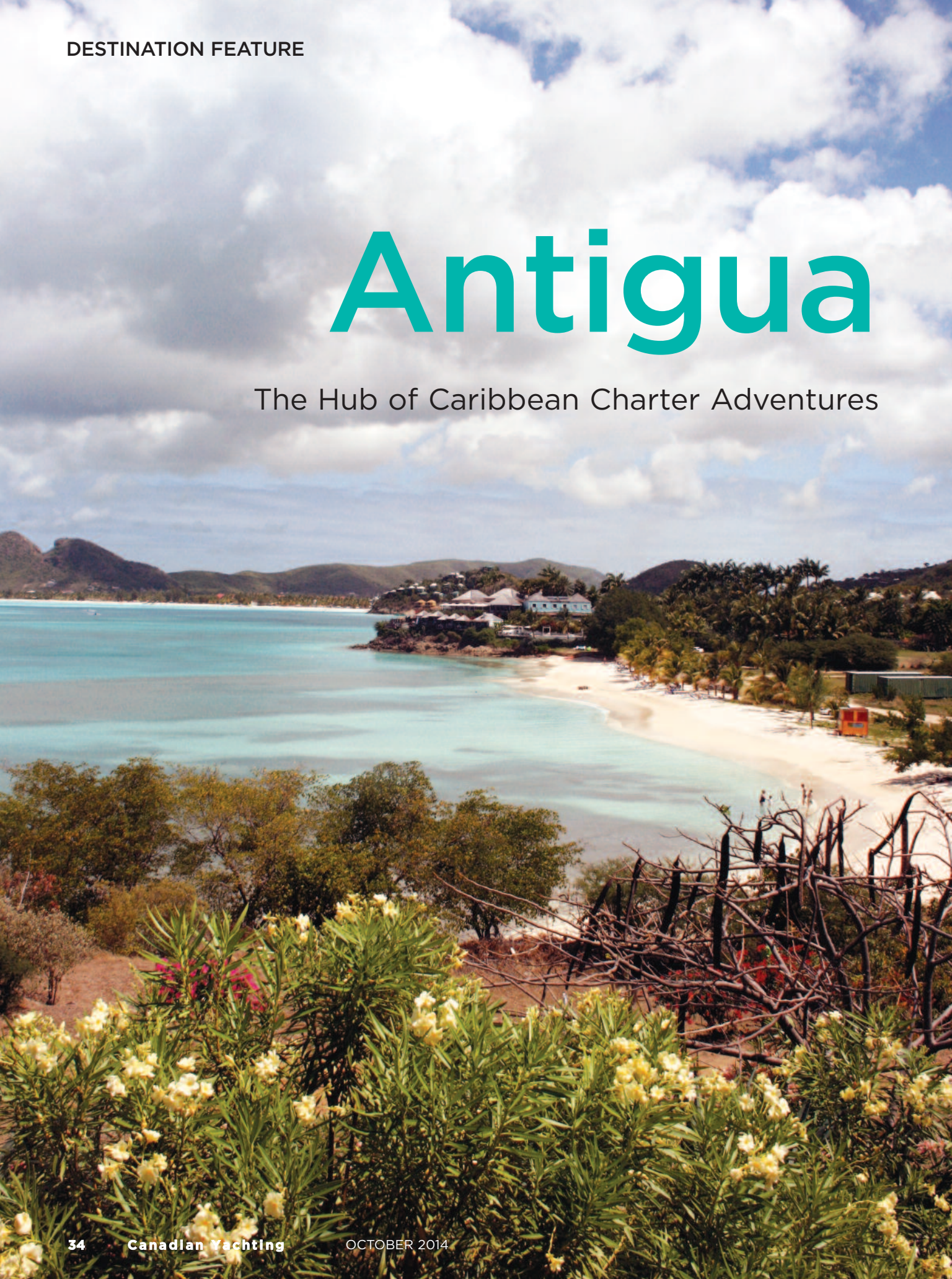


Antigua

The Hub of Caribbean Charter Adventures



By Elizabeth A. Kerr

It's just so easy to get to Antigua with direct flights offered by Air Canada and West Jet several days a week in season, Antigua also offers one of the best kick-off points for exploring so many other Caribbean islands...if you have the time and the winds are prevailing in the right direction.

However, don't get me wrong. There's lots to do in Antigua and since it's pretty much a year-round destination, you could customize your charter vacation by planning it around Antigua Sailing Week in late April or the annual carnival in late July.

Chartering a boat in Antigua is simple, but book ahead to guarantee that just the right boat is waiting for you. Horizon Yacht Charters, On Deck and Sunsail have bases right on the island and all offer a range of boats and services to make your charter a lasting memory. No matter where you do your cruising, there are a handful of full-service marinas nearby to provide you with an overnight stay, maintenance and repair, provisioning, shopping and entertainment.

They say that Antigua can offer up a different beach for every day of the year! Needless to say, we just didn't have time to visit them all on this trip, but we do have a few favourites that you should consider while circumnavigating the island.

No visit to Antigua is complete without a visit to English Harbour – a great starting port for your charter and aptly steeped in naval history. Although indeed another notch in Christopher Columbus' island discovery repertoire, it was Lord Horatio Nelson's arrival in 1784 (as head of the Squadron of the Leeward Islands) that facilitated the construction of Nelson's Dockyard to serve as a main Caribbean base for the British Navy. Although virtually abandoned and ultimately closed in 1889, this fifteen-square-mile property has now been completely restored thanks to the Friends of English Harbour and claims to be the only Georgian-era dockyard in the world. Extend your stay in one its two charming spots – the Admiral's Inn or the Copper and Lumber hotel – both located within walking distance of the must-see Dockyard Museum and the Dockyard Bakery (tucked in behind).

