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SEPTEMBER 1995

## ANNUAL CHARTERING ISSUE

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# WORLDS

WITH JUST 18 MILES BETWEEN THEM, MARTINIQUE AND





It's off to school in the big city of Fort-de-France, Martinique...

# APART

ST. LUCIA OFFER CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN CARIBBEAN CLIMES.



...while it's off to work on the western coast of St. Lucia.

BY CAPT. CHRIS KELLY PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM CHINITZ

More than anything, you need flexibility when cruising the Windward Islands. Things just don't happen when you want, as fast as you want, or necessarily in your favor. But once in a while, you do get a break.

"I'm looking for the marina office and the customs dock. We need to clear in," I say to a local dock worker who's casually perched on a milk crate.

"Well, mon, dee office right up dere, secon' flow see, but you chew can't be clearin' in toDAY."

The image of calling a cranky customs officer—on a pay phone I don't understand—and summoning him down to the dock at overtime pay flashes through my mind.

"What's the problem?" I ask, bracing for the answer.

"No problem, mon. Customs, dey gone on strike." Welcome to St. Lucia.

that, there are few similarities between the two islands.

We begin our exploration aboard the charter boat *Matis*, a Gib'Sea Jamaica 38 from Kiriacoulis Yachting in Le Marin, Martinique. This two-stateroom, 18-knot, flying-bridge cruiser serves as our home for one week, and she offers upper and lower helm stations, two heads with showers, full galley, main saloon, cockpit, inflatable dinghy with 2-hp Yamaha outboard, and swim platform that serves us well during our diving expeditions. While we had two couples in our party, the boat is better suited to one couple with children since the midcabin becomes uncomfortable due to the boat's lack of air conditioning. Kids would do better on the drop-down dining table in the saloon. Though I would have appreciated a few cruising touches like

cia's northern tip. The interisland, open-ocean crossing can be very rough at times, so you must watch the weather (there are no VHF weather broadcasts) and proceed with caution.

Just south of Pigeon Island is Rodney Bay, a quiet anchorage with a mile-long beach and good holding ground in sand. The town, centered around an inner harbor, offers practically everything for the cruising yachtsman. Eastern Caribbean (EC) is the local currency, but merchants accept U.S. dollars and VISA or MasterCard.

You can dinghy ashore and sample some local restaurant fare, and there are several shops that sell handmade gifts and art. Friday night is the big night in town, when the streets are closed to traffic and the locals dance outside during "jump-up time."

Southbound the next stop for

## YOU CAN EASILY BURN FIVE DAYS EXPLORING THE WESTERN

Martinique and St. Lucia—in the Caribbean Windward Island chain that stretches south to Grenada—are *big*, some 30 miles long, and offer a multitude of quiet coves, quaint towns, and protected anchorages from which to choose. Unlike the daily island-hopping that most yachtsmen do in the Virgin Islands, you can easily burn five days exploring the western shores of one island before moving on to the next. Eastern-shore cruising is not recommended due to rough onshore conditions caused by the tradewinds and tricky barrier-reef navigation.

Taken together, both islands offer similar terrain—sugar cane and banana farms surrounded by mountainous rain forests in a jungle-like setting. Long, white-sand beaches are characteristic of most anchorages. Under water, coral reefs form at the headlands that divide anchorages, making the area perfect for divers and snorkelers alike. But outside of

isenglas and a depth gauge on the bridge and a transom shower in the cockpit, her twin Iveco 300-hp diesel powerplants performed flawlessly, and for the most part so did the Lofrans windlass that handled a CQR plow and all-chain rode. Overall, *Matis* is in "fair" condition for charter use.

Since all aboard are certified divers, our first stop is Diamond Rock on Martinique's southwest corner. A stand-alone volcano wannabe perhaps a mile offshore, Diamond Rock juts straight up to nearly 600 feet above sea level. In the northwest lee of this tiny island, we anchor and dive the rock's western point. Here, a nearly sheer dropoff supports several coral swimthroughs, and reef fish and sponge life are abundant. Since it's prone to current and strong winds, the Diamond Rock dive site is not for beginners, but it's spectacular for the experienced.

