Île Tintamarre - An Uninhabited Mystery Island

Trying Out a Caribbean Cruise
By Chris Morvan

Chris Morvan goes on a Caribbean cruise to experience Sint Maarten/Saint Martin as a regular passenger.

What You Should Know About Conch

The shells of the Queen Conch are treasured souvenirs and even popular as music instruments. But there is more...

Long, empty beaches, crystal clear turquoise water- Sint Maarten? Anguilla? Maybe. Add to the list that the location is an uninhabited island close to St-Martin and the answer is Île Tintamarre. This island is a dream destination for any day charter trip. Big enough for serious hiking, there is much to explore. Tintamarre has a history with previous settlements, an abandoned airstrip and the rumor that it once served as a station for Nazi-submarines. Enough to make it a tempting location to visit.

There are several day charter operators who offer excursions to the island.

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Letter From the Editor
May 16th, 2019

In this issue, we continue our support for the essential cultural institutions of our island. It is a tragedy that the Jubilee Library has been virtually destroyed by Hurricane Irma, but even worse is the fact that a national library is not deemed important enough by the public to make rebuilding a priority. Considering the sad reality that the island never had quality book stores, a library is a wonderful way to open the world to young minds.

Amuseum Naturalis in the historic Old House close to Orient Beach is also featured frequently. We receive a steady stream of press releases and quality information and feel that this growing volunteer museum is a 'must visit' for every child on the island. The team of Les Fruit de Mer around Jenn Yerkes and Mark Yokoyama will help the next generation to appreciate the nature around them. Environmental awareness and a keen desire to preserve the beauty of the island will follow almost automatically - no alarmist warnings and scare tactics needed. Kids who understand nature and have an insight into the science explaining it will not ignore destructive habits like littering anymore.

Jan Thoelke
Publisher

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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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An Idiot’s Guide to a Caribbean Cruise
by Chris Morvan
Part one: The Ship

It’s early afternoon in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and I’m sitting in a small bar/lounge next to a highly varnished wooden walkway along which hordes of people are wandering aimlessly. The surroundings are elegant in a rather retro way, with chandeliers in vast dining rooms, staff smartly dressed in white uniforms and there is an atmosphere of expectation. It’s embarkation time on Royal Caribbean International’s cruise ship Adventure of the Seas.

This is my first experience of cruising and my wife and I have arrived armed with plenty of cash, which I soon discover is my first mistake. The bartender is not interested in $100 bills. What he wants is my SeaPass, a credit card-type thing linked to a normal credit card and which I can top up with my redundant greenbacks. The SeaPass also identifies me, so they can keep track of guests when we go ashore for a few hours on various islands.

We had vaguely discussed doing a cruise several times, but not a Caribbean one, because it’s where we live and we’ve seen plenty of the islands. Then by chance a conference came up which my wife wanted to attend, and it happened to be on a ship in this area. It’s actually going to call at St Maarten, so we have the choice of popping home to water the plants or staying on the ship that day. From my point of view the cruise is an opportunity to see how St Maarten measures up against the other ports of call.

We relax with a beer and when the time comes when the rooms are ready (they don’t call them cabins, but “staterooms”) we join the wandering hordes and set about understanding the layout. The room is smaller than the name implies: a “stateroom” suggests (at least to me) something spacious, with the Meghan Markle draped across a sofa and a large desk at one end where you can sit and write your novel, but the reality is a compact affair dominated by a good, comfortable bed, with just enough room around the front corners to slide your knees between it and the other furniture and get around the sides. The bathroom is similarly bijou, as the marketing team who came up with the word stateroom might call it. The shower is reminiscent of a one-person Star Trek transporter room. Everything, though, is good quality, and it all works.

Over the first couple of days we find our way around. On an open deck at the top there are several small pools in which people laze rather than swim, with sunloungers around the edges. Mainstream pop music is pumped out here even right after breakfast. You soon get to know which areas are for you and which are aimed at someone else.

I gravitate towards deck four, which has a nice wide promenade around the edges where you can sit and read a book or just watch the world go by.

Bizarrely, this is a haven for both fresh air friends and smokers, so you have to try to get upwind of anyone intent on creating noxious fumes. Interestingly, most of the smokers just happen to have a bit of a cough at the moment.
..continued Caribbean Cruise

Walkers out for some exercise do endless circuits here, although in fact you can burn plenty of calories just by using the stairs instead of the elevators. This is a microcosm of a small town in which you don’t have a car or the option of a taxi, and although nothing is more than five minutes’ walk away, all the little outings to a café, bar, theater or shop add up to more physical activity than many of us get normally.

