

Dominica 2005

We arrived in the north of the island and our hotel was in Roseau in the south. On our drive to our hotel the taxi driver took us through the Carib Territory and Keeb photographed portraits of the Caribs for my Dad to paint. I even took one photograph of a Carib man. This island has the largest population of Caribs in the Caribbean but many of them did not wish to be photographed so we were fortunate to get the shots that we did. Some of them were so shy when our maxi taxi passed them, they would turn their head so we could not see their face. Keeb asked two young Carib girls if he could take their photo and one of them said "We too ugly". I was looking at them thinking how beautiful they were, but they could not see it in themselves. The Carib territory was very mountainous and lush, and although there were some replicas of the thatched houses of their ancestors, their actual homes were modest. They fight the same demons as other indigenous peoples around the world - alcoholism and poverty.

That same day we stopped at the Emerald Pool which is a waterfall in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park. We were lucky to get so much in on our arrival day because when we got to our hotel, we decided to shorten our stay from five to three days. So, the next day we changed our tickets to return the following day then headed out for an island tour. When we visited the museum, it turned out to be run by a Trinidadian who lamented that she was hankering for a roti.

The Botanical Gardens were a bit of a surprise. A bus crushed by a tree which was a relic of Hurricane David, had pride of place. We then took a scenic mountain drive to Trafalgar Falls. The flowers and ferns were spilling over on the road and at one point ginger lilies lined its edge. The mountains felt much taller and steeper than ours. The falls turned out to be a pair – a male and female. I was impressed.

We then took a coastal drive to Portsmouth to the Indian River. On the way there we started looking for lunch. We stopped at a village where the restaurant was out of food but I will never forget the scene of the school with its bright yellow shutters on the windows and the children running around on the basketball court wearing bright yellow shirts reminiscent of large butterflies. I did not take a picture of it but I wish I had. Anyway, we ended up stopping at an American medical training facility and I happily aimed for a café selling Indian food. Keeb did a quick evaluation:

Jo + Indian Food + Boat Ride = Disaster

He left me at the restaurant and found the pharmacy and returned with a bottle of Pepto Bismol in tow. We had a leisurely tour down the Indian River as only row boats are allowed. So I did not suffer any gastronomic mishaps. The buttress roots of the trees on the river were unique and the guide mentioned that some scenes from the "Pirates of the Caribbean" sequel were shot on that river. The tour was a bit like our Caroni Bird Sanctuary tour but with less wildlife. However, the trees made it a very picturesque experience. And we saw the reeds used by the Caribs to make baskets before bamboo was introduced.

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Our final stop that day at Portsmouth was at the Cabrits National Park. We visited Fort Shirley, an 18th century military installation. The manicured lawns complimented the remnants of the buildings and there were many signs giving historical insights into life during the time of its occupation. There was also a tiny indoor museum tracing the history of the island. Of all the experiences we had that day I think Keeb enjoyed this one the most.

The one thing we had hoped to do but we dropped from our itinerary was whale watching. Keeb promised me that we will plan another holiday to go whale watching, maybe to Alaska or Canada. It turned out in the years to come that we saw whales on both countries.

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