

Tall Ship Future



THE SEDUCTION HAPPENED QUICKLY, BEGINNING WITH OUR FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE FIVE-MASTED CLIPPER SHIP WITH ITS POLISHED BRASS AND GLEAMING BRIGHTWORK. IT CONTINUED AS WE EXPLORED THE INTERIOR, MET THE CREW AND GOT UNDERWAY.



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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Adven



SALE ON Royal Clipper's figurehead, from left; creative culinary display at a shipboard buffet; Atlantic bottle-nosed dolphins playing at the ship's bow; below, red-roofed homes on St. George's Harbor, Grenada



Sailing from the harbor

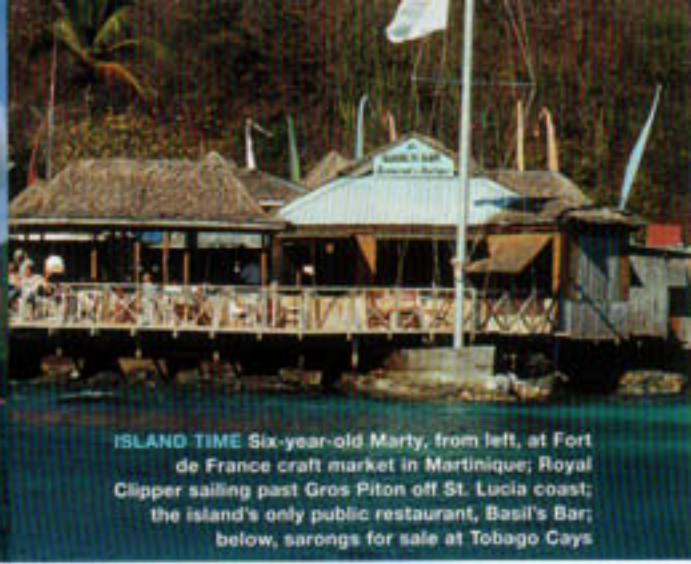
in Barbados, the distractions and clutter of civilization faded away. It was an exceptionally fine evening, with a steady wind, calm water and glorious moonlight. With all 42 billowing sails aloft, Royal Clipper knifed through the gentle swells of the Caribbean as the wind whipped around us. It was pure exhilaration to be riding the high seas, flying along at 16 or 17 knots beneath 56,000 square feet of sail.

We had been looking forward to this voyage ever since we traveled two years earlier aboard her sister ship Star Clipper to the northern Leeward Islands. This time we were bound for the southern Windward Islands of Carriacou, Grenada, Tobago Cays, St. Vincent/Bequia and St. Lucia, as well as Martinique, one of the Leeward Islands.

Royal Clipper has the distinction of being the only five-masted, full-rigged sailing ship built in the past 100 years. At 439 feet in length with a beam of 54 feet, it's also the largest true sailing clipper in the world, carrying up to 227 guests in luxurious style, plus 105 crew members. But this is no computerized, whiz-bang, faux sailing vessel. She is the real McCoy, recreating the sailing experience of the golden era of Tall Ships, but with all the modern conveniences—and indulgences.

Spacious staterooms have all the accoutrements of a luxurious classic yacht





ISLAND TIME Six-year-old Marty, from left, at Fort de France craft market in Martinique; Royal Clipper sailing past Gros Piton off St. Lucia coast; the island's only public restaurant, Basil's Bar; below, sarongs for sale at Tobago Cays

trimmed with burnished brass fittings and mahogany brightwork. Prints of famous clipper ships and sailing yachts grace the walls. Navy blue and crisp white cotton fabrics reflect the colors of sea and sky.

Dinner is served in the elegant dining room, which seemed like the United Nations with guests hailing from all corners of the globe. A typical seven-course meal includes poached salmon, carved loin of venison or perhaps a roast halibut supreme, accompanied by marinated roasted vegetables, with a finishing flourish of hazelnut parfait. Vegetarian and health-conscious options also are available. Dress for dinner is casual (but no shorts or T-shirts), and you may dine when and with whom you wish.

