

# Caribbean cruise success for Reina del Mar

In planning the itinerary of *Reina del Mar's* first venture into the Caribbean cruising field we had nothing to go on except what could be gleaned from books, maps, tourist literature and of course the advice of port agents; for the rest it was all in the mind and it could well have turned out that our preconceived notions were far removed from reality.

We now know that any such apprehensions were unfounded. The Caribbean area in general, and our five West Indian islands in particular, proved to be all that we had expected, fully justifying the adjectives we had used in writing about the projected cruise in *CLANSMAN*; colourful, romantic, exuberant, tropical, palm-fringed.

For the passengers, there is no doubt that the cruise was a success and that there will be a demand for the repeat cruise next year. Right from the start this was a happy voyage, both for the regular *Reina del Mar* supporters—of whom there were remarkable numbers on board—and those who did not previously know the ship (but who will now surely travel in her again).

For the story of the voyage, let's start after the visit to Tenerife. Enjoyable as it was, that island is too familiar to warrant describing again. From there to Trinidad was a leisurely succession of sun-filled days, each one more brilliant than the last, as we moved steadily southwest into the tropics; day after day of limitless blue sea with only the flying fish to keep us company and never another ship in sight. While the pleasant ritual of shipboard life proceeded, the bodies on the sun deck turned from pink to a deep rich brown, friendships were made and strengthened and time and the demands of everyday life seemed to matter less and less.

Whatever the delights of the ocean voyage, our purpose was to reach the West Indies. So when *Reina del Mar* docked at Port of Spain, Trinidad, at seven o'clock on the morning of March 21 there was a great deal of bustling about, with many passengers on deck to catch the first glimpse of a Caribbean island. Port of Spain is a busy commercial port and the ship tied up

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Union-Castle's cruise ship *Reina del Mar* made new friends in the long-range holiday market when she carried out her first UK-Caribbean cruise in early 1973. Already Union-Castle is planning a similar voyage for 1974. Here, K. J. Brett describes the cruise calls, most of which will be made again next year.

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at a cargo berth with all the paraphernalia of dockside sheds and installations; nevertheless, the faces on the quayside and the backdrop of hills behind the town were enough to assure us that we were indeed far from home.

Before reaching Trinidad some had felt apprehension about the political and social climate in relation to white visitors, but in the event nobody encountered anything but the utmost courtesy and friendliness. Scenically Trinidad is a beautiful island with a diversity of attractions ranging from wooded mountain slopes and rich valleys to tropical swamps such as the Caroni Bird Sanctuary. And, of course, it has its quota of palm-fringed beaches, of which Maracas beach, just 40 minutes exciting drive from Port of Spain, is as delightful a spot as one could wish to see. Port of Spain itself is big and bustling but there is the very pleasant Savannah Park within easy reach of the city centre, although in a shade temperature of 89°F it was a bit too far to walk.

For two hours before the vessel sailed at 01.00 a steel band played on the quayside, providing a fitting climax to a full and enjoyable day. Passengers were amazed at the quality of sound produced by the steel band and the almost symphonic tonal range, apart from the rhythmic exuberance of the calypso numbers.

After a day at sea the ship reached Antigua, again an early morning arrival on a day of fierce unbroken sunshine. Antigua proved to be quite a contrast to Trinidad; the landscape undulating rather than spectacular, except for the magnificent view of English Harbour from Clarence House. The towns and villages, even much of the capital St. John's, are mostly ramshackle affairs with the evidence of a depressed economy plain to see; indeed the traditional sugar crop has been abandoned and plans are said to be in hand to develop cotton growing, but meanwhile the island appears to rely mainly on tourism.

In spite of this, the general impression of Antigua is a happy one. The shanties were mostly buried in flowers and had a patch of land with a goat or two. Children played happily in the dusty roads and overall was a general air of easy indolence in the sun; a relaxed and friendly island with a superb range of beaches, which proved very popular with *Reina del Mar* passengers.

Most visitors to the island at some time or other make their way to English Harbour and Nelson's Dockyard, which have been carefully and lovingly restored, although it must be said that the presence of so many tourists, all busily downing tea or planters punch or photographing each other against Admiral's Inn, detracted somewhat from the 18th century atmosphere, which was perhaps more apparent at Clarence House on the hill above. The harbour is now also a great yachting centre and every picture of it includes a number of graceful craft at anchor.

Antigua, like Trinidad, again provided us with two hours of steel band on the quayside, this time in the morning, whilst at night there was a shipboard entertainment including Calypso singing and limbo dancing.