

By Jeanne and Colin Harrison

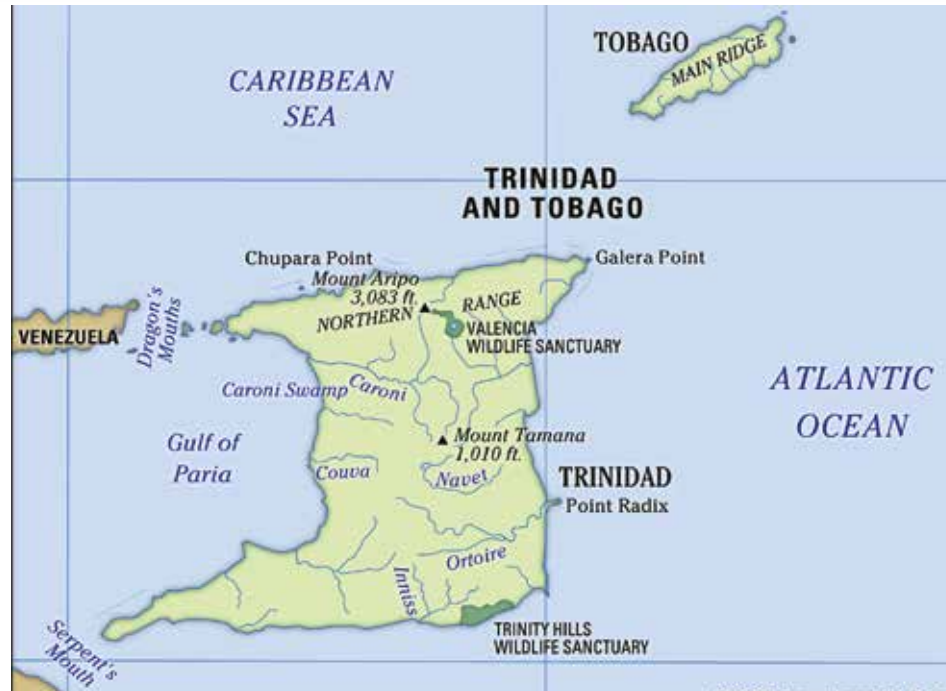
Jeanne and Colin have written numerous interesting articles over many years describing their cruising adventures. While *Dakota* has now been sold this is the second article on unusual cruising destinations they have visited. Editor.

FOR many readers, it might be a challenge to pinpoint Tobago's exact location on a map. However, Australian international cricket fans are probably aware of Trinidad's participation in West Indies' cricket activities and followers of the Olympics most likely have heard of the team from Trinidad and Tobago. This dual-island Commonwealth nation of Trinidad and Tobago lies at the southern end of the Caribbean island chain, nearly touching South America. Trinidad sits only 7 nm from Venezuela. Tobago lies another 19 nm northeast of Trinidad.

On our 24th wedding anniversary, 19 January 2020, we celebrated the occasion by setting sail on *Dakota* from French Guiana, bound for our initial Caribbean port-of-call, Charlotteville, Tobago. After four days of delightful trade wind sailing, the anchor dropped into lovely clear turquoise water at 11° 20'N; 60° 33'W just below the steep, verdant hills of Tobago.

Our clocks were adjusted back one hour from French Guiana Time (UTC/GMT -3 hours) to Atlantic Standard Time (UTC/GMT -4 hours). We looked forward to the first country with English as its primary language since we sailed away from the Isles of Scilly, off of the Cornwall coast of England five months previously.

In 1498 Columbus sighted Tobago but did not stop. Like Columbus, on previous voyages we had to by-pass Tobago, usually because scheduled commitments to parties or arriving guests forced us to carry on downwind to Grenada. Fortunately this time we were able to stop to enjoy this highly recommended cruising destination. Luckily



for us, COVID-19 was only a whisper in the wind at this point. So we were finally able to hoist the Trinidad and Tobago courtesy flag which I had made in 1987 in anticipation of visiting one day.

