Flying Around the Island with the Caribbean Eagles

By Chris Morvan

When the air in St. Maarten/St-Martin reverberates with the sound of throbbing motorbike engines at this time of year it can mean only one thing: it’s the annual Caribbean Eagles bike fest. This was the 10th year to see this coming together of bikers from all over the Caribbean – and much further afield.

The local Harley Davidson club headquarters in Orange Grove was a hive of activity on Saturday morning as club president Jane Therond welcomed friends old and new, including a small contingent from the tiny European principality of Monaco, along with guests from closer to home: Anguilla, St Barth, Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire, Guadeloupe and Marie Galante, among many other places.

“This year we’re completely sold out,” Jane said as early birds dug into a breakfast of Johnny cakes and coffee. “We have to set a limit because it’s a small island.”

It is also a land of hills and, in some places, rough roads still suffering the after-effects of Irma.

“It’s very different from somewhere like Florida, where it’s mainly flat and smooth,” she points out.

St. Maarten’s Hawks chapter was among the founders when the Caribbean Eagles was formed, along with Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Free to Be Yourself: Naturism in SXM

This island is famous all over the world for its beautiful beaches, and is popular with naturists who like to enjoy them au naturel. We look at why they do it and what they get out of it.

By Chris Morvan

New Floating Bar and Restaurant

Come aboard the D-Boat, a freighter converted into a waterpark, nightclub, and restaurant. This latest entertainment attraction is presently berthed in Simpson Bay.

By Chris Morvan

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Letter From the Editor

November 16, 2018

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For my fellow residents, don't forget that these advertisers would love to see your faces as well, so don't be shy. Sometimes the fact that we live on a tropical paradise gets lost, but this is the time to enjoy all our island has to offer.

I'd like to take a moment to thank you for choosing the ST-MAARTEN.COM Weekly Edition as your newspaper of choice.

If you are visiting on island and would like to continue to read our publication from home, please scan the QR code to your right with your smartphone to access our electronic version.

Hilary Grant, GIA GG
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.

What does the number on each advertisement stand for?
Please refer to the map on Page 6. Regions of the island are marked with a number which corresponds to the number you see on ads.

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The Sinking of SV Jab Jabs

By Leslie Hickerson

Starting in April of 2017, there was a unique bar on the Dutch side that provided a beautiful way to spend Happy Hour or ‘Sunday Funday’. An 86 foot boat was sitting in the calm waters of Simpson Bay right in front of Kimsha Beach. The boat was called Jab Jabs and her history dates to 1958 when she was built for a Duke.

Stefan and Daniel Veraguas both grew up on the boat in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. It traveled from there to Massachusetts, where it sat in a boat yard for three years. Then, when they heard that their family had put the boat up for sale, the brothers jumped on the opportunity to bring it to St. Maarten where they would operate as a bar boat along with Stefan’s wife, Kristen McAllister.

Over the next four months Daniel worked on the boat preparing it for its trip from Massachusetts to St. Maarten. When it arrived there, was even more work to get the permits to operate the business in the bay. In the end, after two inspections and a noise level test, opening day finally arrived Easter 2017. Over the summer business was booming. Popular for Happy Hours, Karaoke, and Sundays; the team knew that the boat would be a success during high season that year.

Then as we all know disaster stuck in the form of the largest hurricane on record to date, Irma. The boat was on a hurricane anchor in Simpson Bay Lagoon but it, like so many others, did not weather the storm.

“The morning of the hurricane from Beacon Hill we made our way, down the runway (of the airport) on the grass and Daniel said to me, ‘Stefan look,’ and he pointed and there was one of our bar stools on the runway. At that moment we knew. We picked up the pace and when we got to Simpson Bay we could see it’s mast from the roundabout,” says Stefan Veraguas.

It took 13 more weeks after the storm for the boat to be lifted from her shallow grave in the lagoon. Once she was above the surface the insurance company found that, even though the hull was intact, the repairs would be too costly. Jab Jabs was declared a ‘constructive total loss’.

