

Caribbean (II)

Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic & The Bahamas



...Kingston – home of Bob Marley

... My LH flight from Stockholm via Frankfurt to Miami was cancelled on my outbound flight. This in turn meant I missed my connecting flight to Kingston Jamaica on the same day. As a consequence, I then had one day fewer to spend on the Island. The initial plan of making a detour to Montego Bay thus had to be cancelled. Arriving at Miami I instead ended up spending overnight there. I was rebooked to Kingston and arrived at around noon instead at this modern but small airport. Horrendous taxi prices offered to take you anywhere, made me take a moment to negotiate carefully. As my hotel was also situated a bit outside of the city up in the hills, they all of course wanted extra for this. I managed to half the initial asking price and took off to check-in to my place **The City View Hotel in Smokey Vale, St. Andrews** up in the hills. I had only seen it over the internet, but was positively surprised by the stunning view overlooking the whole city of Kingston and the bay area. Absolutely amazing.

We did a little bit of sightseeing stopping on the way up the hill, and with a jet-lag I was quite happy with staying put at the hotel for the late afternoon and evening.

I had dinner on my balcony while enjoying the amazing view at the same time. The hotel is a converted old mansion and the service was excellent, as was the food. The room rate around 1000 sek / night was very affordable and included breakfast.



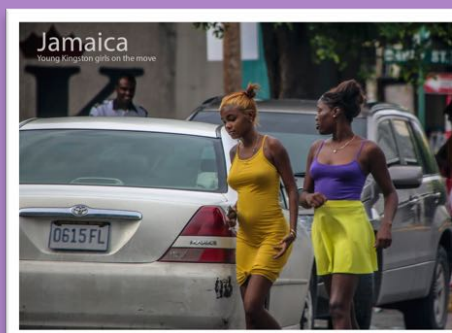
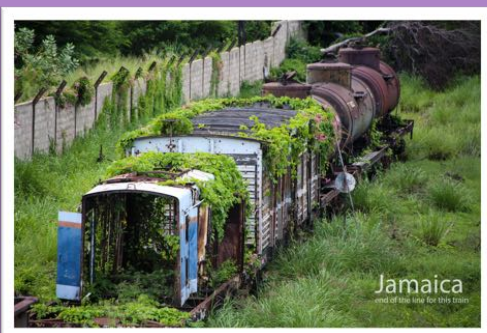
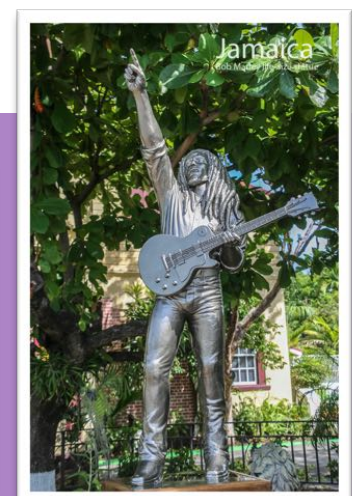
Trench town, where Bob Marley started out his career



... The tour around Kingston started with seeing a few of many churches. We then continued to the **Bob Marley museum on Hope road 56**, where he had lived up to his death. Having done this, we continued also down to **Trench town**, a rougher part of the city where Bob Marley had lived in his earlier years just after marriage. This was actually more interesting as it was not too touristic and too organized. There were no other tourists around. Only a few Rastafarians who were high on something. I stayed for a while and chatted, bought some crappy jewellery made by one of the guys and managed to take some good photos of him in the process. Mr. Walker had double booked for the day, as he had a previous engagement of leaving and picking-up some 15 people from a funeral. I tagged along for this. In the bus, which he was using for this particular part in order to fit everyone, he put on a video with music during the transportation of the group. I was quite taken by everyone – all dressed up in black for the funeral of course – started to sing and chant in the bus.

