

# Caribbean Cruising Part 2 St. Lucia North and on to the US or Europe

Liza Copeland continues her look at  
cruising routes from Saint Lucia.

*While some ARC participants can enjoy relaxed Caribbean cruising, their only constraint being hurricane season, others will be on a fixed sabbatical, their tropical experiences a teaser for future retirement reveries. Caribbean Cruising - Part 1 (World Cruising Club magazine – issue 26, Summer 2008 – available as a free download from [www.worldcruising.com/shop.aspx](http://www.worldcruising.com/shop.aspx)) explored south from Saint Lucia and included popular choices for leaving a boat during hurricane season. Although it is pity to miss the Grenadines group, for those completing a quick Atlantic circuit, or heading to the United States for the summer, visiting the islands north of Saint Lucia will be the focus. The diversity of colourful cultures, cuisine, fauna, flora, topography and the underwater, along with idyllic trade wind sailing should ensure rewarding cruising for all. As in the southern section less travelled tracks are discussed as well as the popular milk-run routes to help make decisions between the many choices.*

▼ Petit Anse D'Arlet, Martinique



### The Windward and Leeward Islands

The bow-shaped Eastern Caribbean Windward and Leeward chain, also known as the Lesser Antilles, stretches over 4000 miles north to south. Together with the Virgin Islands, that lie to the northwest, they include the most popular destinations for Caribbean cruising.

### The Windwards

#### **Martinique** (Fort de France 14°36'N 61°04'W)

Lying 23nm north of Saint Lucia, Martinique was aptly called the island of flowers by the Caribs. It is the largest, highest, most northerly of the Windward group. Like all Departments of France (including Guadeloupe), it has benefited hugely from French and EU funding with sophisticated shops such as the hypermarket Carrefour, great restaurants, good roads and facilities for yachts. It is also completely Caribbean as can be seen in the capital city Fort de France. Check out the colourful market here for its flowers, produce, cheeses, potions and spices.

Popular anchorages on the western (leeward) side include Grand and Petit Anse D'Arlet, the region of Anse Mitan in the Trois Ilets district that has marinas (ferry over to Fort de France) and Fort de France itself. In the northwest lies St. Pierre with the dramatic backcloth of the verdant, soaring Mount Pelée



▲ Brilliant flowers everywhere particularly in the French islands



▲ Dominica, Portsmouth exploring Fort Shirley



▲ The Saintes, oozing Gallic charm

which erupted in 1902 and instantly killed the entire city population, except ironically for the one man in prison. The ghost town of this former 'Paris of the Caribbean' is gradually being redeveloped. Check out the town museum photos and artefacts, such as fused nails and scissors and the impressive new museum outside town, that shows the considerable volcanic activity throughout the Caribbean island chain.

Alternatively, one can visit the south coast with the pretty, popular St. Anne village or use the extensive yachting facilities in Marin. Adventurers may also cruise Martinique's windward shore as it is protected by a barrier reef. Although the chart looks intimidating, piloting was GPS accurate on our Nobeltec charts. Here you will find purely French communities, few, if any, international yachts and wonderful wildlife trails on the Caravelle Peninsular.

### The Leewards

**Dominica** (Portsmouth 15°34'N 61°28'W)  
Sandwiched between the sophisticated French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe the naturalness of this dramatic jungle island, the most southerly of the Leewards, is accentuated. Although Roseau, the capital, is worth a stop for its Creole houses with gingerbread trim the popular yachting anchorage along the steep-to lee coast is the northerly Prince Rupert Bay at Portsmouth. Here one can clear in; enjoy a good hike around Fort Shirley; take a trip up Indian River with informed guides, and sample the many restaurants and 'Happy Hour' bars ashore – always remembering that rum is cheaper than mixer and that the rum punches are powerful! A tour around this verdant island is a must for a true rain forest experience, refreshing cool waterfalls and particularly to visit the new Carib Indian village, a long time vision that has finally come into reality.

