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UP AND COMING

St. Kitts and Nevis have it all, but let's keep that between us.

BY MARY SOUTH



I'd been to St. Kitts only once.

It was about a dozen years ago, and I was a guest aboard a charter yacht. We took the tender ashore on Turtle Beach and had lunch at a charming island rum shop. Green monkeys roamed free, waiting for the occasional handouts of sliced fruit. Fresh seafood sizzled on a kettle grill and the sound system played Caribbean music — a perfect accompaniment to the small waves lapping on the beach. The simple West Indies-style bar had a one-room apartment for rent above it, and for many years afterward, I'd pull up the restaurant's website and think about leasing that apartment when I was craving an unpretentious island escape.

So I was excited when the representative from the St. Kitts Tourism Authority said we'd conclude my recent island tour with a visit to Reggae Beach, the rum shop I had loved. To be honest, the 2½-hour tour hadn't done the island justice. During most of the day, the rep was snuggled into the van seat in front of me, mildly carsick, only weakly raising her head to point out the churches we passed. "There's the Anglican church. ... There's the Catholic church. ... There's the Seventh Day Adventist church. ... " When we pulled into Reggae Beach, I realized the parade of churches was going to be the high point of this particular tour after all.

The bad news is that my favorite haunt had changed. The place was crawling with sunburned tourists bused in from a cruise ship. Jimmy Buffett was blasting from the speakers. A T-shirt and souvenir shop had been added to the compound, and the whole setup had been relocated to a beach with less seaweed. Worst of all, the green monkeys were now caged.

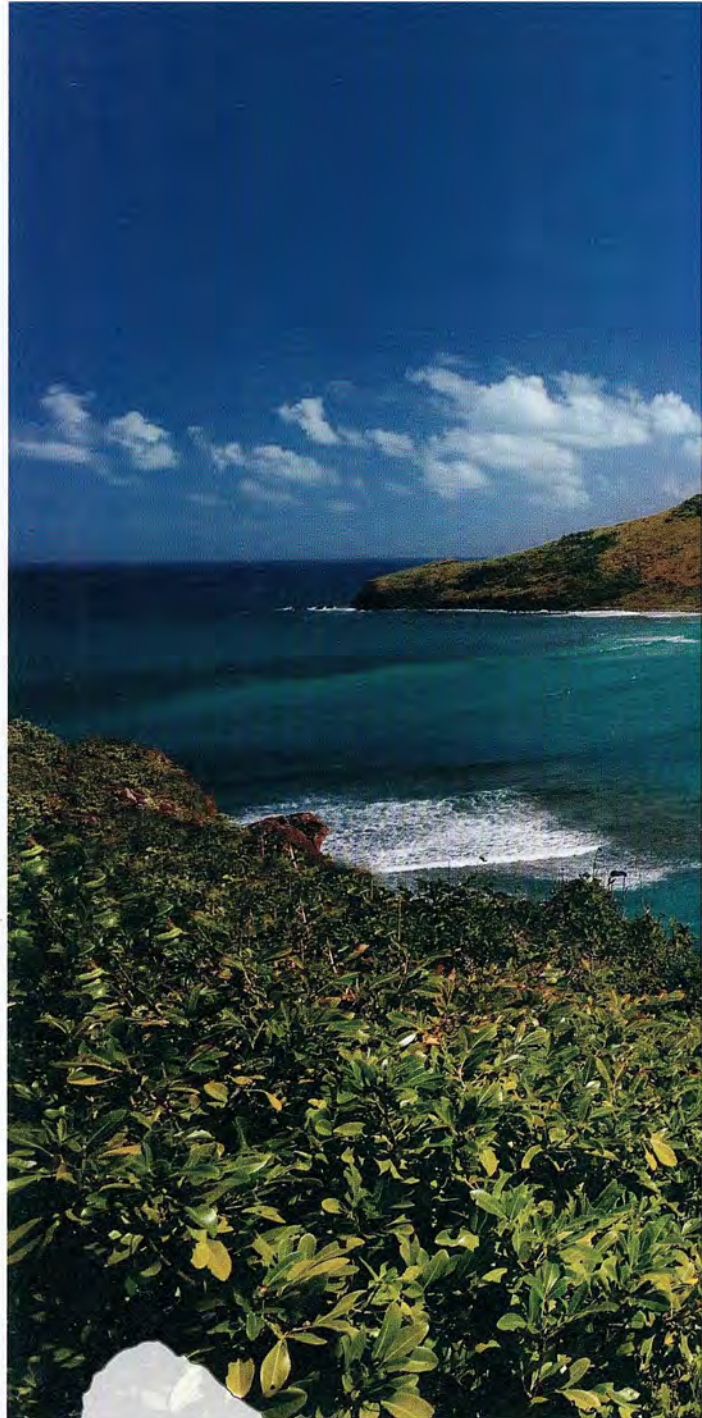
The good news is that most of St. Kitts and Nevis is nothing like what Reggae Beach has become, and my recent visit highlighted just how unspoiled and friendly yachtsmen will find this paradise. The smallest sovereign nation in the Americas with one of the highest literacy rates in the world, this island federation is still a relatively undiscovered gem. It is a part of the Leeward Islands, and on a clear day you can see St. Barths and Sint Maarten to the north, Antigua and Barbuda to the east and southeast, and the volcanic island of Montserrat to the south.