At this point it could have been the end to the story. Jab Jabs may have been sold or stripped for her remaining parts. But instead fate intervened. The boat was still floating as another storm approached and concerns arose about her breaking free and damaging other vessels in the area. So Nagico Insurance Company partnered with the St. Maarten Nature Foundation to sink the boat on one of the many dive sites on the Dutch side. “We were very happy to work with all who were a part of the project and to know that we played a small part in ensuring that Jab Jabs lives on as an artificial reef in our post Irma reality,” said Tadzio Bervoets, Director of the St. Maarten Nature Foundation.

As a steel boat she will be a strong addition to a popular dive site. Over time while the boat sits under water she will start to grow coral and become a shelter for marine life to live and hide in the area.

Sinking her wasn’t easy though. First she had to be stripped clean to ensure that there wasn’t any debris that would end up in the ocean. The group, Kid’s At Sea, worked very hard to clean up anything that would contaminate the site. Then it took the combined efforts of crews from Jab Jabs, the Nature Foundation, Ocean Explorers Dive Center, and Kid’s At Sea to position the boat and sink her without causing any damage.

“Watching it go down it wasn’t until the last foot where it got emotional. It was kind of slow it was fine and the as soon as the water got above the portholes it was really going down. It was actually gone now,” said McAllister.

Now she rests at the dive site called The Old Bridge in front of Simpson Bay. After only a few weeks the ocean has already claimed her as it’s own. The beginnings of growth have started and you can find several small fish species and even lobster hiding on the boat for shelter.

Veraguas is very happy with Jab Jabs laying to rest at The Bridge. “I obviously have a very strong connection to that boat and I didn’t want someone else buying it. She was built in Holland in 1958 she’s been around the world. For her to be sunk back in a Dutch area, I think it’s a great end to her story.”
Free to Be Yourself: Naturism on the Beaches of Saint Martin

Continued from Page 1

Naturism is a subject that makes many people titter (pull yourselves together at the back) despite themselves, because, as I suggest to the interviewees, nakedness is linked with sex. The only time you would normally see someone in the nude would be when you’re about to get intimate.

“Yes, but that’s not true,” they counter. “It has nothing to do with sex.”

With no prompting, Melissa offers a little revelation.

“We have been to places where there are swingers,” she says. “But we’re not into that. And generally speaking, people are much more respectful when you’re all nude. A woman is far more likely to be leered at if she’s wearing a bikini on a textiles beach.”

It’s a theme that is also mentioned by fully-clothed Louis and Lara (not their real names), who run a small naturist resort not far away.

“People talk to each other more easily,” Lara says. “There is less judgement among naturists.”

Melissa expands on the theme. “You’re all naked together, so there is no judging people by what they’re wearing. It’s not like ‘She’s wearing a Tommy Hilfiger bikini and I got mine from a gas station.’”

The general idea is that naturists are all members of the same global movement, because they are naked while the rest of the world is clothed. And it goes further than that, which is why the word “naturist” replaced “nudist”.

As French-speaking Lara explains, “Naturism is the happiness to be naked in the nature, swimming nude with a feeling of freedom. It’s a great way to disconnect from the reality, daily living.”

Most of us have been skinny-dipping once or twice and you probably know exactly what she means.

To get to interview people such as this, you’ve got to start somewhere, and with no official local organization to consult, one option would be to approach people on the beach, but obviously for a non-naturist that presents problems.

The solution for your correspondent was to join the SXM Naturism Facebook group. The members are mainly Americans who are counting the days until their next visit, and there is plenty of discussion of issues such as respect and the prevalence or otherwise of inappropriate behavior. The overwhelming consensus is that Orient in particular has no such issues.

Orient is, after all, the only official naturist beach on the island and while some members report occasional incidents at unofficial spots, such as Cupecoy and Happy Bay, Orient has an ethos (and security) that unites its sun worshippers against what one long online conversation calls “lewdness”.