And that unintentional physical activity is just as well, because you find yourself eating and drinking more than usual. Some of the restaurants charge money, but the Windjammer on deck 11 and the café on 5 offer free food and drink just about all day long. It's all too easy to load up with as much as you want and more than you should at the self-service buffets, where no server is making you feel self-conscious as you have both the curry with rice and the pasta, plus a dollop of mashed potato and some pork chops for good measure. And anyway, the large people on the next table have got six slices of pizza each, in addition to your modest plateful – and they’re snowing it with salt too.

Breakfast? You’re on vacation.

That means not only can you have some healthy oatmeal: you can supplement it with bacon, eggs, sausages, toast, jam and that wolf-in-sheep’s clothing, full-sugar fruit juice. And it’s free.

What is not free is alcohol. I had been told in advance that you could take a couple of bottles on board and had therefore stashed a bottle of cognac in my luggage.

Not true, as I find immediately on the first day when my suitcase doesn’t get delivered to the room. I go down to the lower decks to find it’s been sent to the naughty corner. They confiscate the bottle and keep it, to be returned at the end of the cruise.

There’s an onboard rumor that each passenger can bring a bottle of wine back from a shore trip, and on the first such day we do just that and get away with it – but it seems we were lucky, because the next time we get the old contraband treatment again. What seems to be happening here is that the company wants you to buy all your drinks from their own bars, at whatever price they wish to charge you. It’s like shopping in an airport: what are you going to do, go somewhere else?

Even in the onboard liquor store, with its special offers of two or three bottles for slightly less than they cost individually, you can buy them but you don’t receive them until the cruise is almost over. Dinner for us is in a palatial restaurant on deck five, same table, same time every night, with the conference people. The good thing about this (assuming you like your colleagues, which we do) is that you get the same waiter and assistant waiter every time, so you get to know them and they get to know you.

Our Tunisian waiter, Slama, seems to know all about the food, as if he’s best friends with the chef. He will make recommendations about what is particularly good on the menu that night. His assistant, Roanna, is smiley and quietly efficient. The staff in general are friendly and helpful as they should be, and this may have something to do with their terms of employment. Seven months on, seven days a week, then two months off at home. If you don’t like doing a good job, you won’t last long here. Both Roanna and our deck steward, Alicia, have children and send most of their salary home. After all, they’re working all the time they’re on the ship, so there is precious little chance to spend money.

NEXT WEEK: Shore time. How does St Maarten measure up?
Let’s Hear It For The Chefs
A series looking at the people who make the food in our island.
Part one: The man with a kitchen in his car
Chris Morvan interviews private chef Roman Boghassian

Coincidence is a fascinating thing. I’m in Marigot to talk to a private chef – one who will cook for you in your own home – and the café we’re supposed to be meeting in is closed, so I’m outside, talking to an American couple based in Anguilla who have popped over for the day. I have told just them what I’m doing when my phone rings and it’s him, standing just two yards away.

“Romain,” I call loudly, and as he comes over, the American woman steps in. “Chef Romain?” she asks, astonished. It turns out she’s a potential client who contacted him the previous week about catering for a special occasion she and her husband are hosting across the water.

Romain and I move along to the L’ArhabwaK restaurant and get talking. He’s French, full name Romain Boghassian, and he’s been working as a private chef in St Martin for 12 years. Born near Lyon, Romain trained at a culinary school in Tain l’Hermitage before honing his skills at the two-Michelin-stars restaurant Leon de Lyon.

Military service in the French navy interrupted his career but after that he began working as a seasonal chef, spending the summers in St Tropez and the winters in Switzerland. Then came a one-month visit to St Martin, where he was encouraged by friends to work locally, which he did, first at the Mullet Bay hotel and conference center, and then on to various top restaurants including Mario’s Bistrot and Le Tastevin.

Having developed a taste for travel, though, he was off again, working in London, Mexico and Florida before returning to his Caribbean destiny and specifically top restaurants in Grand Case including L’Auberge Gourmand and Rainbow. After gaining experience in private catering with one of the island’s leading exponents, in 2008 he took the plunge and set up on his own.

So if somebody wants Romain to cook for them, how do they go about it?
“Go online,” he explains. “Go to www.stmartinprivatechef.com and you look at the menus and we discuss by email what you want.”

If a client wants something that is not among the suggestions, Romain is more than happy to accommodate them. Having agreed the menu, he will do all the shopping and on the day he will prepare what can be done in advance at his home, where the kitchen, by the sound of it, is kitted out like one in a restaurant.

He arrives at the client’s home ready to apply the finishing touches and do anything that has to be done at the last minute. “All I take is my knives,” he says.