We stopped for a super lunch at a hole-in-the-wall type of establishment and then continued on to visit also the Devon Mansion house. Thereafter down to the old quarters on the city centre and the harbour area. My general impression of the city and the state of the houses was that they were in very poor condition. Also, one of the dirtier cities I've visited lately, with garbage laying around everywhere. So – not so much to see as far as old colonial style buildings etc. We drove down to the main market which was very rough and unorganized. A quick stop at the old and shut down train station. This was interesting with the old tracks and train-sets almost overgrown with grass and weed.

End of tour and back to my "hide-away" up in the hills high above Kingston. Nice with a shower a cold beer and a dinner on the balcony. I decided not to venture all the way back down in the evening again just for something to eat. Especially not since I thought the food was excellent at the City View Hotel.

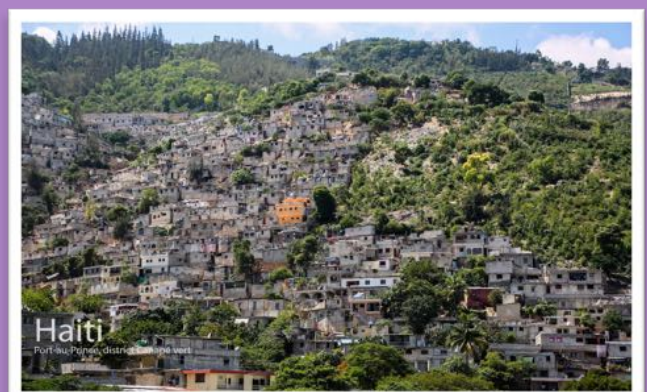


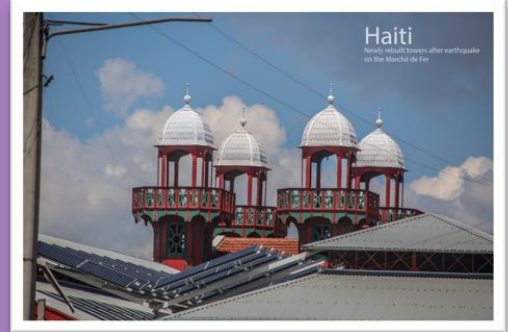


The many faces of Port-au-Prince

I had booked myself at **the historical Hotel Oloffsson**. An old wooded mansion in the centre of town. The hotel has seen much better days, but it is still amazing and worth to stay at as the rooms have been fixed up and fitted with A/C. Highly recommend to get that extra feeling for the city. The Hotel was built in the beginning of 1900 by the son of the President. Between 1935-1950 it was owned by a Swedish Sea-Captain. He lived here with his Haitian wife and two kids – hence the name of the hotel. Lot of celebrities have stayed here over the years such as Graham Greene, Michael Jackson, Susann Sarandon and many more. Arriving in the afternoon – I spent the time arranging for the coming days visit to the city. In the evening, I met up with Romel – another local guide which had been used by friends on their trips to Haiti.

We started off by scanning the city for the camera battery adopter which I needed and had forgotten at home upon packing. We went to the few electronic stores available in the city, all located in **Pétion Ville (rich neighbourhood) in Port-au-Prince**. The last shop, believe it or not, did have a multi-purpose adopter which we got to work. We could now seriously start exploring the city.





Port-au-Prince....

A damaged city from earthquakes and hurricanes



Our first stop was to go up the hill to get a view overlooking the whole of PoP – amazing. The government had started to sell off plots to private investors with great **views on the mountain top hill-side**. On the way, down we stopped at the lesser fortunate district; **Canapé Vert**. This “Favela” looking district climbed up the mountain from below. Great for photos, but not so great to live in. We continued down to the city centre and **Marché de Fer** – the main market for food, voodoo stuff, clothes and what have you. The Voodoo section interested me – as always – and I could not resist to buy a piece to support the local business. We covered the downtown area by car as most of the buildings had been seriously hit by the Hurricane- & earthquakes of late. There was rubble and waste everywhere. The government had not allocated enough to the aid money to clean up and make sure the remaining constructions were safe. The sewage system does not work which means the streets get flooded after the smallest rainfall. People have set-up business selling anything and everything along the dirty streets. This is not a safe place to walk-about freely. Highly recommended to stay in the car and go with the flow of traffic. It was a devastating sight to see.





