

Embrace Your Inner Pirate in Magical Dominica

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February 14, 2019

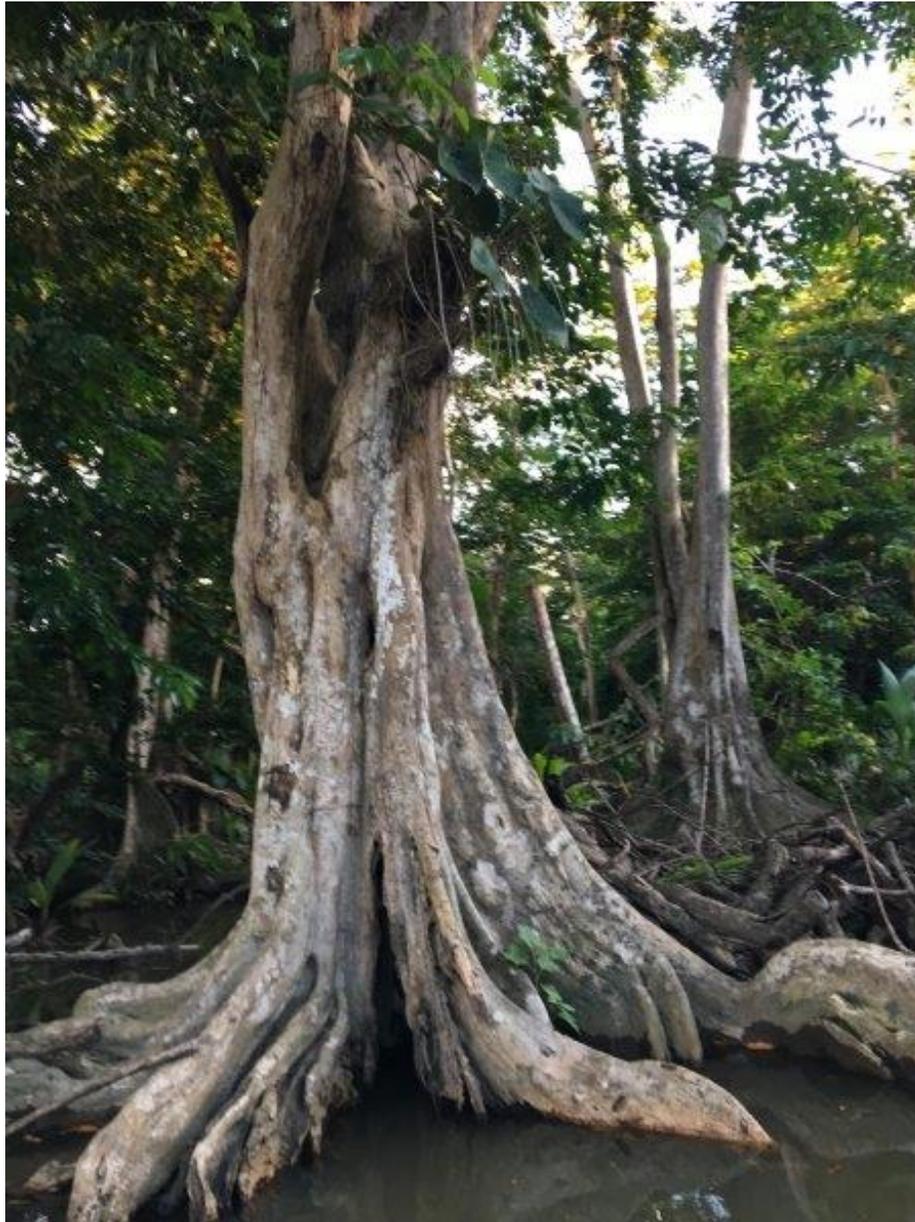
Mentioning to friends I was travelling to Dominica, they all replied, “oh, you mean the Dominican Republic.” No, I mean, Dominica, a tiny island off the coast of Venezuela, close to Guadeloupe, Montserrat and St. Lucia. It has the ocean, mountains and rainforest all within a close range of the other.

Hurricane Maria swept through the island in 2017, but out of devastation has come immense growth. The hurricane wiped out the largest trees, making room for sunshine to allow small, younger trees to flourish and the island itself is thriving as well.

