

BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS, CHRISTMAS EVE 2007

It is before 7 in the morning when the port pilot boards the Van Gogh in order to steer her into the port of Bridgetown, Barbados. We have a trip around the island this morning, and will be leaving at 2pm towards our next port of call, Madeira.

The organised excursion is excellent, with a friendly and informative guide. We firstly drive through the centre of the capital, Bridgetown, where we see lots of duty free shops, a city square with a statue of Lord Nelson (much older than the one in Trafalgar square!), and a main shopping street called Broad Street which is quite narrow!

A stop is made at the fort on Gun Hill, where we have views over the green, undulating hillside towards the port area. We can just about see the Van Gogh, berthed alongside 3 other cruise ships. These are the Prinsendam, the Freewinds and the massive Star Princess.

Our next stop is at an Anglican Cathedral, where again we have panoramic views out to sea. We cross over the central part of the island with its sugar plantations and fruit farms, before we descend to the east coast.

The beaches on the sheltered Caribbean side of the island are safe for swimming and have soft white sand. On the eastern, Atlantic side of the island, the waves crash against the shore, resulting in photogenic, eroded rocks, and great surfing opportunities for the locals.

A 45 minute stop at the Andromeda gardens - run by the Barbados National Trust - is very interesting, with many indigenous and unusual plants. The varieties of trees include Casuarinas, Plumeria, Cabbage Palm, Tulip Trees, and Barbados Mahogany. There are beautiful "Snow in the Mountain" and Poinsettia bushes in bloom amongst the yellow spikes of candle flowers. Impatiens and varieties of ferns carpet the floor.



We have a sudden downpour while we are in the gardens, and spend some of the time sheltering from the torrential rain. As soon as we get back to the coach of course, the sun comes out again!



As we travel around this part of Barbados, our guide shows us the "chattel houses" which were originally given to freed slaves by their masters. As the land underneath the houses belonged to the land owner, the chattel houses were supported on rocks so that they could be moved when necessary. This area of Barbados is called Bathsheba, and was originally given this name by early British settlers, who thought that the white surf resembled Sheba's bath of milk. A stop at a hotel for a drink of rum punch follows, and we admire the views from the hotel balcony.



The journey back to the ship takes longer than it should, because of the queues of traffic travelling towards Bridgetown. Eventually, we arrive back at the dockside with minutes to spare, before we are due to sail.



A party on deck starts up immediately, and staff and passengers, dressed in a variety of loud Caribbean shirts and Santa Claus hats, sing and wave and cheer as the Van Gogh sets sail for Madeira.

Half an hour later, we are given the news by the Captain, that Club Cruise have taken over the ocean cruising part of Travelscope, and are guaranteeing that the next world cruise will go ahead as planned. There is a loud cheer from staff and passengers alike, and one member of staff tells us that the Travelscope name on the ship's funnel has already been painted over. The brochures on board have already been removed, and even the racks in which they stood have disappeared.

The new owners of the ocean cruising section of Travelscope, Club Cruise, will obviously want their own logo on uniforms, badges and so on, so there will be a lot of work to be done in organising this. The next week or so should prove very interesting. Watch this space!