Its fantastic location, in addition to its gorgeous natural beauty, promises that St. Kitts and Nevis will not go undeveloped for long. Done right, development will safeguard the magnificent ecology and rich historical and cultural legacy of its host. Done wrong ... well, hello Reggae Beach.

So it's encouraging that Kiawah Partners is the force behind Christophe Harbour (see "Game Changer" on page 60), the ultra-luxe resort development that owns 2,500 acres — most of St. Kitts' southeast end. Chairman and CEO Charles (widely known as "Buddy") Darby III is famous among his employees for the quote: "Our job is not to screw it up." And all signs are they won't.

Basseterre, the capital, has an authentic charm with plenty of sun-bleached wooden West Indian buildings as well as some handsome stone architecture from colonial days. Visit Brimstone Hill Fortress, a 38-acre UNESCO World Heritage site perched on an 800-foot hill with spectacular views across the Caribbean. It's an atmospheric place where cannons are still arrayed over the ramparts and long-gone soldiers' initials are etched into the walls.

Romney Manor has stunning gardens open to the public as well





St. Kitts' Sandy Bank Bay is now home to Christophe Harbour's Pavilion Beach Club.

as Caribelle Batik, an on-site artisans' workshop demonstrating and selling batik crafts. Be sure and stop at the Wingfield Estate on your way up to the manor. The ruins of a former sugar plantation, Wingfield was the first land grant (1625) in the British West Indies and was owned by the great-great-great-grandfather of Thomas Jefferson.

Scuba diving, snorkeling, fishing, sailing and fine dining are all available on St. Kitts. If you love to hike, then tackle the challenge of Mount Liamuiga, the island's extinct volcano, which presents a nearly 4,000-foot ascent. Visitors to St. Kitts will find plenty to do but be equally tempted by the abundant chances to engage in the great tradition of "liming," which is Caribbean for hanging out with friends, family, music and food.

Kittitians regard Nevis as their island's smaller, sleepier sibling. In fact, Nevis momentarily presented me with one of the few moral dilemmas I've faced in my time at YACHTING: How do I honestly

share my feelings about this island without exposing it to the ruinous world and accelerating its discovery and decline? And then I realized two things. The first is that you, dear readers, are the kind of people who can be trusted with this secret. I am confident that if you visit, you will not litter, pine for American franchises, campaign for streetlights or bemoan the lack of a Reggae Beach-style establishment. More important, the Nevisians know exactly how magical their island is and are not about to entrust its fate to sun- and rum-soaked journalists. They've kept a wary eye on their big brother and are enforcing some rules.

For instance, it's illegal to swear on Nevis, though people are rarely jailed for it. As my taxi driver Hillary explained, the island is small enough (36 square miles and 12,100 people) that people know one another, know one another's children and know when someone's been up to no good. The community is actively engaged

in creating new opportunities for the island's youth and protecting what's special about its culture and atmosphere. (Alas, Nevis had room for only two more permanent residents and two small dogs, and I have made my family's reservations. Sorry about that.)