With the sun getting low, we make a beeline for Pigeon Island on St. Lu-

yachts is compact, sheltered Marigot Bay, with its secluded entrance and hurricane hole deep within its confines. As you enter the bay, you begin to get the full flavor of down-island Caribbean life. A small armada of local boys in motorized skiffs will approach selling straw hats and fruits.

Marigot Bay is a microeconomy catering to yachtsmen. The north shore has Dolittle's beach bar/restaurant, Marigot Inn up on the hill, and a full-service dive shop right on the beach. Across the channel the Moorings has a yacht facility with restaurant/hotel, fuel dock, minimart, and showers. A free shuttle barge ferries passengers and supplies back and forth.

Marigot Bay is a port of entry, and since it's roughly halfway down the island, it makes a good base of operations for a few days. You can make

**Top: Petit Piton makes a spectacular backdrop to *Matis* at Anse Chastanet. Bottom: Huge barrel sponges are found everywhere at Diamond Rock.**



SHORES OF ONE ISLAND BEFORE MOVING ON TO THE NEXT.



day trips to the dive sites or beaches and then return to Marigot and anchor at night.

**T**he balance of the coastline heading southbound to the town of Soufriere is dotted with white-sand beaches, a few day anchorages, circling frigate birds, and rugged scenery. Snorkeling is good at the headlands.

The best dive site on the island is at Anse Chastanet, just north of Soufriere. This is a coral garden—it seems you can't pack another hard coral or sponge into the place, and it offers a good mix of midsize reef fish scattered between canyon-like indentations in the coral wall. While you can't anchor on the reef since the whole area is a marine park, you can dinghy in and dive with Scuba St. Lucia, which has a shop right on the beach there.

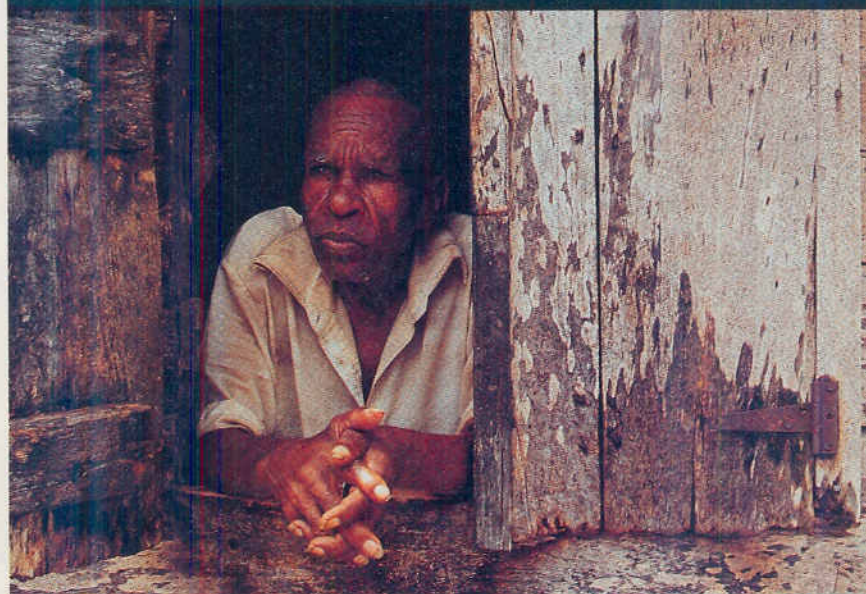
But as good a site as this is, its setting pales in comparison to St. Lucia's biggest attraction, the nearby Pitons. These twin volcanic peaks scrape the sky at 2,500 feet above sea level, and the diving along their bases is excellent. One feels minuscule so close to these giants of nature. We arrange with a local boat-boy for a cab ride—in his car—to Diamond Falls and Diamond Baths in the rain forest. The winding trip to the falls takes us through downtown Soufriere, and though the town is described in one cruising guide as "rustic, picturesque," I'd skip it in the interest of safety.