And you don’t check out the kitchen in advance?
“No. It’s an adventure, I like that. And I have a kitchen in my car anyway.”

Such an attitude is probably not surprising in someone who has moved around so much and taken on so many new challenges.

But sometimes life throws an unexpected situation at you, and Romain laughs as he recalls the time when he arrived at a house with an all-electric kitchen, only to find the power was off in the area. With no guarantee of normal service being resumed, he made a fire on the beach and did his stuff there in the open air.

This is a man who clearly loves what he does. He knew he wanted to be a chef at the age of eight and his parents warned him onto the job, allowing him to make cakes and cookies before branching out into general cooking when he was old enough to be safe in the kitchen.

Does he, I wonder, cook for his family or does his job use up all his appetite for preparing food?
“If I have a job that night I’ll make a little more and my family eats the same as the client,” he says.
Do you say that you would never eat snails? And most certainly not raw snails? Even if you are not a connoisseur of French-style escargots, you might have eaten snail meat without realizing it. One of the Caribbean staple foods is the conch (pronounced konk), a large sea mollusk with beautiful shells. If you ever ordered conch fritters or conch chowder, you ate a snail. If you enjoyed a conch salad or conch ceviche, you ate a raw snail. But this should not turn you off, because conch meat is very healthy and a delicacy. ‘Lamb’ is another term for conch, used in Spanish and French-speaking regions.

Conchs were plentiful in the tropical sea until the 1970s when overfishing required protection of the sea creatures. Most conch meat today comes from farms.

If you happen to find a conch shell in the waters around St. Maarten while snorkeling, first check that nobody is home before you take it. Don't remove a live conch out of the water in the mistaken belief that the beautiful shell would make a wonderful souvenir. Wrong!

The resident inside the shell itself is actually of considerable size. Once the mollusk died a slow death, a terrible odor from the decomposing body will be attached to the housing and spoiling any thought of storing it in a suitcase to take home.

The souvenir shells available in stores have been appropriately harvested with the animals removed. There is a trick of how to do it and this article will not list this method. The reason for withholding the information is the likelihood that any live conch to be found in the waters around St. Maarten/St-Martin was in a marine park, a protected zone where fishing is not permitted.
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

Careful! This week's crossword puzzle has a couple trick questions. 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 directly to the North of our location, it can only be Anguilla.

If we are using compound words in the answer, they do NOT have spaces!

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 SXM@EMAIL.COM.

Puzzle Solution on page 18
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The Jubilee Library Will Rise Again
Continued from Page 1

By Chris Morvan

Of all the many casualties of Hurricane Irma, some got back on their feet quite quickly, while others found the resurrection more difficult. One such example is Philipsburg's Jubilee Library.

Tucked away in Voges Street, next to the Sundial School, the building was not particularly prominent or exposed, yet it suffered catastrophic damage - to the extent that it will have to be demolished and rebuilt. Under the leadership of Interim Director Irmin Hughes, the library struggled on where it was for a year, with a limited stock of books on display and the rest in storage, but eventually the members received the news late last year that it was to be closed 'indefinitely'.

Meanwhile work continued behind the scenes to find a way forward, and it has now resurfaced in temporary accommodation, upstairs at the Adolphus Richardson building, just around the corner on Walter A. Nisbeth Road. Being above a store dealing in computer technology is oddly appropriate, because times have changed and the sight of someone reading an actual book made of paper is increasingly rare. The Jubilee Library is acutely aware of this and in addition to its stock of paperbacks and hardbacks it now has some 1,000 e-books which members can read online.

Joining Ms Hughes in a back room of the small new premises to talk about the future is project manager Pieter Lucas. "There has been a library in St Maarten since 1923," Ms Hughes says. "The first one was in someone's house in Front Street, near the Methodist church."

She started out in 1978 as a junior librarian when the library was housed in the Cultural Center in Back Street, and was part of the team when the enterprise moved to the now-stricken building.

"Yes, things have changed," she agrees. "You don't find people with their nose in a book so much these days. They are much more likely to read online, so that is the direction in which we are heading."

"We have a full collection of genres," Mr Lucas continues. "Not just fiction but reference books and we are responding to popular demand, acquiring what members want."

It would have been a long and costly process even without the unwelcome intervention of Irma, but the library is actively moving forward with plans for the future. The immediate aim is 15,000 e-books, and even then, there will be some ground to make up on the physical books, which number 55,000.

Most are currently in boxes, but Ms Hughes is determined to get them out on shelves as soon as possible to allow them to 'breathe', because pages tend to become musty if they're not exposed to air.