As Lise Cuffy from Discover Dominica Authority says “Dominica is back on the map and ready to welcome visitors.” Nature bounces back so much faster than people, and the rebirth of Dominica is rich in culture, adventurous activities, water sports by the ocean, activities in the mountain and rainforests.

With the Atlantic Ocean on one side, the Caribbean Sea on the other, 365 rivers and ten waterfalls on the Leeward island, water is visible everywhere. The seas sparkle in a variety of shades of blues, greens, turquoise and even hues of the palest purple. Waves crashed so high; they flowed through a restaurant patio as we ate lunch one day. Water tumbles over rocks and cascades from plentiful waterfalls, and the many rivers and lakes provide swimming, hiking and hydroelectricity in nearby villages. Snorkelling, diving, fishing and sailing are all ways to enjoy the water on the nature island. Historically pirates who left small treasures behind used water for travel and throughout the 290 square islands are reminders they left, tracking their routes.

Indian River was where a lot of the trading from Indigenous people occurred. They would be on the sea for six weeks at a time and trade fruit for wood, making it an active area of culture. The island was challenging to colonise and was the last island in the Caribbean to be colonised in 1763. As it was neutral for one hundred years, it allowed indigenous people to remain.



Indian River Trees – Photo Melody Wren

A leisurely canoe ride down Indian River brings to life the movie which was filmed there “Pirates of the Caribbean, Dead Man’s Chest.” Canoeing with a guide along the 3 1/2 mile long salt river through the protected national site treated us to tiny blue Herons, white Egrets and large white crabs. Wild hibiscus grows alongside the river, and trees with almost comically long roots appear as if they are from a children’s book and about to come to life.



Indian river canoe – Photo Melody Wren

Dr Lennox Honeychurch, local historian and guide at **Fort Shirley** recently collected artifacts off the east coast off Calibishie, including plates, pieces of guns, bows and shells. Archaeologists confirmed they were from a trading post of Indigenous people, used for the route between Guadeloupe and Dominica, as it was the main entry point for ships. Pirates would go out to the vessels and ravage them.

The rich history of the island is seen clearly where cannons still stand sentry overlooking Prince Rupert's Bay at Cabrits National Park, a reminder of the British taking over the island in 1763 making it the capital of the island. African slaves cleared the forest and laid out a design for the buildings where seven hundred men were stationed and the Navy ships anchored to protect the British.



Fort Shirley – Photo Melody Wren

The Fort Shirley barracks that housed those men are part of the self-guided tour and have been converted into a hostel which hosts large school groups every year. With low prices of \$15 U.S. per night, it is steadily booked.



Guns at Fort Shirley – Photo Melody Wren

Red Rocks: A certified local guide will take you on a short hike for \$2.00 U.S. to the absolutely stunning curved rocks that slope towards the sea. Incredibly unusual shapes hidden in the rocks everywhere you look.



Red Rocks – Photo Melody Wren

Emerald Pool: a brief 10 min walk through a rainforest takes you to Emerald Waterfalls and Emerald Pool. A wooden deck to set your bags down allows you to scamper down steep and slippery rocks into refreshingly cool water. Swim towards the falls and have your FB photo taken under them but I recommend wearing water shoes! \$5.00 U.S.



Waterfall at Emerald Pool – Photo Melody Wren

Kalinago Barana Aute (KBA): A visit to this heritage site gives you a detailed history of the island. Posters illustrating how the food was prepared and baskets were made really bring it to life as well as looking at the reproduction houses made with straw and wood that illustrate how the property looked in the original village, that was home to 3500 people.



View from Heritage site – Photo Melody Wren

A background of Mayan, and Arabs from South America as well as Asia explains the different facial structure of the locals. As you hike through the property, Crayfish River follows along. Local seeds and coconut shells are turned into beautiful jewellery and sold at the souvenir shop as well as baskets and carvings.



Heritage site guide - Photo Melody Wren

Driving around the mountainous island, bright crayon coloured houses dot the streets of the towns and villages. It's not unusual to see laundry hanging on the side of the road. Locals are friendly and will happily share recommendations of what to see on the island.



Bright shops – Photo Melody Wren

Be prepared! Winding mountain roads are so twisty, and crisscross the many rivers, so even the most steadfast travellers get nauseous from the constant vertiginous, almost circular drives. Come prepared with gravol-ginger chews in your knapsack just in case.