The Facebook group is where I found Melissa and Marc, and eventually a very different character.

Krysta Summers is an independent young woman from the US who often travels alone. As confident as she might be, Krysta is acutely aware of the potential hazards involved in being a lone woman on a naturist beach.

“It’s difficult for a man to think like a woman,” she says. “We’re like hens among foxes. Even though I am an alpha hen.”

It was she, in fact, who started the thread about potential lewdness, as she prepared for her first visit to St-Martin.

The overall impression, then, is that there is more to naturism than the mere shedding of clothes. It’s about being at one with nature, and seems like a progressive mindset with more maturity, if you like, than those who choose to remain “textiled”, as Melissa puts it.

Local St-Martin naturists urge visitors to respect the island’s conventions, such as which parts of the unofficial beaches should be used, because this is still a slightly contentious issue and the idea of live-and-let-live cuts both ways.

The sense of happiness these people all refer to, the friendliness and mutual respect they encounter, is clearly genuine and only to be applauded.

“This is our fourth trip this year,” Melissa explains. “It’s almost addictive. In a good way.”
St. Maarten/St-Martin Island Map

Island Destinations Made Easy

1. Simpson Bay/Pelican
2. Maho
3. Culebra/Dutch Lowlands
4. Terres Basses
5. Marigot
6. Grand Case
7. Hope Estate/Cul de Sac
8. Orient Beach
9. Oyster Pond - Dawn Beach
10. Philipsburg
11. Cole Bay

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Every Day Is Christmas at Joe’s Jewelry
By Chris Morvan

A good reputation is the greatest of all assets for a business – and reputations travel the world. This family business – just west of the Court House – is owned by the Baharani: father Prakash, son Adesh and his brother Ajay. Today we’re talking to Adesh.

There is, it’s worth pointing out, no Joe. The business was started by Prakash Baharani in 1980, and the name reflects his desire to connect with the American public, who made up the vast majority of the customers – and still do.

The Baharani had been living an international life at that time, with business interests in Spain, Gibraltar and India, before settling in St Maarten, where the cruise industry was proving a lucrative market for jewelers.

Adesh finished high school and college in the US before joining the business in 1997 and has been here ever since. In those days the business had three locations on Front Street and that grew to six at one point.

“We consolidated and developed a partnership with the biggest watch company in the world, the Swatch group,” he says. “We opened the first Tissot boutique in the Americas, the first Rado boutique in the Americas, there’s another near Holland House Hotel and we have a Swatch boutique right across the street. And a satellite store in St Thomas.”

Customer service is the company’s number one priority. One modern way in which this manifests itself is user recommendations on TripAdvisor – and Joe’s Jewelry on Front Street is proud to be ranked number one among its peers.

“We focus heavily on giving the customer an exceptional experience in the store. We’re ranked number one on TripAdvisor for customer service, quality and price, and no one in the Caribbean has achieved the number of reviews that we have.”

A key factor in the company’s success is, he says, the stability of its team.

“Our team has been with us a long time. We are a family business and they are part of the family. Several members of the staff have been with us for 20 years.”

In addition to the benefits such stability has on the company, this has a strong influence on customers too.

“What the customers want is to shop with confidence. With us they know they’re getting genuine products, they’re getting quality and they’re getting a good price. And when they come into our store they recognize the faces. We build relationships. And after the sale has been made we have dedicated customer service staff who liaise with them if a stone pops out or something needs to be polished or a watch has to be sent for repair. We respond very quickly and the reviews reflect that. We know people’s wives and husbands and children. And sometimes they just come in to say ‘hi’ and they may end up buying something.”

Adesh estimates that 60-70% is repeat business. His customers love the island and keep coming back. Some have homes here. And as for prices, they get a duty-free discount and they pay no sales tax. “We don’t wait for Christmas and we don’t wait for Valentine’s Day. Every day is Christmas.”

And the Baharani family’s plans for the future?

