

St. Maarten: The Friendly Island

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Since embracing my love of naturism, I always try to find nudist destinations and lodging when I travel. This can be challenging, both for me and friends who tolerate my nudity when I drag them to clothing-optional hotels. So, I was glad to make the acquaintance of my friend G through Gay Naturists International. G (whose German name is usually mangled by others) and I are both very serious about nudism, and share many of the same views—we enjoy being nude anywhere possible, anytime. We both believe that nudism and sex are not the same thing, and we both enjoy mixed nudist settings. We decided to look for an opportunity to take a “nude trip” somewhere together. G suggested Saint Maarten.

Well known for its liberal stance on nude beaches, St. Maarten is the home of the well-known Club Orient naturist resort. It offers year-round warm tempera-

tures, gorgeous beaches, many flight choices, and lots of places to stay.

Arrival in St. Maarten is through the modern and well-equipped Princess Juliana Airport. One of the unique features of the airport is the approach. The runway threshold is only a few feet from Simpson Beach, and from a passenger's view, it appears that the plane is descending right into the ocean. Meanwhile, people line up on the beach for the unique experience of feeling that a large jet is about to land right on top of them. It's a pretty amazing sensation, and of course I had to try it.

St. Maarten is one of the islands in the French West Indies. Only 37 square miles in size, it is split in two. The French side named Saint Martin, to the north and west, remains a territory of France. The Dutch side, for many years a part of the Netherlands, became independent on October 10, 2010, bringing many new challenges to the small nation. Like many

Caribbean islands the extremes are significant: great wealth and dire poverty exist side by side, but remain mostly separate. This dichotomy may lead to our experience of finding many local interactions to be less than good examples of the tourist board's motto “The Friendly Island” suggests.

G found the Wyndham Sapphire Beach Resort, located conveniently on Cupecoy Beach, one of the well-known “nude” beaches. Once clearly a high end luxury resort, the public areas of the hotel haven't been scrupulously maintained over time, yet the individual rooms are still quite nice. Our suite featured two bedrooms, full kitchen, living room, and three balconies, one complete with a hot tub facing the ocean. There's a pool, small grocery superette, car rental counter, and concierge.

A \$14.00 cab fare for a three-mile ride to the resort suggested that renting a car would be a good move. It made our trips to the other side of the island easy and cost



photos by Rick Stockellburg

VIEW TO ORIENT BEACH and Tintamarre from highest point on St. Maarten.

us only \$163.00 for a week. Driving on St. Maarten is a test of patience. The roads are poorly constructed, with only two lanes (at best), and traffic, even off season, is frustrating. Road signage (or the lack thereof) keeps you on your toes. We tested the turning radius of our little car making several U-turns in our travels around the island. Still, we were able to see much of the island, and visit many places that would have been impossible without a car. There is a public bus system, but no one, including locals recommended using it.

Our first exploration was to the beach. Cupecoy is rocky, backed by cliffs and caves formed out of the volcanic rock, and divided into various sandy stretches. The amount of beach varies depending on seasonal currents. Some find the lack of sandy area unappealing, but I enjoyed the beauty of the sandstone cliffs and caves.

For our first full day, we set out for the world-famous nude beach at Orient Bay. Located on the French side it hosts Club Orient. The beach is open to the public (as are all beaches by law on the Dutch side of St. Maarten and the French side of St. Martin). A stunning beach crowns a large compound of bungalows that comprise the resort. A very good restaurant and bar are available to beach goers complete with two-for-one happy hour specials between 3 and 4 p.m. The people were friendly here, and we learned about nude cruises on the Tiko Tiko, a 46-foot catamaran moored right off the beach. We selected a "Picnic" cruise for Thursday out of the several options available.

Our trip to Orient Bay had taken us through the French main city of Marigot. Known for its duty-free shopping, the high exchange rate for the Euro (the French side uses the Euro as its currency although dollars are accepted everywhere), has left Marigot at somewhat of a disadvantage to its sister city on the Dutch side, Phillipsburg. Shopping on the Dutch side is always in dollars which provides a significant bargain in comparison to the Euro.

We explored Marigot, and hiked up to nearby Fort Louis. It was one of the key fortifications built to help protect the



A PLANE ON APPROACH above Simpson Beach.



WYNDHAM SAPPHIRE RESORT near Cupecoy Beach.



A SWEEPING VIEW OF MARIGOT and its harbor as seen from Fort Louis.



AUTHOR POSING ON SOME ROCKY OUTCROPPINGS on the far side of Tintamarre island.

island during the many invasions which transferred ownership over the centuries, the most recent one leaving it split between the French and Dutch. Fort Louis had relatively few visitors, so G and I took advantage of the solitude to enjoy clothes-free the beautiful hilltop location with a 360-degree view.

Cupecoy Beach became our end-of-day refuge. Facing southwest, it provided a gorgeous sunset every afternoon, often punctuated with a sailboat drifting lazily across the horizon. It was also a great time of day to get to know some of the regulars there. We met several interesting locals and visitors from the USA and Europe. The natural beauty of the beach is striking. Azure blue water, constant wave action, sandstone and lava rock cliffs and caves makes for a continuous visual panoply. The only downside to this section of beach is the lack of dry sand and the rocks tumbling around from the wave action. A quick dive into the oncoming wave gets you in the water safely. Getting out is more of a challenge as the rocks tumble down the steep incline with the receding wave.

Thursday arrived, and we headed back over to Club Orient for our "Pic-nic" cruise. We stripped down the moment we got out of the car, and were ready for our adventure. Our party consisted of G and I, a very nice couple from New York enjoying a four-day getaway from their kids, and a retired German couple. Captain Phillipe and his first mate Melanie sailed us

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CUPECOY BEACH CLIFFS AT SUNSET.



RICK AND G on the Tiko Tiko Tintamarre cruise.



BEACH ON TINTAMARRE WITH Tiko Tiko moored in the distance.

out to Tintamare Island, a beautiful uninhabited island that is part of the protected area of St. Maarten.

With few visitors we were free to roam about Tintamare's 50 acres nude and enjoy the chance to get some truly stunning photographs. Phillipe and Melanie set up umbrellas on the beach, gave guidance and suggestions for the day, then retired back to the catamaran. We spent the day swimming, snorkeling, and hiking around the island. What a truly satisfying nudist experience it was to be on a deserted island with no clothing whatsoever, and a whole day to experience being one with nature.

One of the fun highlights of our week

was discovering a small, new restaurant near the airport. While searching for a place to eat, G spotted an interesting looking cafe on one of the curves surrounding the airport runway. Crazy Thyme was opened in November 2009 by owners Andreas (the chef) and Bevil (the manager and host). With a unique tropical décor, and unusually diverse menu (selections range from Wiener Schnitzel to Thai green curry), it makes for an excellent, fun dining experience. We returned later in the week with a group of people we had met at the beach, and all raved about their great meals.

On Friday, my wanderlust, combined with too much sun on Thursday, led me to

explore the highest point on St. Maarten: Pic Paradise. Home of several cell phone and broadcast towers, it's reached via a narrow, poorly maintained road that put our little Hyundai Getz rental car to the test. Once at the top however, the view made it all worthwhile. While G was on the beach at Club Orient, I stood atop this highest hill overlooking the entire east side of the island, including that very beach.

Our goal had been to enjoy a nude getaway. While we didn't stay at a nudist resort, we were able to enjoy all of our time in our apartment nude, along with much of our time outdoors. St. Maarten provided a great place to be at one with nature with warm air, water, and newly formed friendships. We met many like-minded people during our visit, so the tag line "The Friendly Island" turned out to be true for us. **N**