Morne Trois Pitons is one of the highest peaks and at 1000 ft high, has one of three freshwater lakes on the island. Surrounded by rainforest and fog, it's always cooler than the main city of Roseau. It was one of the steepest drives up a mountain that we encountered during our stay. The forested mountains attract rainfall that maintains the rivers, waterfalls and lakes both in and outside of the park.



Morne Trois Pitons – Photo Melody Wren

Where to stay:

There are many new developments being built on the island, positive proof that the island has recovered. **Kempinski**, the oldest hotel chain in the world is building a large 100 room hotel in the first wave, due to open 2nd November 2019, Independence Day. There are challenges of construction in Dominica totally different from other islands. The co-owner, Kamal Shehada enthused that they were working hard to maintain the culture, including outlets for locals to sell local crafts, helping to finance them to get materials. Training by Swiss trainers for staff will ensure it is 5 star from the spa, gym restaurants throughout the hotel.

Wanderlust: We stayed at the new Wanderlust hotel, perched on the ocean, and were made most welcome by owners Tom and Sherry who share their passion for outdoor activities and everything there is to do on the island. Attention to detail is evident everywhere from the simple, elegant room decor, quality linens and towels. Balconies with ocean views invite you to linger, but with so much to do elsewhere on the island, it was a comfortable retreat to return to at the end of the day. Wanderlust also has fabulous food, incorporating local ingredients into dishes made by Tom and Sherry who are also very attentive to catering for food allergies and intolerances.

Picard Beach Cottages – where some of the crew from Pirates of the Caribbean “Dead Man’s Chest” stayed, with each cottage named after individual characters. Eighteen cottages, all with kitchenettes, 9 of which are on the beach. Simple and rustic, they are all a guest needs to embrace nature.

Secret Bay: High-end villas with private plunge pools overlook the sea. Local wood and modern furnishings make it sleekly simple. Included in your stay is a concierge to organize your excursions and will even have snorkel gear, paddleboard and kayaks set up for you ahead. At the restaurant, a menu is conspicuously absent, and the chef will plan a three-course seasonal menu for you using local and foraged ingredients.

Where to eat:

Poz: If you do nothing else but chat with its charismatic owner Troy Dixon, a Canadian from Toronto, you will have a wonderful time, but you can’t leave without a meal there! Troy has owned Poz for 6 yrs after falling in love with the island following a one-day excursion from a cruise ship. With fresh fish abundant on the island, I had my first meal of Blue Marlin, local veg and fruit. Simple and delicious with personal service.



Islet view fresh fish – Photo Melody Wren

Islet View restaurant, Castle Bruce: incredible views of the Atlantic with hues of turquoise, blue and purple in the shallow edges, I enjoyed a local fish called Kawang with a traditional side dish called “Provision” that usually

contains Pumpkin, Dashin, Yam, Potato, and Tania which is a medicinal plant. Provision sometimes is just yam or Dashin but often a mixture of root vegetables.



Islet view restaurant view- Photo Melody Wren

Les Champs: At this restaurant and hotel overlooking the town of Roseau, I enjoyed the extensive menu featuring several gluten-free and lactose-free options including gluten-free pumpkin soup, corn chips and roasted eggplant salad, and Chicken with noodles and vegetables. At dessert I devoured the first gluten-free crepes I have had in years and served with local bananas it was a total treat. Travellers with food allergies and intolerances will love having their needs easily accommodated at this quaint and friendly spot.

Fort Young: The restored Fort is host to an upscale restaurant with an extensive creative menu with vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options. Features local fish and vegetables. Accommodates special dietary requirements easily and quickly devoured.

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About The Author

Melody Wren

Melody is an Ontario based travel writer who believes travel stories are meant to encourage and inspire and considers her age (over 60) a gift in her journeys, bringing wisdom, experience, humour and a major 'if not now, when' attitude to her writing. A



formerly nervous traveller, experiential travel has helped her conquer fears as she snorkelled through the Galapagos islands, glacier trekked in the Northwest Passage, danced around a fire in Africa, learned how to make the perfect tiramisu in Florence, kayaked amongst spawning salmon in Ontario, snow-shoed in Colorado, and sailed in the British Virgin Islands . Her work appears in Canadian Yachting Magazine, Canadian Jewish News, The Toronto Star, Kitchener Waterloo Record, Caribbean Beat Magazine, Cottage Life Magazine, Waypoints Global, Active Over 50, and Inspired Seniors.