### The Saintes (15°52'N 61°35'W)

A 20-mile rollicking reach north of Dominica lie the picture-perfect Iles des Saintes with their red-roofed dwellings covered in hibiscus and bougainvillea, a vibrant contrast to the sapphire seas. Ashore the town on Ilet Cabrit oozes idyllic Gallic charm with aromas of garlic wafting over the water from restaurants galore and boutiques filled with enticing Caribbean clothing alongside high-end French fashions. Clearance is at the Town Hall and includes Guadeloupe. Walk over the hill past the small airport and the classic West Indian cemetery, whose graves are lined with conch shells.

### Marie Galante (15°52'N 61°19'W)

This dry, flat island is little visited by cruisers as it lies to windward of The Saintes. The community of Grand Bourg has a small harbour and ferry dock, and the main anchorage at Saint Louis is by a sleepy village.

### Guadeloupe (Deshaies 16°52'N 61°48'W)

The two butterfly-shaped islands of Guadeloupe are divided by the navigable Rivière Salée. From different geological eras the newer, higher westerly side is named Basse Terre (low land) while the flat, older, easterly wing is named Grande Terre (large island)! Most cruisers transit the calm lee side and stop at attractive Deshaies Bay, but watch for fish pots when approaching. This is a good spot to stock up on French wines and cheeses, and on our last visit we bought 20 bottles for 20 Euros. Very drinkable; mostly, anyway! Like southern France refreshing Rosés are popular. It is a long climb to the Jardin Botanique de Deshaies (past Customs) but well worth the hike.

Visit Pointe à Pitre, the capital in the middle of the south coast, by bus along with a chicken or two or alternately take the boat there. It's a vibrant attractive town with seafood sold on the quay and another mouth-watering market. We completed the transit of Rivière Salée successfully with a 7'4" draft. It is an early start to catch the bridge openings, a little tricky to navigate the river if the channel marker lights have failed and a deceptively strong sideways current between the first two opening bridges. Snorkelling is rewarding on the north side and the easting gives an easier slant to Antigua, which is due north and can be a hard windward slog from Deshaies in a northeasterly wind. The distance is just over forty miles, one of the longest in the Windward/Leeward chain.

### Antigua

(English Harbour 17°00'N 61°45'W)

There is nothing quite like entering English Harbour, Antigua, between the towering 'Pillars of Hercules' rock formation and the fort on Berkley Point, then entering the aqua waters of Freemans Bay ringed with white sands. Secure English Harbour protected the British fleet from the French and Nelsen's dockyard itself has been beautifully restored. Fittingly it is the centre of yachting in the Caribbean with facilities galore and is famous for its Classic Yacht Regatta and Antigua Race Week, that are held annually in April to early May, that provide a magnificent spectacle, particularly the classic yachts. Don't miss the steel band on Shirley Heights on Sunday afternoons, and enjoy the amazing view of the Dockyard, English Harbour and Falmouth Harbour beyond that offers a huge area for anchoring, marinas and other facilities, and is home to Antigua Yacht Club. The small isthmus of land between the two harbours is lined with a variety of restaurants with the Admirals Inn just inside the Dockyard gates.



▲ Pointe A Pitre market, Guadeloupe



▲ Rum Punch on Shirley Heights over looking English Harbour Antigua is a must!





▲ Pan bands are popular and now women are playing too!



▲ A good dinghy to get one ashore is a must and to see the sights Andy adds!



▲ The helm of Ticondergo feels so good, just like on our wedding day aboard her in 1973

An older flatter island, Antigua boasts beaches for every day of the year. It is easily circumnavigated with Great Bird Island and Green Island giving lovely windward anchorages and easily accessed with electronic charts. (Always also have paper at hand!) Antigua has every yachting facility, great provisioning, and yards to haul and leave the boat particularly at Slipway in English Harbour and in Jolly Harbour (a large full service marina/town house development on the west coast). Check with your insurance company carefully for their requirements for leaving a boat during the hurricane season in the hurricane belt. Clearing in the Dockyard and Jolly Harbour is much easier than in the capital St. Johns.

