

Travel



Thursday, November 20, 1986 O&E

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Take a Caribbean tour and see Europe

You have just watched the Changing of the Guard and now you are on your way to a cricket match, with a stop for high tea along the way. Where are you?

You have your Spanish-English dictionary in your hand and are ready to tour a 16th-century church called Santa Maria la Menor. What capital city is this and how far are you from the Mediterranean Sea?

You have changed your dollars for French francs, bought Chateau Lafite-Rothschild for your Uncle Henry and now you are sitting in a sidewalk cafe eating French pastry. You are in a Department of France, but which one is it?

London, Madrid and Paris? No, the answers are: Nassau, Bahamas; Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; and Basse-Terre on the island of Guadeloupe.

If you made a high score on that little quiz, you may already know that the Old World is alive, well and speaking many languages on the islands of the Caribbean. If you stayed home this year because the dollar is going down and terrorism is going up, you may be able to take part of the Grand Tour after all, with the U.S.A. only a few miles away.

THE ISLANDS of the Caribbean cover 2,000 miles east and south from the Gulf of Mexico to the coast of South America, although they have the same emerald green warm water seas that we associate with the Caribbean. Bermuda is also in the Atlantic, on a parallel with Charleston and Savannah.

The true Caribbean starts with the large islands of Cuba and Hispaniola, and curve like a long bony tail east and south to the South American coastal counties of Colombia and Venezuela. You might expect the West Indies to offer you a unified culture, but every island has its own character, determined by the people who settled and ruled it.

The Spaniards discovered most of the islands, but the Spanish culture predominates now only in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Guadeloupe, Martinique and their dependent islands are French-spoken.



one-of-a-kind traveler

Iris Jones

contributing travel editor

Dutch, Spanish, English and Papiamentu are in the Netherlands Antilles. Most of the islands ended up within the British empire, so most of the islanders speak English. Whatever the language, each little piece of coral rock speaks it with a Caribbean accent.

TO REDISCOVER America, start on the large island of Hispaniola, where Christopher Columbus ran the Santa Maria aground on the north shore during his first voyage to the New World in 1492.

His brother Bartholomew built the city of Santo Domingo in 1496; today it is the capital city of the Dominican Republic, which shares the island with the smaller, poorer, politically troubled nation of Haiti.

The friendly inhabitants of the Dominican Republic have restored Santo Domingo so that you can cover the beautiful old Spanish city on a walking tour. Stay in one of the fine city hotels or 50 miles away in Casa de Campo, which is one of the most complete resorts in the Caribbean; it has regular polo matches and a recreated 16th-century Mediterranean Village called Altos de Chavon.

A walking tour of Santo Domingo is very similar to the kind of Old World walking tour you would take in any historic European city. The Alcazar de Colon was the home of Columbus' son Diego and his descendants. Santa Maria la Menor, the cathedral built in 1540, has a splendid altar, a silver carillon by Cellini and the tomb of Christopher Columbus.

SUCH TOMBS can be found elsewhere, in Cuba or in Spain, for example, but there is strong evidence to suggest that this is the real thing. The most interesting building in

the old city may be the Museum of the Casa Reales on Calle las Damas. Two early sixteenth century palaces have been joined into a museum showing Spanish colonial life through artifacts, tapestries, maps and the salvage of old shipwrecks.

There is, of course, a modern side to Santo Domingo, complete with shopping centers, hotels, restaurants and discos.

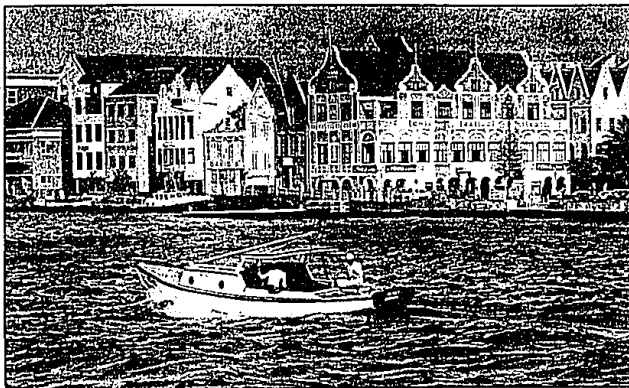
CARIBBEAN NETHERLANDS — Flip through a AAA guide book on the Caribbean and you will note that Columbus sighted, discovered and named many of the islands, although few of them remained long under Spanish rule. The Dutch, French, English and Spanish merchant ships fought recurring wars to win the rich bounty of the Indies, each leaving an indelible mark on specific warm water islands.