...a city still in shambles

We continued onwards to with a short lunch break at **Le Palace hotel** and its coffee-shop. Expensive, but clean. We then headed for **the Basilica Notre Dame** back in the centre. The church had been severely damaged during the last earthquake. They had also closed off the entrances to what is left due to heavy looting. They are now holding sermons outside in the open. This is really worth a stop, but again, be very careful and do not walk around unless accompanied here. We were also approached by thieves and tons of beggars around the church area.

A stop was made to **Atis Resistance** and its owner. This is also a must on the list of things to see in PaP. His place is filled up with art-pieces which he has made from junk, human skulls, bones and god knows what. The objects are also heavily inspired by Voodooism. The artist, Andre Eugène, travels a lot apparently, I don't understand how he can afford this, as he does not seem to get any tourists or visible buyers for his art.

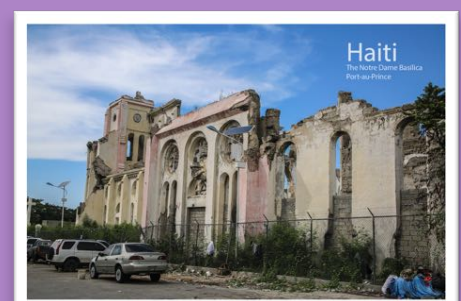
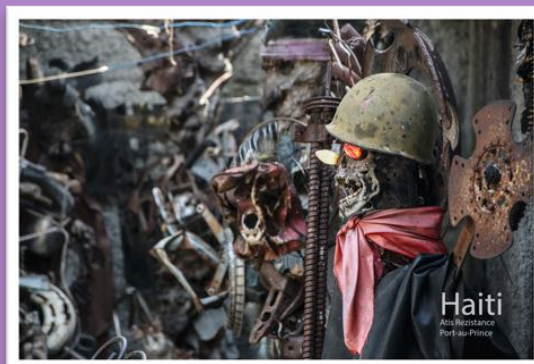
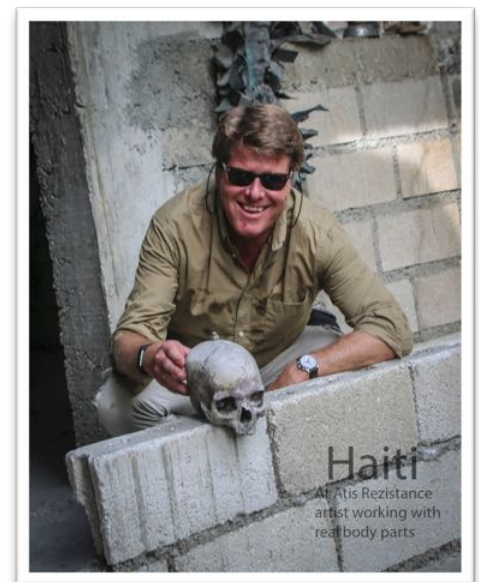
Museum Mupanah and the park surrounding it deserves also a visit. I am not however a keen museum visitor. **Croix des Bouquet** (a suburb) is also a place with artists and voodoo – recommended.

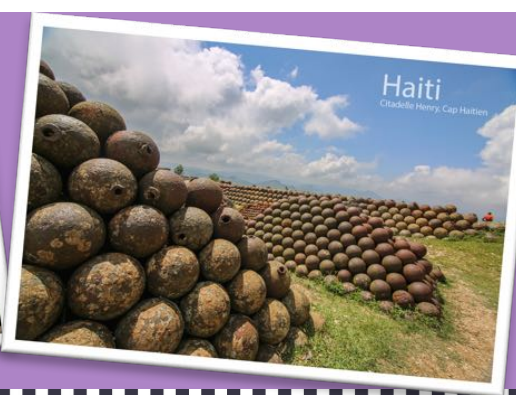




Atis Resitance in Port-au-Prince....
 ...creating junk-art from human skulls and bones.