“We’re taking it one day at a time,” he says. “What happened last year with the hurricane was a wake-up call for everybody. But the island is resilient. As long as the government ensures the infrastructure is strong, everything else will flow from that. The power company, water, the airport, telecommunications. If those things are functioning in a category five situation, then everything will get back much quicker.”

Bike Fest
Continued from Page 1

She estimates there are as many as 150 Harleys in the island, and when you add all the other marques, that’s a lot of bikes.

The festivities began on Thursday November 10 with the unloading of bikes which guests had brought in at considerable expense for the sheer pleasure of being among kindred spirits.

Those who only notice bikes when they appear out of nowhere while the four-wheeled world is grinding slowly – or not at all – around our roads may be surprised to learn that there is much more to it than just riding mobile machinery.

The local Harley club is active in the community.

“We’re a family-oriented club,” Jane explains. “There is a real community spirit here. Recently one of our members broke down on the hill and called in and everyone went there to help.”

Outside the world of motorcycling, the club is involved with the BACA organization (Bikers Against Child Abuse).

The weekend’s activities were an unusual blend of simply riding around the island, lunches at nice restaurants and evening get-togethers featuring live music and the old-fashioned simple pleasures of a wet t-shirt competition and Jello wrestling.

The Saturday morning early birds included as many women as men, which again may be surprising to some.

If a room buzzing with leather-clad women on a Saturday morning doesn’t change people’s preconceptions about bikers, nothing will.
The Unique St. Maarten/St-Martin Crossword Puzzle

Find out if you are a truly knowledgeable about our region and its culture, history and geography.

Please enjoy another edition of our crossword puzzle. You will notice that all 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: the answers are valid for St. Maarten/St-Martin and the neighboring islands.

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

If you try to solve the puzzle as a visitor to our island and you get stuck: don't be shy! Approach a local and ask. You might find they struggle to answer as well. Or strike up an interesting conversation and learn a bit about our very unique region.

Mistakes do happen, even though our puzzle is produced right here on the island. If you detect an error, drop us a line at info@staarten.com. But please be aware that some of the questions are a bit tricky on purpose. Good luck!

ACROSS
5 Nightclub with name of British automobile brand
7 Island nick-named 'The Unspoiled Queen'
8 Well regarded jeweler starting with Z
9 Type of business of Century 21
10 Local St-Martin communications provider
16 What does a boat need to float?
18 What was D-Boat before?
19 What do motorists dislike about Simpson Bay?
20 Japanese-style dinner with cooking at table
21 Breakfast and Lunch spot in Simpson Bay
22 Who writes many articles for our Weekly Edition?
24 Stricter than vegetarian

DOWN
1 Restaurant next to the Atrium Resort
2 What does “fin” on price tags stand for?
3 Prominent business family
4 What island do you fly to with code BBQ
6 Top level Internet domain ending for St. Maarten
9 Famous painter to give name to Dutch bar
11 Person who goes to the nude beach
12 SXM motorcycle club
13 Precious metal used in name of adult club
14 Name of Roman soldier becoming Christian saint
15 Historic name for St-Martin
17 Dutch bar in Simpson Bay
23 What media is Island 92?

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D-Boat Brings Back Floating Entertainment, Dining and Nightlife to Simpson Bay Lagoon

Floating bars have history on St. Maarten. During the first decade of this century, it was Lady C, docked in Simpson Bay at the location of Nowhere Special which fulfilled this niche. After being a cornerstone of St. Maarten nightlife for many years, the classic wooden sailing vessel finally succumbed to wood rot and was floating no more.

The Pink Iguana, a one-hundred-year-old tug boat, gave it a try to be a follow-up act to Lady C, but the business never got off well enough to make a mark.

The situation was similar with Jab Jab’s, a steel-hulled sailing yacht moored at Kimsha Beach: the storm hit only a few months after business started, so that Jab Jab’s never had the chance to become part of the party folklore.

What better time to bring the next floating entertainment center to SXM than in the rebuilding phase after Irma? D-Boat’s owners made the bold move to take the ship over from Antigua with the clear intention to shake up the SXM entertainment scene.