Cruise into Willemstad, capital city of the island of Curacao, and you may wonder if the captain turned the wrong way and took you by mistake into an Amsterdam canal. There they are, leaning over the water, blue and yellow and white clapboard houses rising high and narrow above the shoreline, bending over the waterways exactly as they do at home.

On the Dutch-inclined streets are European goods on sale at excellent prices because of the very low import duty. This is a European tour of the Caribbean so you will be shopping for china and crystal; island crafts can be bought in various island destinations, either in specialty shops or in colorful street markets.

CURACAO is also a good place to trace the history of the Jewish community in the New World. Jews who were driven out of Spain, and later out of South America, came by a roundabout route to these Caribbean islands. Historic synagogues are found on many islands, but Mikve Israel Synagogue, built in 1732 in Willemstad, is believed to be the oldest Jewish synagogue in the Western Hemisphere.

Curacao is one of the islands of the Netherlands Antilles, which includes the ABC islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, as well as St. Eustatius and St. Maarten. Note the double a in the last name or you may land by mistake on the French side of the island



— photos by MICKY JONES

The Willemstad on the waterfront in Curacao reflects the influence of Dutch architecture in the city.

In St. Martin. If you want two European countries for the price of one, this is it.

FRENCH PASTRY, HIGH TEA — St. Martin, one of the island dependencies of Guadeloupe, is, like the island of Martinique, actually part of France. These islands have their own representatives in the French government. They carry French passports, spend French francs and sing the French national anthem.

To see a perfect example of Europe in the New World, drive from the casinos and the duty-free shops of Philipsburg, capital of St. Maarten, which is Dutch, to the French cafes and the nude beaches around Marigot, the French capital of St. Martin. In both cases, you will find quaint old houses converted to restaurants.

Of course, many Americans go to Europe to see the British Isles, Coldstream Guards and all. Perhaps no other nation left its stamp on the Caribbean islands more firmly than England. Anguilla, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Grenada, Jamaica, Trinidad, the British Virgin Islands and many more of the islands are part of the Commonwealth and call Elizabeth queen.

Many of the island capitals were named for British monarchs: George Town, Grand Cayman; St. George's, Grenada; Kingstown; St. Vincent; Kingston, Jamaica. All of them have

the queen's portrait hanging high in government houses.

TEA IS SERVED every day at "half after four" in Barbados, where cricket is the main spectator sport. An authentic European cloister sits atop a hill on Paradise Island. The British love of formal gardens left glorious public flower patches behind in most of the British islands, i.e. the Royal Botanic Gardens of Port of Spain, Trinidad, and the Ardsra Gardens and Botanic Gardens, both on Chippingham Road near Fort Charlotte in Nassau.

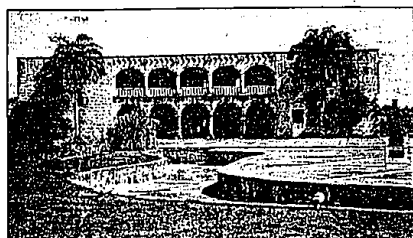
Old forts are found all over the islands, but the most colorful and photogenic of the European souvenirs left behind in the Caribbean may be the various police forces. London-style bobbies in white helmets and police bands that look like the Coldstream Guards.

The Changing of the Guards can be seen at 10 a.m. every second Saturday in front of the Government House in downtown Nassau.

In the Bahamas in early November, you can also watch the Remembrance Day ceremonies on Nov. 11 in the Garden of Remembrance.



You don't have to go to Buckingham Palace to see the changing of the guard. It's a regular ceremony for the Royal Oak Bahamas police force in Nassau, complete with all the trimmings of Buckingham.



The Alcazar de Colon in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic was the home of Christopher Columbus' son Diego.

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