



The Caribbean & Guyana

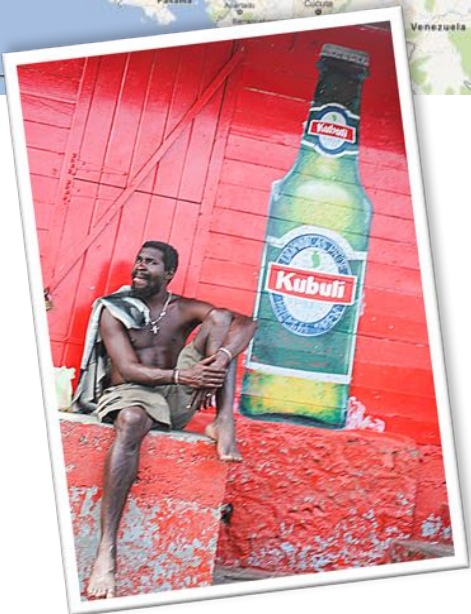
...Island hopping in the
West Indies + Guyana

The summer of 2012



20 Flights in 3 weeks...!

... You can't be really sane if you're attempting to cover 9 countries in only 3 weeks! ... And what is the point one would ask? Hang on and I'll tell you shortly. The main purpose with this trip - paid for by a travel agency - was primarily to explore Guyana and make contact with local travel agencies and to produce "adventure tours" for Swedish travellers looking for something out of the ordinary in Guyana. Already in the region I added on an "Island hopping" journey covering 8 of the small Caribbean countries.



Is it possible or even advisable to see 8 countries in 3 weeks time then? Probably not. Although the Islands are very small and some of them are more interesting than others and also differ and offer more to see and do, **I did this to get a "flavour" of which Islands to come back to and discover more at a later time.** I confess - this was also way to collect and "tick-off" a few more countries. But, I was positively surprised. I have visited other Islands in the past as well.

Previously it was possible to get an "Island-hopping flight-pass" through Liat, but this had been taken away. With a short and tight schedule I then decided to pre-book all flights prior to arriving. This restricted the flexibility, but assured me to get onward connections.



Georgetown – the capitol city!

Small, dark, under developed and unsafe – summarizes it all!

Guyana is where I spent most of my time on this trip. Arriving in the middle of the night at a small airport (Cheddi Jagan). I was advised to take a taxi to be safe. It was pitch dark, upon my arrival and the road to Georgetown didn't offer much to see, as there was no streetlights nor houses lit along the way.

Having had prior bookings (advisable) at the Ariantze Sidewalk café, I had at least secured a room for the night (very cheap). This turned out to be a good starting point for both exploring the city as well as getting information for tours/guides into the jungle. The staff was very helpful here.

Don't go wandering about too much on the late evenings, as it can be a bit dangerous...

2 days is quite enough for Georgetown. The most impressive is probably the Anglican, Gothic-style St. George Cathedral (said to be the world's tallest wooden building (built in 1892)). The city is really quite small and you can walk around and cover most sites in just a couple of hours. The market and city centre is probably the most interesting to see. There are museums for culture lovers – me – I spent most time getting organized to go inland to explore more of the interior of the country.

What I did miss on this trip was a visit to Kairture waterfalls. You can hike there (plan on 1 week min.) or by helicopter (has to be filled up however). Unfortunately there were not enough people to fill one up during the days I spent In Georgetown. Otherwise, and next time around, maybe a 1-2 week hike would be the adventurous way to do it...!





Dutch Forts upriver the mighty Essequibo River



On the first day inland into the Jungle, we went by bus as far as the roads would take us. We went through the town of **Parika**, passing the **longest floating bridge in the world**, the **Demerara Harbour Bridge**. A bit further away we got onto the longboat, which would take us all the way up to **the mining town of Barica**. The only way to get here was by boat.

From Barica there are only two dirt roads inland which takes you to the mines. You'll need 4-wheel drives for this. We opted to continue along the "Coca Cola" River – the mighty Essequibo and stopped at **Fort Zeelandia (old Dutch Forts)** (see pictures below) on an Island in the river. These were used when the Dutch and the Brits were fighting for control of the region and were constructed back in 1744. They were also meant to serve as stronghold against internal forces such as rebellious slaves.

Enjoy the "fancy" toilette at the doc when leaving/coming to the island (see picture to the right). This is your last chance of a bit of privacy for a while....

The food (Guyanese cuisine) had an interesting mixture of ingredients and flavours. Heavy on chicken, fish, vegetables, fish, coconut milk and East Indian and Chinese spices.





Santa Mission in the Jungle

Established in 1796

Once you have travelled for hours up the river of Essequibo you eventually make a right and start travelling up smaller and yet again smaller side-rivers. Gliding along still black waters, as you pass the lush green vegetation all around is truly amazing. The sound from the jungle is deafening. You can enjoy one of the greatest varieties of butterflies, birds, amphibians and giant utters (if you're lucky in these pristine forests.

One of the great things is that very few tourists find their way to these parts. **You find small Amerindian villages along the way**, as well as meeting them on the river as you travel along. They are quite poor and will hassle you for pocket change.

Enjoy the wildlife along the way and be ready with the camera. There are lots of good photo opportunities.

Further upriver you will eventually stop at the **old Mission – Santa Mission**. This is the highlight of the trip. They have continued to live here and have their own school. Yes, they do get some smaller grants from the government, but mainly they try and live of the land and be self-sufficient.