An initial list of beneficiaries from Dutch aid money included the library, although, they say, its name mysteriously disappeared from the list and they are now pursuing a policy of combining government funding with contributions and possibly low-interest loans from businesses and private individuals. The library is joining forces with the national museum and the Sint Maarten Archaeological Center (SIMARC) to find suitable spacious premises from where all three can operate - and a building has been identified quite close to the old library, but it could be several years before such a thing is up and running.

In the meantime, life goes on for the Jubilee team in reduced circumstances but with the same aims and services as before.
Île Tintamarre - A Deserted Island Off St-Martin's Coast with a Mysterious Past

Continued from Page 1

Deserted islands always carry some mystique and stir up fantasy stories of castaways surviving Robinson-style tales of pirate treasures, ready to be dis-covered by you. Islands are usually uninhabited for a reason: they are either inhospitable, useless rocks in the ocean. Or they have a shady history of a previous habitation, which causes a lot of legal obstacles and makes redevelopment difficult. (Just as in The Bahamas, where in the late seventies, the cocaine cartels took over complete islands.)

There is such an island with a strong history only two nautical miles off St. Martin's eastern coast: Tintamarre. The flat, brush-covered 0.8 square kilometres (0.3 sq mi) islet features a gorgeous main beach. There is a calm anchorage for the day charter boats, which frequently visit for a few hours. On the southern coast, there are several sandy coves with complete privacy. A little exploration of the island will reveal that Tintamarre was not always without permanent residents. Walk or hike around a bit and see plenty of strange ruins.

In the old days, there was agriculture and some commerce. Up to 150 people made their living on Tintamarre, and it was ruled by its owners as an almost independent territory. Even a currency was installed about 100 years ago when 30,000 Dutch cents, not circulating as currency in the Caribbean, were imported as cheap tokens with a new value assigned to them.

Nowadays, the beaches and mud baths are the attraction for most visitors. Secluded and only a short boat ride away from clothing-optional Orient Beach, it is just natural that many visitors enjoy the beach on Tintamarre in the nude. If you like to explore the island a bit further to see some of the ruins or the secluded coves, don't rely on flip-flops, but bring some firmer footwear along.

So, how do you get there? There are several boat operators offering trips to Tintamarre. Some of the day charter boats are running on a schedule, others can be booked for customized excursions.

Check out the fast speed boats of Caribbean Marines. It's great fun and surprisingly affordable for groups.

Commercial aviation for the much larger main island of St. Martin started right here after World War II, on an airstrip in the center of Tintamarre. One of the most colorful characters to influence life and business in our corner of the Caribbean was Rémy de Haenen (1916-2008). He founded the Compagnie Aérienne Antillaise (Caribbean Airline Company), operating with aging aircraft purchased cheaply in Puerto Rico. The exact nature of these activities is not too clear. The airline was a short-lived venture due to a string of fatal accidents, which shut down operations only a few years later. Remains of one of the crashed planes can still be found on the former runway. Rémy de Haenen lived on to be the major of St. Barth's for 21 years, to name just one more facet of his fascinating life.

Anchorage on the western coast of Tintamarre Island

Long, secluded beaches

A naturist paradise
Adventures in Sex and Dating in St. Maarten
A regular column by Leslie Hickerson

There was an old saying that men used to say “No means; try harder.” For anyone that thinks this is still a thing let me just clear it up for you. No means; No idiot. We are just being polite and not calling you names. Gian is one of the men left that believes this stupid saying. He and Chantal went on a couple dates when she realized that it was not a good fit and told him they could be friends.

Gian’s reaction was to re-double his efforts and call/text every day. After repeatedly being told to back off Chantal finally blocked his phone number and WhatsApp. His poorly thought out reaction to this was to show up at Chantal’s door unannounced one day to ask why she had blocked him… (Gian isn’t the sharpest tool in the shed). Chantal explained again that she didn’t want to date him and he needed to leave her alone. Several months later at Carnival this year Chantal was dancing at the Hit Maker’s concert, and Gian came up to give it another shot. Chantal lost her cool and told him to back the hell off. His reaction was to say to her that she was crazy, he didn’t even like her that much anyway, and he could have any girl he wanted. Hopefully, Gian will take his delicate ego and move on to a girl who actually wants to be with him!
Sudoku Puzzles
Try your skills on our Sudoku. Ranging from easy to difficult, giving you the opportunity to see if you are a puzzle master. Need help or want to see if you got it correct? Find the Sudoku solutions on Page 18. Good Luck!