#### Barbuda (17°33'N 61°46'W)

Under the jurisdiction of Antigua the low island of Barbuda lies 25 miles due north of Antigua, and again can be a hard sail close to a NE wind. Barbuda has an interesting history. It was owned by one family, the Codringtons, and the small population are descendants of their slaves. It is enjoyed for its peacefulness, beautiful waters, great fishing, diving and bird life, particularly its large frigate bird rookery, but its reef strewn waters demand careful piloting in good light.

While many cruisers now enjoy easing off the wind and heading 60 miles to St. Barts, then on to close by Sint Maarten (St. Martin) and Anguilla, there is another chain to the west that we find most rewarding. All verdant towering volcanic islands with steep-to shores they have fewer anchorages, although some now offer mooring buoys, but they are charming to visit, give great hikes up to fertile craters and being off the 'milk-run' the people are extremely friendly and relaxed. Stretching nearly 90 miles from southeast to northwest are Montserrat, Nevis, St. Kitts, Statia and Saba.

#### Montserrat (Little Bay 16°48'N 62°12'W)

Lying southwest of Antigua, Montserrat used to be a prosperous rural haven for locals, ex-pat residents and a medical school, but in 1995 the Soufrière Hills volcano erupted violently burying the capital and much of the island in volcanic rubble and mud. Volcanic activity continues, and the island is a testament to nature's tremendous power and force. Sailing the coast gives dramatic vistas of brilliant green and cultivation, alongside a land of grey ravaged rock and pumice spewn from the depths of the earth and sometimes still smouldering. Driving to the look-out on land one can truly assess the extent of a devastated, stark, jagged land that stretches across the entire south side. This was where most lived and we gained insight into the extent of the tragedy from a group of previous residents on their annual trip home. With its ever reducing boundaries the population that is left on Montserrat valiantly fights on.

#### St Kitts and Nevis

(Basseterre 17°17'N 62°43'W)

North of a large barren rock named The Kingdom of Redonda (of course there is a story!) lie the verdant, soaring islands of St. Kitts and Nevis, both one country and like Montserrat linked to Britain. Both make great stops but have few anchorages, although St. Kitts has a small marina in charming Basseterre, the island's only Port of Entry. Sugarcane production officially closed in 2005 after 365 years, but wild cane still gives a carpet of green on the coastal slopes before they rise into rainforest. The beautiful gardens and old plantation homes are delightful to visit, along with the well-restored Brimstone Hill Fort making an island tour well worthwhile.

Clear in or out of Nevis at its only town Charlestown and maybe vie for the fisherman's catch with the locals. Anchor off sandy Pinney's Beach and enjoy a drink at Sunshine's, a colourful local character, or visit the small anchorages to the north. The Gallipot is particularly welcoming to cruisers.

#### Statia/St. Eustatius

(Oranjestad 17°28'N 62°59'W)

It is hard to believe that this laid-back sleepy island was once the centre of trading in the Indies, as the Dutch opened it as a free port to get around restricting trade laws. Oranje Baai is the main anchorage. There is a US\$10 (per night) park fee, which includes



▼ Nevis, Pinney's Beach





▲ *Sunshine, a welcoming character, at his bar*



▲ *The Nevis fishermen are in*



▲ *Touring the old plantations, St. Kitts*

the use of mooring buoys (yellow with a blue stripe, some faded). Everyone waved as we walked up the old cobbled slave road, some stopping to ask if we needed help. We found this one of the most friendly islands we have visited and thoroughly enjoyed sleepy duty-free Oranjestad at the top of the hill with its restored old houses, fort and museum. The island's hiking trails are well-kept and we had an exhilarating climb up the 2000ft volcano The Quill to the fascinating fertile crater filled with wildlife. On our return friends enthused about the local diving.