On this trip we learned of a German woman, Heidi, who had just completed her 33rd voyage with the line, and a Swiss woman, Barbara, who had spent 86 weeks on Star Clipper ships. In fact, most of the people we met were repeat customers, many of them vowing never to travel again aboard conventional cruise ships.

Star Clipper seems to attract a more adventurous traveler. A third

of the repeat customers own their own sailboats, according to the line's research. We met a young couple who spent 11 years traveling around the world in their 32-foot sailboat. They had some riveting and entertaining stories to tell, but they were excited to be aboard Royal Clipper for a more pampered adventure.

One morning, completely enjoying the speed of the ship under full sail while lying in the trampoline (the netting under the bowsprit), we noticed some grayish forms rising toward the surface. Suddenly, two Atlantic bottle-nosed dolphins jumped out of the water, keeping pace with the ship. Soon, four more appeared, all six crisscrossing back and forth across the bow, sometimes only inches from it. Two of them rolled over, pink bellies showing, looking up at us as they continued to keep pace with the fast moving ship. They frolicked for 10 minutes or so before disappearing.

For us, the experience of seeing dolphins playing in the wild might have been worth the trip. Yet there was so much more.

Perhaps our favorite stop was tiny Tobago Cays, a cluster of small islands surrounded by sparkling aqua seas, with colorful boats anchored close to shore. We spent about seven hours here





Colorfully restored vintage bus, Grenada

H3312

FOR FLIGHTS FROM MIAMI TO BARBADOS: BWIA (British West Indies Airways)—800/327-7401, American Airlines—800/433-7300

FOR BOOKINGS AND INFORMATION ABOUT STAR CLIPPERS: 800/442-0551, or visit the Web site at www.starclippers.com



Freshly opened nutmeg fruit

SPECIAL DISCOUNT: On all Caribbean cruises May through October 2002, Star Clippers is offering two-for-one sailings and airfare discounts at 50 percent off regularly scheduled fares



DESTINATIONS: Caribbean, Far East, Eastern Mediterranean, Western Mediterranean, Ocean Crossings, Mayan Caribbean (Mexico, Belize, Honduras)



Cocoa beans

EXTEND YOUR TRIP: Before or after sailing from Barbados, consider a stay at Cobblers Cove, a luxuriously intimate property on a quiet bay on the island's Gold Coast. Call 800/890-6060 or visit www.barbados.org/hotels/cobblers.htm.

on a decadently restful, sunny day with just the right breezes to cool us. In the shade of feathery casuarina trees, Royal Clipper's cooks and wait staff set up the lunch buffet, complete with grilled tuna steaks, barbecued beef and chicken, conch salad and tropical fruits. The ship's sports team helped passengers enjoy the water toys and snorkeling along a reef a short distance from shore.

Another beautiful island was Grenada, lush and green with lots of orange-blossomed trees, brightly colored bougainvillea and huge, startlingly red poinsettias. Known as the Spice Island, Grenada is fragrant with cocoa, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, ginger and mace. The capital of St. George's is one of the most beautiful harbor towns in the Caribbean. In addition to its natural beauty, the island's reefs and wrecks make for excellent dive sites.

We liked the atmosphere of the island. Vendors weren't pushy and the people were friendly. As we parted, our van driver Elvis remarked, "Remember, when you return to Grenada, Elvis is still alive."



Another enjoyable shore excursion was a Jeep safari tour in Martinique, our last port of call before returning to Barbados. Our driver and guide was Coco, a 29-year-old French woman. She spoke enough English to be understood and had a playful sense of humor. At one point, while fording a river, she pointed out that,

"Martinique has two rivers, this one and the other one."

On the final leg from Martinique back to Barbados, we reflected on our voyage. Often, it's easy to pick out highlights of a vacation, but the entire experience aboard Royal Clipper was exceptional. There was an energy we found stimulating—about the crew and about the passengers as they anticipated a new beach or reef or another adventure onshore.

But there also was a solitude here that affected us deeply, especially with our mugs of coffee in the cool early mornings before other passengers came on deck. The real wonder of sailing is the absence of any noise other than the wind filling the sails, the water breaking under the ship's bow, and the vast emptiness of the sea. ♦



JEWEL TONES Palm-lined beaches and turquoise water of Tobago Cays