As you approach across the two-mile narrows that separate St. Kitts from Nevis, your eye is inevitably drawn upward to Nevis Peak, a cloud-shrouded volcano that hasn't erupted since prehistoric times. Lush green hills flow down to a ring of sandy beaches. Several wonderful sugar plantations have been converted to chic hotels (Montpelier Plantation,

Golden Rock Estate and the Hermitage are three that stand out), and there is also the Nevis Four Seasons (see "Classic Escape"), which delivers its tried-and-true brand of luxury and service with delightful Nevisian touches. An Aman resort is expected to start construction soon, and there are plans afoot for 100 slips at Tamarind Cove Marina and Village. Excellent dining options, beautiful beaches, a world-famous hike of Nevis peak, golf and tennis options — Nevis has plenty for the ambitious to tackle, but its whole aura reeks of blissful relaxation.

By all means, visit. But try and keep it to yourself, OK? **V**



Game Changer / Christophe Harbour

One look at a chart would be enough to convince most savvy yachtsmen that Christophe Harbour's marina will lure boaters away from St. Barths. A sheltered entrance and deep harbor at Great Salt Pond will host a 300-acre, 300-berth marina with 60 slips to accommodate super-yachts. One of the Caribbean's best anchorages, White House

Bay, lies just outside the marina entrance, with easy access to the Caribbean and the Atlantic. Christophe Harbour will provide a designated port of entry and on-site customs and immigration services for yachtsmen.

Kiawah Partners, which developed the award-winning Kiawah Island property in South Carolina and Doonbeg in western

Ireland, was smart to hire Capt. Aeneas Hollins, who formerly helmed Buddy Darby's 154-foot Perini Navi *Andromeda la Dea*, to run marina operations and sales. Work on the marina has accelerated, and the first phase has already sold out. (While I was visiting, the 289-foot Perini Navi *Maltese Falcon* was anchored in White House Bay and auditioning the resort.)

There's very little built at Christophe Harbour right now, but land sales have been brisk, and the facilities that are in place are absolutely top-notch. I stayed in a chic beach bungalow with a wall that opened onto a deck with a view of the narrows. The Pavilion Beach Club, which overlooks the stunning beach at Sandy Bank Bay, is open and

a knockout. A sinuous open-wall restaurant built of stone with soaring ceilings and a view across the infinity pool to the beach, the Pavilion Beach Club will be open to Christophe Harbour residents and guests. — M.S.

For more information, visit christopheharbour.com or call 869-466-8738.

TAKE YOUR PICK

For photo galleries of St. Kitts and Nevis as well as information on where to tie up, dine, shop and explore, visit yachtingmagazine.com/may2013.



Classic Escape / Four Seasons Nevis

No matter where you go in the world, when you stay at the Four Seasons you know what you're going to get: dependable luxury and outstanding service. Detractors will claim that the resorts lack the challenge and unpredictability that travel to foreign places should embrace, but fans say, "Exactly." The Four Seasons Nevis has done an exceptional

job of combining its core strengths with an appreciation for the customs of its stunning locale. For instance, the resort offers a "liming tour" that takes guests to the Friday night barbecues that are a local custom. These are authentic and can be as down-home as enjoying a cold beer and great food from a paper plate on your knees in a parking lot with lots of

locals. For overachievers, the resort also offers demonstrations on how to climb a coconut tree, and a Dive and Dine experience that lets you catch your own dinner. Me? I was thrilled to play tennis, enjoy the world-class cuisine, get a great massage and spend a whole day in a private Beach House cabana that was larger and nicer than my first New

York apartment. If you fall in love with Nevis, as I did, the Four Seasons Nevis offers a variety of villa residences that provide a permanent piece of paradise and access to the resort's AAA Five Diamond Award facilities. These include three infinity pools that overlook Pinney's Beach (one of the island's best), four restaurants, golf, tennis and spa services. The

resort offers a private launch service from the St. Kitts airport directly to the Four Seasons dock. My only complaint was that the launch also runs from the resort back to the airport. Sigh. — M.S.

For more information, visit fourseasons.com/nevis or call Suzette Liburd, reservations manager, at 869-469-6234.