#### **Saba** (Buoys for officials 17°37'N 63°15'W)

The 5 square-mile round rock of Saba lies 15 miles to the northwest and just south of the rhumb line lies the Saba Bank, a submerged atoll with some of the richest diversity of marine life in the Caribbean. Also Dutch, with English commonly spoken, Saba used to be almost inaccessible for yachts both due to its deep waters and towering shores. When my husband Andy first visited, one person had to stay on the boat while the others landed on the rocky beach and climbed 800 hewn steps to the main town - strangely named The Bottom by the mostly white population descended from Dutch, Scottish and Irish settlers and a few slaves. Engineers decreed building a road impossible until a local decided he could design it and 'The Road' came into being. Now one can tie to a mooring buoy at Fort Bay on the south coast and take a tour around one of the most picture perfect islands in the Caribbean with its immaculate white planked, red-roofed houses and well kept gardens. It has arguably the world's shortest commercial runway 396m long with both ends of the runway butting the sea, which has allowed limited tourism and the Saba University School of Medicine to prosper. There are also moorings off the steps if you would like the challenge!

#### **St. Barts, St. Martin, Anguilla**

Lying some 25 miles to the Northwest lie the popular eroded older islands of St. Barts, St. Martin and Anguilla that can all be circumnavigated. Contrasting in nationality and personality they offer a variety of anchorages and experiences. While St. Barts and northern St. Martin are French under Guadeloupe's administration, the other half of St. Martin (Sint Maarten) is Dutch and Anguilla is still British. Clearance must be completed in each. The trip to reach them is generally to windward from Statia or Saba.

#### **St. Barts (Saint Barthélemy)**

(Gustavia 17°54'N 62°51'W)

The picturesque sleepy small port of Gustavia, the main town, has always been a favourite. It has become very fashionable and was certainly humming on our visit last year when dwarfed by the Bucket Regatta Megayachts. Although French it was named in honour of King Gustav II when owned by the Swedes in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the Swedish period also left its mark in the names of the streets and the town. It is fun to wander around, climb up to Fort Gustav for a great harbour view and visit Anse du Grand Galet ('shell' beach) to the south. It is often possible to tie up on the wharf, otherwise anchor to the north of the port, being careful to clear the shipping channel.

Anse de Colombier, 2 miles NW, offers another pretty option. The bay is filled with free government mooring buoys and green turtles graze under the boats, quite tame to snorkellers. Ashore one can leave the dinghy by steps and have a wonderful walk along the northern shore on a path often lined by lilies.

An island tour will show that the island certainly appeals to the rich and famous; look out for aircraft landing on the downhill runway!

#### **St. Martin (Saint Maarten)**

(Marigot 18°04'N 63°05'W, Phillipsburg 18°01'N 63°03'W)

In contrast, southern Dutch Sint Maarten and northern French St. Martin have large-scale tourism inspired by their white sand beaches and duty free shopping. Although the boat has to stay in the waters of the jurisdiction of clearance its crew and dinghy can freely visit the whole island and ashore the borders aren't marked.

Lying at the head of Great Bay in the south lies Phillipsburg, the Dutch capital. Although convenient for bargain hunters it can be roly in SE trades, and avoiding a cruise ship day is advised. Be warned that salesmen can be aggressive, so bargain hard here. Most yachts making longer visits anchor or dock in protected Simpson Lagoon. Check opening times for bridges. This makes it handy to visit the two large marine stores chains, Budget Marine and Island Water World, who deliver throughout the islands and give an automatic discount here at their home bases. There are also a wide variety of other services in this centre for yachting.

Clear at Customs at the French capital Marigot in the north. This charming town has a sweeping sandy bay anchorage (can be roly in NE trades) and sheltered marina. Ashore find duty free items in relaxed, air-conditioned shops at competitive prices



▲ *The beach and the steps to 'The Bottom, Saba'. Can you see them?*



▲ *The Bottom, a strange name for a town up 800 steps*

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▲ Gustavia



▲ West Indian style



▲ Anguilla, Road Bay the only free place to anchor

(euros), inexpensive flavourful French cuisine, and colourful clothing and produce markets. Both sides have large supermarkets.