Approaching the northern coast of Tobago with slight seas and a gentle breeze, we enjoyed the scenery of rolling hills on the main island and rocky outcrops scattered around the northwest cape. A few local fishing boats were working the reefs and rocky areas as we sailed into Pirate's Bay then around to well protected Man of War Bay. The locally built small fishing boats boasted hand-painted fun-loving names like 'Dreams of Brighter Days' and 'Ah Love It.'

After a good look around the anchorage we realised that two of the nine cruising yachts at anchor (one French, one Brazilian) had shared anchorages with *Dakota* previously on the other side of 'The Pond' aka the Atlantic Ocean. This led to a very social time ashore and numerous Happy Hours. Fresh fish and chips, washed down with Carib beer, could be coupled with free Wi-Fi at several of the rustic alfresco restaurants ashore in the quaint town, including the very popular beachside Suck Hole Restaurant & Bar or Sharon & Phebe's Restaurant on a rise overlooking the bay.



Dakota anchored at Charlotteville



Charlotteville Beach



Happy Hour – fish and chips with Carib beer



Suck Hole Restaurant and Bar

Provisioning was very basic here in Charlotteville, so we decided to take the \$2 (\$1TT=\$0.80AUS) local bus into Tobago's bustling administrative centre of Scarborough, about a 45-minute ride to the southeast side of the island. The major purchases from our shopping expedition included a very solid new black plastic bucket and a few fresh vegetables. Shopping may not have been very exciting, but the bus trip provided a most enjoyable scenic tour of the tropical rainforest covered island.

Back on *Dakota* we had a friendly visit from an inflatable runabout launched from the 73 m power yacht *M/Y Planet Nine* (with matching helicopter and crew of 22) at anchor nearby. They had noticed our Australian flag astern coupled with our British flag sunshade and wanted to verify our correct nationality, as they were Brits. We chatted with the two men and invited them for Happy Hour, not realising that one of the men was the Rothschild owner of the yacht. Surprisingly they did not take up our offer. Perhaps it was the laundry on the lifelines which dissuaded them.

R&R included swimming in the warm water, exploring the coast by dinghy, watching cruise boat visitors looking for non-existent

souvenir shops ashore, and chatting in English with the locals. Thank goodness for the air conditioned visitor centre where I was able to recreate a *Squadron Quarterly* article on the Canary Islands by the deadline date using their free Wi-Fi, having inadvertently deleted the original copy from my phone.

Luckily we had no major maintenance issues on *Dakota*, so our time here in Tobago was very relaxing. Facilities in Charlotteville were limited, however, so in order to easily access diesel, propane, petrol, fresh water, provisions and a chandlery it was necessary for us to plan to sail onwards to Prickly Bay, Grenada. We knew that the downside of popular Prickly Bay would be finding an anchoring spot amongst several hundred cruising yachts and squeezing the dinghy into a spot on the always crowded dinghy dock. Reluctantly we prepared to bid this lovely slice of paradise goodbye.

Outbound clearance from Trinidad and Tobago required that we hike up the hill to where customs and immigration offices were located. The paperwork was straight forward, but we had a complete shock when entering the immigration office where the female officer was engrossed in the international cable sports channel on

a small television. She was mesmerized by our Adelaide Crows AFLW team beating Melbourne and proceeded to ask us more about AFL than about our outbound immigration form. Thus we ended our visit to Tobago with smiles on our faces. The smiles continued as we opted to spend our remaining local currency on ice cream and Carib beer on the way back down the hill to the dinghy.

While most of our fellow cruisers departed Tobago for the colourful and energetic Carnival activities in Port of Spain, Trinidad to the south, we decided on an overnight sail to Grenada, the next island country to the north. Warnings of piracy around the offshore oil rigs to the south increased our vigilance, and reinforced our decision to head in the opposite direction.

Charlotteville, Tobago has been added to our list of highly recommended remote non-tourist oriented cruising destinations. Perhaps we will be fortunate enough to return one day.



Basic shopping



M/Y Planet Nine