

11th April Cartagena

We didn't arrive in Cartagena, Colombia 'til midday and had only six hours or so to enjoy this city, the approach through the huge Bahía de Cartagena, surprisingly lengthy, thus justifying another party on deck with live music. The city is a Unesco heritage site, and was particularly recommended by our travel agent, Veronica, back home. We took a tour in a "taxi", along with a number of other BW (Black Watch, not British Waterways!) travellers, with a local, Gerona, with just adequate English but enough personality to make up for what he lacked linguistically.



The old walled city and the silvery tower blocks of the finger of land to the south have two sea fronts, one on the above-mentioned bay and the other on the Caribbean. The city was awash with police;(here school leavers have the option to serve a year with the army or a year with the police and indeed many were young); the reason is the a Convention of the Americas, about to happen here, and even Obama is expected for a

couple of days!



We first travelled up to a high point where an ancient monastery stands, very old, classically Spanish, with a wonderfully serene atmosphere, and inner courtyard, still home to twelve monks and the spiritual zenith for the city. Every year in January, the city faithful toil up the hill, past the Stations of the Cross, day after day. From here one is able to enjoy hazy overviews of

the city. We also visited the regulation Joyeria, cunningly disguised as an Emerald Museum, where armed employees stand guard. I would imagine the contents of the building would be uninsurable. Also a bazaar, for those looking for more reasonably-priced souvenirs. We also stopped to photograph the ancient and very impressive fortress, La Tenza, which other tours explored more thoroughly. Our last stop was the actual walled city contained within 7 miles of ramparts. It was here we would have liked to linger, wandering the streets, with their beautiful frontages and grand gates with inviting interiors, and sit awhile in the delightful squares . . . but it was time to return to the boat. The fruit seller in one of the town squares was a little reminiscent of the market lady in Hoi An, a little miffed that, having stopped to take her picture, Nick didn't buy any of her wares.



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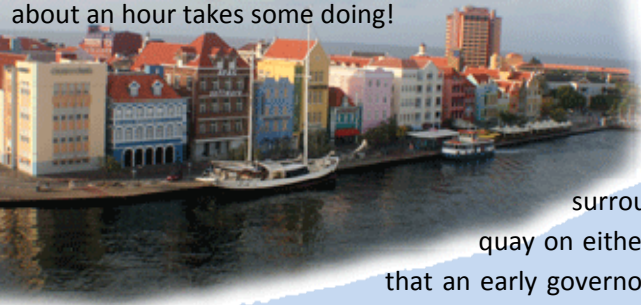


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Friday 13th at sea, having spent the day in Willemstad, Curacao (36 miles off Venezuelan coast)

Yesterday, routine day, Nick certainly better, good news I haven't succumbed and I had my hair chopped as it was looking grim – sea air, spray and water not kind to hair. A special Indian meal in evening was excellent and the evening entertainer, Mike Doyle good excellent interaction with audience, a lovely voice and so clever at picking up humour from the situation we find ourselves in – not just any cruise, but *this*, cruise with *this* captain and *this* crew. To manage to keep an audience with you for about an hour takes some doing!



Today we were through the Queen Emma swing bridge, along the sound, under the Queen Juliana Road Bridge, turned about before returning under the bridge and moored before I surfaced. The surrounding town was extremely attractive with coloured buildings lining the quay on either side of this (yet another) Unesco World Heritage Site. The story goes that an early governor found the gleaming white buildings gave him headaches, and decreed the houses should be painted differing pastel colours. Our guide told us that the said governor made a packet selling the paints to the householders! The town had a very cosmopolitan feel, no wonder with the Dutch, South American, Jewish and African influences. There is a floating market where visiting schooners land fish, fruit, and veg, and another handicraft market. Here there is an eighteenth century synagogue, reputedly with a very beautiful interior. We took a tour on a bus with the natural sort of air-conditioning (no windows!) through the old Jewish quarter where old villas were abandoned when, it seems, most took off and settled in New York in the 1930s. Also, we passed through an area where the old plantations were once worked by African slaves, still a poor area. The main source of income comes from the oil refinery, tucked away to the north of the town and away from the tourist – already there are a numerous resorts and villas scattered where we drove and many more being built. Newly retired Dutch folk are being encouraged to come and settle here. We also did the regulation tour to the Curacao factory where we tasted all sorts . . . orange, coffee, chocolate, rum and raisin liqueurs, but not from the famed blue bottle. No worries – there were amazing blue cocktails back on board for the 'Farewell Curacao' sail-away party and a fair few passengers seemed to indulge.



We left Curacao just before 5pm, into a calm sea with a two day journey to Philipsburg, St Maarten, before us.

We arrived in St Maarten on Sunday morning, docking at 8am, with hazy memory of a fairly bouncy overnight journey: is this a foretaste of what we have to come as we cross the Atlantic?