### Anguilla (Road Bay 18°12'N 63°05'W)

Lying five miles north of St. Martin and also dependent on tourism, laid-back British Anguilla is a total contrast in culture. Surrounded by beautiful beaches and turquoise-blue bays its shores are mostly marine park with off-lying cays. Clear in with officials at pretty, northerly, Road Bay, one of the few free anchorages, and check rules and costs for cruising the rest.

### Decision time – Europe or the United States?

Unlike crossing the Atlantic from east to west, when there is a long weather season, the window for crossing from west to east is small. Boats ideally leave in the last two weeks of May or early June from the Caribbean or Bermuda to avoid the earlier northern lows and later southerly hurricane season but still have some wind when skirting the Azores High. While many yachts rhumb-line route to the Azores after stocking up with food and fuel in Antigua or St. Martin, others will circle the north sector of the Azores High which makes a stop in Bermuda little off their track. Those planning to stop in Bermuda may also fit in cruising the Virgin Islands. Allow enough time to actually cruise the delightful Azores Islands that are full of culture and charm, and covered with flowers. We particularly enjoy Flores as well as Horta in Faial, the most popular destination. Be sure to have paints for your picture on the wall! The Antigua-Horta rhumb-line is some 2300nm, Antigua-Bermuda is just over 900nm.

World Cruising Club's annual ARC Europe rally leaves from Nanny Cay, on Tortola (BVI) in early May – see [www.worldcruising.com/arceurope/](http://www.worldcruising.com/arceurope/) for more details.

Those heading the 1200 nm to the United States have many islands and options with the popular Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, The Dominican Republic and the Bahamas if taking the northern route. Those wanting to go off the beaten track can cruise the south side of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, Mexico and Cuba. In addition, Central America may appeal with Guatemalan Rio Dulce one of the best hurricane holes in the Caribbean.

### Cruising Tips

1 **Exchange Rates.** Exchange rates have been fluctuating recently, so check rates

before reaching an island before changing cash. French islands use the euro; British islands EC\$ and the Dutch islands use the euro or US\$. The British Virgin Islands use US\$.

2. **Officials.** As with the southerly islands, forms have mostly been simplified and charges are small. It is increasingly important to go immediately to a Port of Entry to clear on arrival in another country with clearance papers from the country before.

3. **Permits.** If heading to the United States be aware that the Cruising Permit for the Bahamas is \$300 and fees can approach \$100, depending on the number and location of stops, in the Dominican Republic. Personal U.S. Visas for arriving on a yacht must be obtained in advance to enter the United States and avoid high costs and a limited cruising period. Although U.S. boat visas have to be purchased in Puerto Rico these are generally not valid on the U.S. mainland.

4. **Language.** English is generally spoken throughout these islands, less so in Martinique and Guadeloupe which are Departments of France, and most locals have their own patois comprised of a mix of languages and grammatical structures that is hard to follow if not impossible for the visitor.

5. **Boat Boys.** Although most boat boys are extremely friendly these days, there may be the odd one who appears aggressive (often the older men), particularly in a poorer country like Dominica. Portsmouth now has a co-operative, but if greeted out at sea only pick one if you like them and get to know them before inviting aboard. Yachts represent huge wealth to the local people who have few other ways to make a living.

### Pilots

Grenada to the Virgin Islands (Jacques Patuelli), Imray £30

Chris Doyle's Caribbean Guides cover all island groups, including Windwards, Leewards and Virgin Islands.

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### About the Author

Liza is the award-winning, best-selling author of four books. Just Cruising and Still Cruising recount her family travels around the world; Comfortable Cruising tells of their voyage around North and Central America; and Cruising for Cowards, co-authored with Andy (2nd Edition just published and available at [bookharbour.com](http://bookharbour.com)), is their practical how-to text. She has also assisted directing a DVD Just Cruising, writes for several magazines and gives seminars at boatshows and for a variety of organizations on boating and travel. Their 40' 1985 Beneteau Bagheera has now completed over 114,000 miles and visited 114 countries and is still enjoyed and used by the entire family.