...They have a small shop where they sell some Souvenirs for the occasional tourist coming up this way. They are Christians since **the British came and established the Mission here back in 18th century**. They are very proud and keen to take you around. There seemed to be some "inbred" – which was also pointed out by my guide.



Miscellaneous snapshots from Santa





Grenada Island

St. George is a colourful city with its old Fort

My first stopover on this Caribbean Island hopping adventure was **Grenada and its capitol – St. George**. This is a pearl and turned out to be one of the prettiest capitol of all the ones I stopped at. The Island has only some 90.000 inhabitants, but the capitol is very lively.

You can cover most of it by walking around. Some beautiful old colonial houses mixed in with newer buildings. **The Carenage Harbour not to be missed**. The open city market is also only a few side streets away from the port and well worth a visit with its colourful food stalls and small and small shops.

Fort George, is not to be missed, it was established back in 1705 by the French. You have a fantastic view of the city, waterfront and Island from its top. It houses the Police headquarters today, but you can wander freely around its premises.

My choice for sleeping fell on the LP-guide recommendation **Deyna's City Inn, on Melville Street** right in the town centre. Affordable, friendly staff and a good place to ask for advice on how to get around and what to see. The food is OK, not to many good restaurants however to choose from – but enough to get around for a couple of days stay at least. Very colourful Island with friendly people.





Two-Island Nation: St. Kitts and Nevis

Combines beautiful beaches with mountains to hike – and in between you'll find sugar plantations were everyday life has its own rhythm...



Basseterre is the capitol and where to start once you have arrived to this beautiful Island. It opted for the Seaview Inn near the ferry terminal. There is also a supermarket (Rams) just around the corner where one can stock up a little bit. Basseterre (pop. 12.800) was established by the French already some 380 years ago, and hence has a lot of charm. You find many old houses and side streets, which offers great photo opportunities. Again, a day is quite enough to do and see Basseterre. It is then better to take a local bus around the Island and see some local life there.

I can recommend Sandy Point Town and its beaches – superb. Also the Brimstone Hill Fortress is well worth a stop. Get off the local bus and just walk up the hill instead of hiring a cab or tour operator from the city.

The Brimstone Hill Fortress was made a UNESCO world heritage in 1999 for being exceptionally well preserved 17th- and 18th century military architecture. This fortress was built by the British with slave labour. For restaurants in Basseterre try the Ballahou on circus mains. You can sit upstairs on the balcony overlooking the circle and all the people moving about. It's the best restaurant in town but don't expect too much....





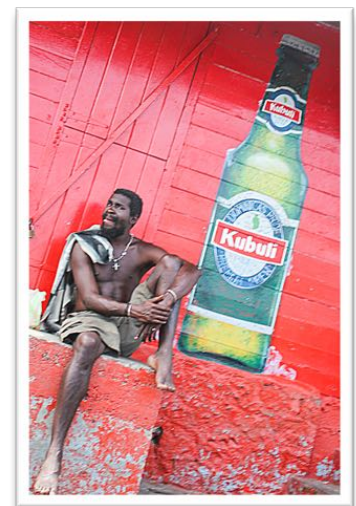
The genuine Island of Dominica

Undisturbed and uninfluenced by tourism...



This is the Island to visit for nature buffs and hikers. It is also the least influenced by tourism of the Island I visited. It does take 1 ½ to get from the airfield in Canefield to the capitol of Roseau. The place to stay in is definitely at Ma Bass Central Guest House. Places to visit in town are among others The Botanical Garden – and do take “Jack’s Walk” a steep walk uphill to the top through green vegetation.

The local market is another interesting point. Be aware, when walking around in the evening. It is very much like Georgetown, Guyana – no streetlights, very dark and quite unsafe. Stay on the main streets. For food and restaurants there is really not much to recommend. Try and arrange for a hiking tour – there are many to choose from. This is the place to do it!



I used Barbados as a stop over arriving and leaving the Caribbean. Depending on how long one I staying and how active one wants to be – there are tons of things to see and do on this Island. I used St. Lawrence’s Gap as my base. Rio Guest House (LP) is where I stayed. Depending on the season it is recommended to book ahead. Super beaches...



Kingstown (pop. 32.000), the capitol of the Island is where I stayed on my rather short visit to this lovely and bustling town. **I was fortunate to arrive during the carnival** and subsequently saw some of the parades. There were also all lot of performances with local and regional bands in the evening. A lot of dancing and partying everywhere.

The place to stay and most definitely the best joint on my whole trip was **the Cobble Stone Inn (Boutique hotel) on Upper Bay Street** in the very centre of town. Although not cheap it is an experience in its own and not to be missed. You're also right smack in the centre of things close of live bars, pubs and restaurants...

Antigua & Barbuda



St. Johns (pop. 36.000), the capitol of the Island was my base during the visit to the Island. This city does not really have any local charm in my point of view. It seems to be a "stop-over" for rich tourists coming in on their boats spending a day or two on the main shopping streets with rather expensive and certainly not very genuine local produce.

I also visited **Trinidad & Tobago** as well as **the Island of St. Lucia** (which requires a chapter on its own). **A flight schedule is available for suitable flight routes and arrival points for those interested**

I stayed at the Heritage Hotel on Thames Street. No charm and not particularly cheap, but with no alternatives – what do you do. I decided to get off the Island already after 2 days as I did not get a very positive feeling for the place. You might be a lot better off if you try the more remote areas of the Island however