We spent a lot of time around the poorer areas among those City Soleil and La Salinas. City Soleil we could only drive through as this is a high-risk area with local gangs stopping cars and robbing you blind, to even consider getting out here is out of the question. The other area, La Salinas, on the other hand is a mishmash of a general waste site, people living and again selling and trading whatever they can. Pigs, rats and other animals live and feed off the waste in the midst of it all. My guide advised against stopping here as well. I did however manage to persuade him to stop as I needed to distribute the bags with footballs, baseball bats & balls, toys etc. to the kids to contribute with at least something. We did this at our own risk. We were quickly swamped with people and sure enough the local police came up to check on us to make sure everything was OK and that we were not being robbed. We assured them our only reason for stopping was to deliver a few small gifts. They were clearly not happy about this but we managed to sway them around and let us continue with them standing by watching. This was hugely appreciated by the locals. But man, what a misery these people live under.





Cap Haitian up in the north

The beautiful Palace Sans Souci and the citadel on the mountain.



Upon my arrival, I started to look for someone who could take me back-and-forth to the Citadel and back for reasonable fee. I had been told I should aim for 80 USD for this 4-hour trip. My first offers came at around 150 USD. I managed to get it for 60 USD after some shameful bargaining. This is always fun. The down side was the transporting vehicle. It turned out to be a very old and rusty car from the early 80-ies without A/C. Well, sometimes you get what you pay for. My driver however was super nice and also spoke enough English. In order to save time and not to be back too late to miss my returning flight at 4 PM we decided on the following. First leg to **Sans Souci Palace** with his car. Second leg up hill (ca: 7 km) by motorbike. And the final leg – the steepest – by horseback. The motorcycle ride was on the back of a driver on quite steep small cobble stoned roads (laid by Baby Dock in the 80-ies). I would have liked to have a kidney-belt for the ride – very rough. Once to the second stage, I was mounted onto a horse. The roads got even steeper, but we managed fine the ca: 3 km up to the top in ca: 30 minutes.

We had made it. Now we needed to walk up a bit more to the very top of this enormous fortification – **The Citadel** - **built back in 1806**. It took some 14 years and was never completely finished. Fitted with many canons and some 10,000 canon-balls still on display. Some 20,000 slaves died during the construction apparently. We spent some 30 minutes in and around the castle. Going down again by horse was actually more difficult than coming up. Our motorcycle rides waited for us to take us the last bit (7 km) down to the Palace Sans Souci. This castle was built in 1805, one year before they started on the Citadel on the top. The palace was much destroyed in the earthquake that severely damaged Cap Haitian and the area back in the 70-ies. Still majestic standing with many of the walls still intact. Time to go back to the airport. We made it just in time with some margin for the returning flight, which actually did depart on time.

The Palace Sans Souci and the citadel....





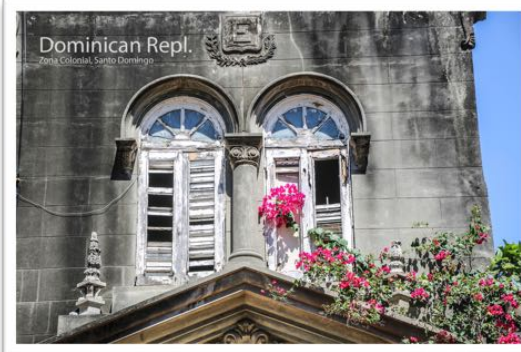
The Colonial city of Santo Domingo



Took a morning flight from Port-au-Prince to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. A rather small airport with only one desk for immigration. Took a taxi to my hotel the **Villa Colonial in the Zona Colonial**. I was very happy with the recommended hotel which I checked into. A boutique style hotel with great service, fabulous breakfast and nice rooms at an affordable price of only 80 USD / night.