The old freighter has been lovingly converted into an activity center both for day and nighttime fun. The original plan was to moor the ship in the cove at Kimsha Beach and market it as a family friendly water park - accessible by shuttle boat.

Presently, D-Boat is comfortably berthed at the Portofino Marina and behind the iconic Dinghy Dock Bar. Guests only need to walk over a gangway to board the ship. Witnessing the instant draw created among the nightlife crowd, one wonders if a move out of Simpson Bay Lagoon is wise. We like D-Boat where it is right now.

The island’s latest floating bar serves as an open-air nightclub, with a cooling breeze coming over the Lagoon and with enough coverage that some precipitation will not crash a party night. The interior design integrates the nautical heritage of an aging commercial vessel without pushing the style into a rugged/rough theme, but rather a surprisingly elegant experience. No one is out of place if they appear dressed up for a night in town at D-Boat.
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Adventures in Sex and Dating on St. Maarten/St-Martin

Our new regular column on (for some) the single most important topic in life

Dating anywhere in the world is and always has been a difficult thing to do. But on this island, things get borderline ridiculous. With the new age of Tinder, Ghosting, Sexting, and Dicksand; people of all genders are staying single longer, divorcing more, and picking up baggage along the way. Now throw in the ever-changing populations of tourists, boat crew, and seasonal workers mix it with the pressures of 2017’s subpar season, and you have a disaster waiting to happen. One of the best ways to get over someone is to laugh about the things that happened; or to get under someone new.

This column will feature a collection of stories from men and women around the island about their dating mishaps and adventures. The names that appear here have been changed to protect the innocent, or in most cases the very, very guilty. Let’s kick this off with something juicy.

A Man Named John

There once was a man named John. This man was successful at his job but had to travel for work. While he was away, he had several habits that were very expensive. He also told every woman he met that he was in the process of getting a divorce. I wonder if you can see where this is going?

Young and gullible Sarah had no idea what it meant when someone’s jaw was working a thousand miles a minute, but she liked men that were confident and liked to party. She and John start to date and become quite close, it was fun and easy. But sometimes on the weekends, John doesn’t come back overnight. Slowly but surely Sarah starts to realize that John is partying too hard and spending an awful lot of time in the ‘back rooms’ of clubs when she isn’t around.

But that’s ok because one day he will change, for her… For a while he acts like a man, then he slips up and gets brought home by the police. Then he’s the perfect gentleman, oops one night he comes back missing his gold chain because he traded it for ‘something.’

But lucky guy Sarah believes the best in people, so every time he says it’s the last time she lets his cheating *** back in.

Then one day John has to go back home to visit his dying grandmother. Sarah bids him farewell with her love. Then she waits and waits, and he never calls to say he arrived safely. Naturally, since he has an itchy nose, Sarah starts to worry that he is hurt or detained. After all that must be the reason, he can’t call. For days she tries to contact him. His friends are evasive and can’t say if they have heard if he is ok. FINALLY, she calls the number from a borrowed phone. Guess who picks up? John’s wife and mother of the 2 children he had never mentioned. It turns out John does this a lot, and as long as he sends home money and comes to visit occasionally, she doesn’t mind. He even asked her to answer Sarah’s call. ‘Boys will be boys.’

Don’t worry, Sarah got over that one real quick. What about John? He emails her every year to give her an update on his life, which sucks by the way. Karma’s a B!
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Great place. Amazing, beautiful and kind people who I am now proud to call friends. Great service. They truly take great pride in their restaurant, food and drinks. They do a great job and I highly recommend. I stopped multiple times while walking in St. Maarten, sometimes for food and sometimes just to have a drink at the bar.

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We publish the solution to our crossword puzzle in the same issue as the puzzle itself. And this is for a good reason: Many of our readers are vacationers who won’t have a chance to wait for the next issue of St-Maarten.com Weekly Edition.
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