

## *Exploring St. Kitts...Gibraltar of the Caribbean*

*by Marcie Connelly-Lynn*



*Incomparable view from the top of Ft. George*

We anchored off Basseterre, St. Kitts at the very roly Deep Water Port, a stern anchor the only reason it was even moderately tolerable. On approach, we had seen massive Ft. George perched on the top of 800-foot Brimstone Hill and looked forward to exploring it firsthand. Taxis were lined up expectantly ashore awaiting to entertain off-season cruisers and an island tour was arranged as soon as we set foot on the pier.

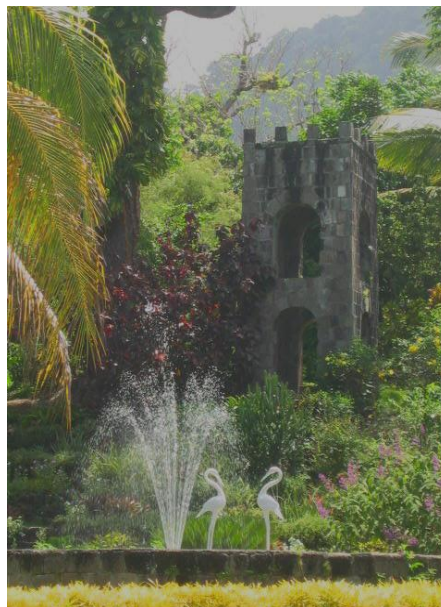
St. Kitts is a fascinating island and Percy, our guide, knew his stuff. He exhibited an obvious pride in his island home and his enthusiasm for its history was contagious. First, we drove through the city of Basseterre, Percy pointing out churches and historical monuments. The downtown area is alive with restaurants and shops, many of which surround the Piccadilly Circus-like rotary which boasts a huge green town clock in its center.

Once out of town, we saw Carib petroglyphs at one location and then further up the coast, Bloody Bay, the site of a massive Carib slaughter by rarely combined British-French troops, reminding us of the violent manner in which “civilization” was brought to the Caribbean.

Wingfield Plantation, built in 1680, is an old sugar cane plantation, which has since been converted into an exemplary botanical garden. The grounds are lush and green, flourishing with local flora due

to the 65” of yearly rainfall. A 350-year-old Saaman tree is the centerpiece of the garden with enormous sprawling limbs and red-pink fluffy blossoms in bloom. An old bell tower remains intact, previously used to signal the beginning and end of the workday. There are a couple of small shops here with local artisans displaying handmade batik fabric and crafts.

We saw the “Sugarcane Train” wending its way along the 36 miles of narrow gage railroad track on the island. The sugar cane plant, native to Asia, was first brought to the Americas by Columbus in 1493. The Dutch traders introduced cane to the islands, which became the major commerce by the mid-1600’s. There’s about 12,000 acres of sugar cane still under cultivation in St. Kitts. The cane juice is primarily used in the production of local rum.



*Wingfield Plantation, an exemplary botanical garden.*

Volcanic stone lines many of the beaches, a reminder that Mt. Misery, at 3,792 feet, though currently inactive, is still part of the mountain chain that only recently erupted in Montserrat. As we began our ascent of Brimstone Hill, we were told to watch for monkeys. They are, unfortunately very shy with visitors. Though we could hear them chatter, we never got a clear view. We continued the circuitous climb via sharp

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switchbacks knowing the piece de resistance, was still ahead...the long-awaited “Citadel” of Fort George.

“A World Heritage site, the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park, is an exceptional and well-preserved example of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century military architecture in a Caribbean context. Designed by the British and built by African slave labour, it is a testimony to European colonial expansion, the Atlantic slave trade and the emergence of new societies in the Caribbean.” So says the sign at the site and so it is.

There is a welcome center with a good, on-demand video presentation available as well as a gift shop, snack bar and small museum to visit. All of the grounds are open to the public and the vistas of Nevis and the surrounding area are breathtaking. Ascending a steep stone staircase to the very top is rewarded by access to the expansive ramparts, which are in remarkable condition, overlooking the bastions below. The enormity of the fort becomes evident here and with such a commanding 360° view, it is understandable why the fort was dubbed the “Gibraltar of the Caribbean”.

Though only 65 square miles, St. Kitts has lots to offer the visiting cruiser in the way of sightseeing, though mariner facilities are limited. Its history well preserved, the Kittians are hospitable and delighted to share their unique island heritage.



*Huge green town clock in Piccadilly Circus-like downtown Basseterre.*

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