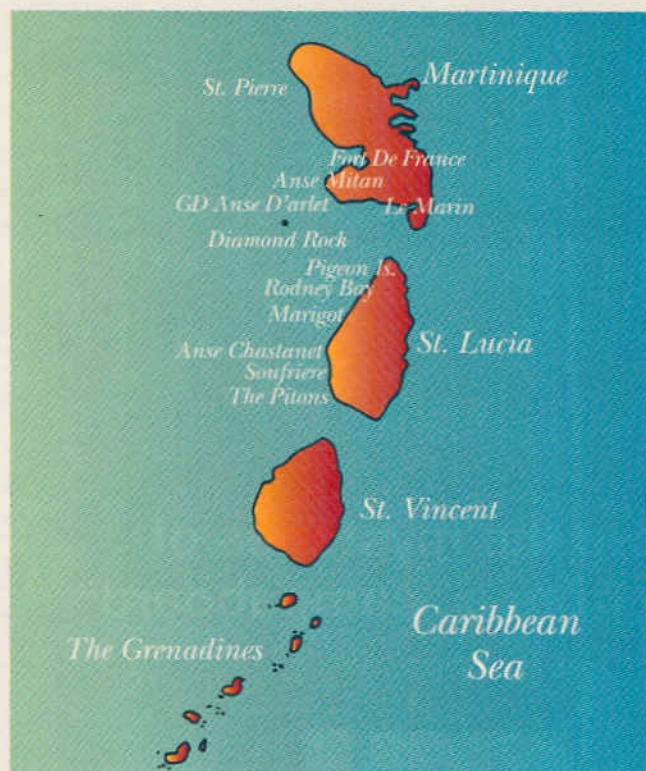
Time is running short, so we return to Martinique, making our first stop at Anse Mitan along the southern shore of Fort de France Bay. The holding ground here is unbelievably tough; the sand bottom is like cement. But after dragging the plow anchor around for two hours, I finally get a bite on the first try with the spare Danforth storm hook.

**Top: Unspoiled Case Pilot on Martinique retains its fishing village heritage. Bottom: A native St. Lucian watches the market activity.**



TWIN VOLCANIC PEAKS  
SCRAPE THE SKY AT 2,500 FEET  
ABOVE SEA LEVEL.





Anse Mitan represents culture shock in the extreme. In stark contrast to the fishing villages and ramshackle one-room houses of St. Lucia, Anse Mitan and Pointe du Bout have several big hotels, a casino, hundreds of liveaboard yachts, and a small marina jammed with sailboats and ferries that make the run across to commercial Fort de France. Forget docking here. The scene is decidedly French, from the dockside restaurant dining experience right down to the flashing, neon-green "plus" signs that mark the pharmacies. ECs are out, French francs are in. It's back to the Western World, big time.

Still, there are several spots on the return trip to Le Marin—most notably Grand Anse D'Arlet—that provide a French twist to the traditional Caribbean village. The northern village of St. Pierre also makes for an exceptional anchorage with a lot of seafaring lore in its past.

While there are no beach-fringed deserted islands in this area (they are further south in the Grenadines), the distances between ports-of-call and the wide variety of life almost dictates a two-week trip to do this right. So if you'd enjoy the contrast between European and Caribbean cultures in a single locale, you'll find what you're looking for right here. □

*Editor's note: The price for 14 days aboard Matis ranges seasonally from \$5,500 to \$9,750 plus fuel, provisions, and a \$150 cleaning fee. A cash/VISA/MasterCard security deposit of \$5,700 is required prior to boarding.*

For more information, contact **Russell Yacht Charters, Dept. PMY, 404 Hulls Hwy., Southport, CT 06490. ☎ (800) 635-8895. Fax: (203) 255-3426. (Or circle Reader Service No. 251)**



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