Top Carrot and Vesna Taverna. And no surprise there: among the many delicious choices of fruit juices in any imaginable combination, their OJ's are competently prepared.

The real surprise though is the juice served at Al Pasha, also in Simpson Bay; here, a tall half liter glass is filled with the juice of six cooled oranges which are squeezed right in front of the customer. No ice added, so for this amount of juice, the price of $6 per glass is the best value we could find - and the best taste.

Some research about the health benefits of orange juice will let you believe that one glass per day leads to immortality - so glowing are the reports. What surprises is the fact that 100 ml have only 47 calories. The big glass at Al Pasha provides you with about 250 calories but is as filling as a meal. Compare this with 700 calories for a regular margarita cocktail, and you might stick with the juice.

Don’t forget that one serving of delicious orange juice packs in your Vitamin C consumption for the whole day.
Soak’A Fete at Kimsha Beach

One of the Caribbean's favorite beers, Presidente, sponsored a major bash on Kimsha Beach. The Soca party started Sunday at 2 PM and went well into the night, featuring some well-established artists and was attended by a massive and appreciative crowd.

The event was organized together with Buccaneer Beach Bar, with the bar being the main gateway to the stage. Thanks to Presidente, there was no cover charge to attend the Soak’A Fete.

Presidente Summer brought back the party spirit to our island, by providing a welcome Sunday stress relief to a population still struggling to make ends meet after last year's historic weather event. Well-protected Kimsha Beach, with its firm sand and calm surf, has proven more than ever to be the perfect party beach for concerts.

A noticeable improvement is the new parking lot. It was much easier to find a spot for a car in the Simpson Bay region (for the ones who came early enough) than during the previous Heineken Regatta years. The professional and courteous deputies of VIP Guards and Errands made sure that the show was running smooth and that all partygoers were safe while having a great time.
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The Days of Caribbean Smog

There you are, arriving in the Caribbean with your new DSLR digital camera and full of ambition to capture the magic of our islands. The sky is not overcast but doesn't show the brilliant blue you had hoped for. Not deterred, you travel to one of the panoramic viewing spots you have read about in your pre-travel research (hopefully on St-Maarten.com).

Oh, the disappointment! Not much to see, the horizon disappears in smog. Not one of the neighboring islands is visible. Is there so much pollution on this tiny island of St. Maarten to cause this tragedy?

Fortunately, it's not local air pollution creating the phenomena of hazy skies - not that we don't have our very own and severe ecological challenges. But this is not one of them.

What you witness are clouds of Sahara dust, which frequently travel 6,700 km (4,000 miles) across the Atlantic and can have a massive influence on local weather conditions. The Sahara is the world largest desert and kicks off massive amounts of dust in windy conditions.

With the prevailing wind blowing in a westerly direction, this dust ends up in the Caribbean and also in the southern USA.

Interestingly, these clouds do more good than bad, aside from spoiling your photos.

The 'dusty season' coincides with hurricane season. But, the dust clouds come with very dry air and tend to inhibit the formation of a tropical cyclone. A strong reason for us island residents to welcome Sahara dust.

Now back to your photography challenges; the dust will disappear soon enough, hopefully before your visit on St. Maarten/St-Martin ends.

But the hazy air can also be an asset for catching breathtaking sunsets. Some of the most intense images of the sun setting over the Caribbean sea have been taken during the kind of weather conditions which block you from taking panoramic shots. Venture out to the Driftwood Boat Bar in Maho Beach and spend the waning hours of the day there with your camera ready to capture the ultimate sunset.

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