

Tortola

When we arrive in Road Town, it is dark and raining heavily, but we are determined to go ashore and find somewhere to have a drink and a meal. Unfortunately, being Sunday, most bars and shops are closed, but we do find the famous "Pussers" bar which is full of crew, entertainers and passengers from the Braemar. Pussers have their own website which you may find interesting - www.pussers.com We particularly like the original yellowed Tiffany style lampshades and the many faded and crooked framed pictures on the oak panelled walls. The rum and cokes are very powerful, and we cannot manage more than two! Our meals are excellent; Alvina has Jerk Chicken, and Owain Creole flavour ribs.



The next day we are up early to board our transport for the 3½ hour trip around the island of Tortola, with Owain acting as courier. The vehicles are mostly large, powerful American trucks with cabs, and with room for 16 passengers in an open air body behind. After we leave Road Town behind, we see that the terrain here requires such large vehicles. The roads are steep, winding and pot holed, and the recent hurricane has brought down large boulders and mud onto the road surfaces. In one place a part of road has collapsed completely.

Climbing sharply up Fort Hill, we arrive at our first photo stop, where we have views out to sea and some of the other British Virgin Islands across the Sir Francis Drake Channel. Some of the names are intriguing - Dead Man's Chest, Beef Island, Fallen Jerusalem, and Sir Richard Branson's private island Necker. We are close to one of the United States Virgin Islands here too, which is where we are told the American vehicles come from. It seems strange to see these left hand drive vehicles travelling on the left hand side of the road - as in the UK



We now climb up even higher towards Sage Mountain National park, and pass some concrete retaining walls painted by local artists in 2002. The murals are impressive with scenes of life in Tortola, and painted in many different styles. Another photo stop is made at the entrance to the national park where we are given a complimentary drink called "Pain Killer" - a sort of rum punch - and very welcome it is too!

The buildings on the island are either concrete or clapboard houses and are often painted in bright colours. There are many churches here too, and a surprising number of denominations such as Baptist, Episcopal, Anglican, Seventh Day Adventist and even a "Faith Centre".

Now we find ourselves on the north side of Tortola, with even more spectacular views of the Atlantic Ocean and smaller islands. We travel down to the coast where we can see surfers riding the large waves in Carrot Bay where there are a number of surfing shacks and bars. On the side of the road we can see bananas, mangoes, breadfruit, papayas and sugar cane.

Our next stop is made at Frenchman's Cay, which is a separate island attached to Tortola by a bridge. The marina is full of large yachts and catamarans bobbing up and down on the turquoise water. A number of tourist shops are doing good business, and we buy some T shirts here before sampling the local Carib beer in the open air bar.



On our journey back to the ship we can see that another vessel has berthed alongside the Braemar, and when we get closer we can see just how big the Norwegian Dawn is - it certainly makes the Braemar look tiny in comparison!

Back on board we have lunch before walking out into Road Town again to find an internet café, take some photographs and do a little shopping. The prices are advertised as being "Duty Free" but we cannot find any good buys here. In one jewellery shop the prices start at \$1000!