It was so nice in fact I decided to stay one more night instead of traveling off to **Jarabacoa or Constanza** which was the original plan. During the three full days, I had at my disposal I walked and covered quite a bit of the city. I particularly enjoyed the La Zona Colonial, with all the old churches – some intact and some in ruins. There are also a lot of fortifications around the old town. I also went to **the 3 eye National Park**. This was interesting with the fresh water lakes (3) covered with greenery. You could also walk down to at least two of them and get a better look inside. This is also a place where all tourists come – they come in bus-loads, but don't let that discourage you - the visit is well warranted. **The Columbus Lighthouse** is an enormous construction said to project a giant cross onto the sky at evenings when they turn on the lights. Unfortunately, they only do this on December 31st as it is quite expensive to run. Worth a quick stop.

Zona Colonial has lots of good restaurants to choose from. I tried **Maison Kreyol (Haitian), Alpargateria** – hidden behind a shoe shop in the front – and also **Japa Café** where you can enjoy a good Yaki Udon / Soba.



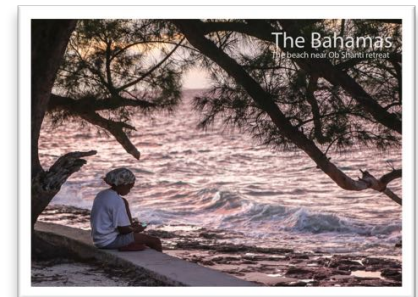
Villa Colonial, Columbus Light House and 3 eye National Park



THE BAHAMAS



...A stop-over on the way back to Miami...



... The Arrived to Nassau international airport. Hey – this is very well organized and needs to be with hordes of tourists coming in – primarily from the US. I got through OK and grabbed a cab to my place – **The Ob Shanti Balcony retreat**. An AirBNB place, which I booked through the internet with only two rooms, owned by an American couple. Really nice and friendly. They let their guest use the house as their own. Now sitting on the balcony watching the sunset over the ocean. I have had time for a few hours on the beach which is lovely and just 20 metres from the house. There are buses which runs along the main West beach avenue for only 1,50 USD. Went to the store to stock up on food and drinks to keep in the fridge in the kitchen so I am self-sufficient here.

The second day I went for a long walk down to **the Native Beach** and also made stop to **Compass Point**. Spent some time down at the beach just near our house. Got a ride with some girls to the city centre, as I wanted to check-out the Food- & cultural festival at the Botanical Garden. Some good food, but otherwise a mishmash of just load and fat people – excuse my bluntness. Very American in every aspect. Took the bus back home to “A Stones Throw away” near our house. Dinos Conch Salad bar close to where we live. A local but popular spot and not very expensive.

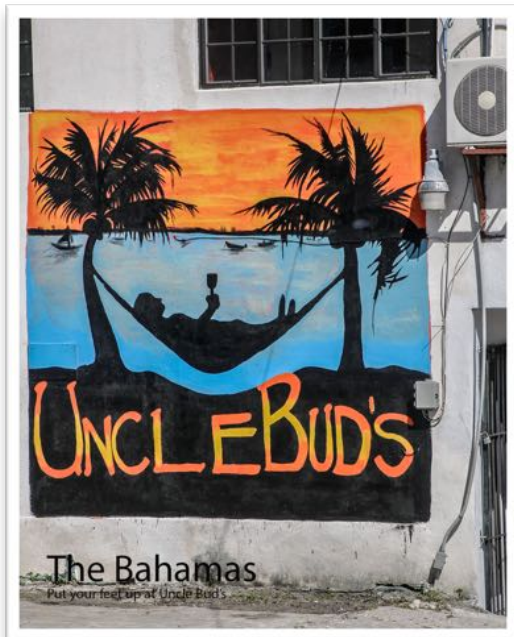
On my last day, I visited a few sites down-town Nassau which were worthwhile. **The Queens stairways and the Finn castle**. Splendid old architecture from old days. Next time in the Bahamas I will not miss **Exuma Islands** where **the pigs swim in the water**. Quite a tourist attraction however.



THE BAHAMAS



There are many lovely beaches here..



Miscellaneous pictures from Nassau

