

## St. Vincent 2011

When I think back to our long weekend in St. Vincent, I am flooded with brightly coloured memories. The perfect tropical sunshine there was such a contrast to all the rainy days we had been having in Trinidad. My cousins Sophie and Ty were on the flight with me. When we arrived, Kali was waiting for us with a seven-seater van which he maneuvered skillfully along narrow, steep roads leading to Prospect where Leandra's home was perched, overlooking two beaches.

We had all our meals out on the terrace starting with dinner that first night and we could hear the waves crashing into the rocks below us and see the moon's reflection glittering on the dark sea. The next day we were greeted to fluffy scrambled eggs, smoked salmon, excellent Vincentian bread, and mimosas. The blue sea, black sand beaches and Bequia served as our backdrop with the waves providing rhythmic background music.

That day we took the ferry over to Bequia I was astounded by how beautiful the harbour at Bequia appeared as we neared it. Colourful boats sat on the turquoise sea in front of equally colourful buildings. We walked along a stretch with little shops including a quaint bookstore that sold West Indian books and maps, carved whale and camel bones and a glass case containing daggers engraved with "Bloom" and "Depp" that I imagine were props from one of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movies.

We then walked on a sidewalk with the sea lapping along the edge, and finally stopped at one of the tiny waterfront hotels to have lunch. The waitress growled at us and it was really amusing how clearly she did not want to wait on us. This was the only unpleasant person I met there.

Sophie had been to the beach with Joy before and in typical youthful fashion convinced us that it was "just over there" so we followed her through postcard perfect scenery on a mostly uphill hike. Leandra and I marveled that we even made it to the beach. We went into the sea which was refreshing. Bequia, like Tobago, has the requisite white sand beaches the rest of the world associates with tropical paradises.

There was a pier on the beach at which water taxis could be boarded. Sophie headed to the pier but since we saw only dinghies there, Leandra, Ty and I decided to take a taxi back to the ferry and stopped at the beach bar for a drink before proceeding. We did not have any luck with a taxi and went out to the pier which was now deserted hoping to find a water taxi. A dinghy pulled up and two mature French women jumped off yelling "Merci" to the young man at the motor. Ty asked him if he would give us a ride to the ferry and he said okay. I was worried about getting in so I decided to get in backwards, stepping down as though it was a ladder. My dress was however fluttering wildly in the breeze. Ty pointed out afterwards this was not my most graceful moment. Leandra got in and we were off with me clinging to the rope on the side of the dinghy for dear life.

When we arrived at the dock I climbed out and Leandra tried to disembark except she was crouched over with her hands on the dock but could not get up. The boat driver was making helpful suggestions, "Use your left foot ... No ze ozzer foot, ze ozzer foot". She tried to straighten up which meant she backed into the boat and landed on Ty.

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I meantime was standing on the dock, arms outstretched like a sleep-walker saying, "Take my hand!" but I was so far above poor Leandra that she could not reach me. Of course, Ty was not impressed because he had visions that Leandra's re-entry to the boat would cause him to fall overboard and send the boat guy shooting vertically up in the air like a cartoon character. And it did not help when Ty looked up on the dock, I was standing there with my arms out, looking like an extra from a movie about the undead. We worked out in the end that the guy with the dinghy was not actually a water taxi driver since he was surprised when Ty asked him what we owed for the ride. Sophie later reported that their water taxi was an actual boat. I felt even sorrier for the poor guy who was just doing us a favour.

That night we had a barbeque dinner. Leandra had coal and fire starters on hand. What we did not know was that the coal already had a flammable coating. Needless to say we had an exciting time controlling the inferno that leapt up from the barbeque at the beginning. Ty barbequed lamb chops, chicken and shrimp. We really ate well all weekend.

The next day we went for a tour of St. Vincent. We started at the Botanic Gardens, reputed to be the oldest in the tropics. We were advised to hire a guide, but we all thought we were quite capable of reading the signs ourselves. However, after wondering around on our own we realized there were very few signs - someone had made self guided tours challenging. I'm not pointing fingers but... The gardens were pretty and featured an open rotunda and pond. And there was a breadfruit sucker from the original plant Captain Bligh brought to the island in 1798.

We left the Botanic Gardens to visit the Wallilabou Falls – a tiny water fall in a small landscaped park. We then went to the "Pirates of the Caribbean" set which was nearby. The buildings seemed solid enough from a distance but up close they were mostly Styrofoam and paint and were crumbling. It was cool to check them out.

That night we had dinner at "Mariners" which was good. I ordered warm fruit and ice-cream for dessert. I took a few mouthfuls and could not figure out why it tasted so strange. And it did not help that I had got insect repellent in my mouth earlier. I am not going into how that happened. Anyway, after a while I realized there was harsh-tasting rum in my fruit. I guess when the menu mentioned "warm" they expected me to understand "laced with Puncheon".

On our last day we walked over to one of the beaches near to Leandra's house. It was so easy to get there, it was not quite so easy to get back. We hiked up and down hill trying to find our way back and when I mentioned a hardware to Leandra she said emphatically there were no hardware stores in Prospect so I asked her to stand still so I could take a picture of her since she was standing in front of one.

We finally got back home and dressed for lunch on Young Island. We had to take a water taxi over, a *proper water taxi* over to the island and had a great meal that included curried goat. It was a peaceful place with hammocks on the beach and we sat chatting long after eating lunch.

We ended our holiday by having cocktails on Leandra's terrace. My very last memory of St. Vincent is the spectacular sunset that was our backdrop.