Easy

```
 1 8 3 7 5 1
4 8 7 2 9
6 4 7
9 3
2 9 6 1
7 4 5 2 3
```

Medium

```
4 6 7 8
9 5 7
1 8 2
3 4 5 6 2
9 7 4 1
1 3 9
```

Difficult

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7 9 1 2 6 4
9 8 7 1
4 3 5 9
2 6 4
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Participate in the Environment Pub Quiz

By Leslie Hickerson

The St. Maarten Nature Foundation will be hosting an Environmental Pub Quiz on Thursday, May 23rd at 7pm. This event will be much like any quiz nights that are often held at bars where teams will compete to answer as many questions correctly as possible for a chance to win prizes! The added bonus to this night is that the questions will be based on the environment of St. Maarten and our neighboring islands!

This event is the first of its kind and was organized by two current interns of the SXM Nature Foundation; Chantal Mondelice (Reduce and Reuse Project Intern) and Latisha Richardson (Marketing Intern). The two developed the idea for the quiz night as a way to get the community involved in learning about our environment as well as supporting the important work the Foundation does to protect it.

“We will have lesson-based question and funny ones, but it will be used to give knowledge to everyone who is participating,” says Mondelice.

After three rounds of questions the teams’ totals will be added up for a chance to win prizes donated by local businesses! “We would just like for business owners, visitors, young professionals and locals to come and participate. We will also be having raffles to win many prizes and we hope to continue helping Nature Foundation to grow,” says Mondelice.

The Official Caribbean Rum Punch Recipe

Rum is a liquor native to the Caribbean. Find out how to prepare the perfect rum punch:
- 175ml orange juice, please freshly squeezed
- 75ml lime juice (not lemon) and also please freshly squeezed and not from this sad concentrate available in supermarkets.
- 150ml dark rum - go for premium quality
- 50ml sugar syrup - ad a few extra calories
- Dash of grenadine syrup
- Dash of Angostura bitters
- Generous pinch of freshly grated nutmeg (should come from Grenada for the Caribbean touch)

- Dress the glass up with slices of orange
- Don't forget a Maraschino cherry

Take a large jug and pour the fruit juices, syrup, grenadine and Angostura bitters into it. Ad the rum, and give the concoction a good stir. Place the jug into a fridge and chill for at least one hour.

Once poured into a glass over ice cubes, just sprinkle a bit of nutmeg over it and garnish with the orange slice and the cherry.
Learn, Help and Share at Amuseum Naturalis on International Museum Day

International Museum Day is Saturday, May 18th, and all are invited to participate at Amuseum Naturalis. Visit the Amuseum 9am to noon for free to celebrate and learn about the island’s nature and heritage. Join in as a volunteer from 3-5pm to help make the Amuseum better. Come share your knowledge and talent, or just enjoy, at the free Cultural Happy Hour from 5-8pm.

“Have you been to a museum lately?” asks Les Fruits de Mer President Jenn Yerkes. She can think of two good reasons why you should go: “I think everyone can learn something new at Amuseum Naturalis, even people who know the island very well. We’re also a community museum. We record and share information from the community so this culture and heritage isn’t lost.”

Amuseum Naturalis is a free museum of nature and heritage located at The Old House in French Quarter. It features over two dozen exhibits covering many local topics, from animals to architecture and poetry to bush tea. The Amuseum has attracted over 5,000 guests since it opened at its current location in July 2018.

It’s really exciting to be part of International Museum Day,” said Amuseum co-founder Mark Yokoyama. “St. Martin has its own wildlife, culture, history and language. There is no big national museum here, but St. Martin needs and deserves museums as much as anywhere else in the world. On the plus side, anyone can help the museums we do have. Anyone can have a voice in how the story of St. Martin is being told.”

The Amuseum has hosted several Cultural Happy Hours, featuring acoustic music, poetry readings and other performances. These events are a great chance to enjoy the grounds and gardens of The Old House, a place that feels very remote for busy St. Martin, especially on a full moon night.

International Museum Day is celebrated by museums all over the world, on or around May 18th. The annual event’s goal is to raise awareness that “Museums are an important means of cultural exchange, enrichment of cultures and development of mutual understanding, cooperation and peace among peoples.” In 2018, more than 40,000 museums participated in the event, in some 158 countries.

People can also take part in Museum Day activities at the St. Maarten Museum on Front Street in Philipsburg. It will be open from 9am to noon, and they will celebrate with the 2019 International Museum Day theme: Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition. There will be games for the children and informative presentations.

Amuseum Naturalis is open from 9am to noon Tuesday to Saturday and admission is free. The Museum Day volunteering will be from 3-5pm on Saturday, May 18th and the free Cultural Happy Hour will follow from 5-8pm.
Crossword Puzzle Solution

Sudoku Solutions:

Easy

Medium

Difficult

Sushi, Teppanyaki & International Cuisine

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