Departing English Harbour and travelling north, Willoughby Bay will welcome you to a great stretch of beach and reef. Thanks to the abundance of tropical fish here, your first taste of Antigua's snorkeling starts now.

Nonsuch Bay offers more than just a great place to anchor. Hop into your rib and visit The Bay @ Nonsuch Bay Resort for some local fare overlooking your mooring. If time and budget permits, indulge in an overnight stay here at the end of your charter to unwind and enjoy what else this resort and the island has to offer that you just can't get to by boat. Whether you stay in a beach cottage or a hilltop villa, enjoy the privacy of your luxurious accommodation, visit the spa or go kite-surfing. Leave the kids behind, rent a car or hire a guide and explore. The lux-

It's truly hard to believe that Ffryes Beach is so beautiful and yet deserted most of the time.



The archway at Devil's Bridge has been created by these foaming breakers pounding into the limestone that have travelled almost 5,000 kilometres across the Atlantic from Africa.

PHOTO CREDIT: Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority

rious Nonsuch Bay Resort is located less than 30 minutes from many of Antigua's many attractions.

Heading north, Long Bay welcomes the sun worshippers like no other bay on the island with the finest of white sand and the clearest of crystal blue waters. Dive right off your boat or visit the beach and wade in. Although there are chair and umbrella rentals here, don't forget your hat and sunscreen.

Having received a good dose of Vitamin D while enjoying a chillaxing day, head to Great Bird Island, a tiny islet measuring just 20 acres. Hike the 150 feet of rocky path to enjoy the panoramic view. Keep an eye out for the Antiguan Racer – a somewhat scary but totally harmless rear-fanged grey-brown snake, apparently named by sailors – whose entire population (500) now lives here. Other endangered species that call Great Bird Island their home include the brown pelican, the West Indian whistling duck and the red-billed tropicbirds.

On your arrival to Antigua's recently-renovated airport, it's likely you flew over Parham Harbour – Antigua's oldest town and the first port of entry. Although it remains a port today, it's now mainly used by local fishing boats. However, it's a good place to stop and take a break from your trip. Although a well-protected anchorage, the channel can be tricky so it is recommended to navigate only during daylight. Take advantage of the laundry facilities at the marina, provision at the nearby supermarket or grab a bite at a local bar. While there, do visit St. Peter's Anglican Church, known at one time "as the finest church in the British West Indies" designed by the famous British architect Thomas Weekes. I'm a wannabe architect myself, so I truly admired the Italian-influenced octagonal shape of the church and the rib-like wooden ceiling that reminded me of the inside of a well hand-crafted canoe.



Nelson's Dockyard offers the landlubber and boater alike a place to learn about Antigua's naval history while visiting the world's only Georgian-era dockyard. Grab a scone or a yummy sandwich at The Bakery behind the Dockyard Museum while enjoying the views of the many yachts that moor here.

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most often pokes out of the water – offering another fun and easy snorkeling experience. Or opt for a ten-minute hike that takes you to Fort Barrington, where breathtaking views of St. Kitts and Nevis are always possible.

No stay in Antigua should go without at least a little time spent at Jolly Harbour Marina Village. No matter where I am, I'm always in search for some retail therapy and this is one of the spots where I found it. From clothes to artwork, the shops at Jolly Harbour cater to every taste and (almost every) budget.

Before heading back to base, spend a day and night in Carlisle Bay. This scenic spot is an easy sail home and another favourite for fellow boaters. This beach does not disappoint in any way and is clearly a welcoming spot for Antigua's green sea turtles. Sadly, all sea turtles species found here on the endangered list, however, the Environmental Awareness Group in partnership with WIDECAST and the Jumby Bay Hawksbill Project team are conducting an ongoing survey to better understand the turtles themselves and how widespread the nesting population spans.

There is no question that you can discover much of Antigua by boat. But if you can add a few days to your itinerary, there are a few other sites and must-dos I'd be remiss if I didn't share here.

Although the retail therapy of Jolly Harbour did whet the appetite, the works of local artisans, including internationally respected artists, potters and sculptors can be found throughout the island including the gallery at Harmony Hill (Parish of St. Paul), Redcliffe Quay in St. John's or the Fig Tree Studio Art Gallery (situated in the heart of the rainforest).

For some great sightseeing, follow Fig Tree Drive through Antigua's rainforest and witness mango, guava, oranges and bananas happily growing there. It's definitely worth the drive to Long Bay to visit Devil's Bridge. For somewhere so remote, it's

If you're keen to escape the peace and tranquility of the sea and are perhaps craving a little land-based activity, your next stop should be Dickenson Bay. This busy stretch of beach is home to many lovely resorts, great restaurants, and waterfront bars. You can even go exploring on horseback or try your luck at Grand Bay Casino! Not matter what you choose to do, don't forget to take in the sunset at Runaway Beach before heading back to the boat.

Steering south, you may see a glimpse of the Andes, a wreck that lies in the middle of Deep Bay – easily spotted because its



At the quietest of times, Antigua remains a lively island to visit but during Antigua Sailing Week (April 25-May 1, 2015), yachts from all over the world arrive in English and Falmouth Harbour to compete in one of the most preeminent yacht racing events in the Caribbean. Lively indeed!

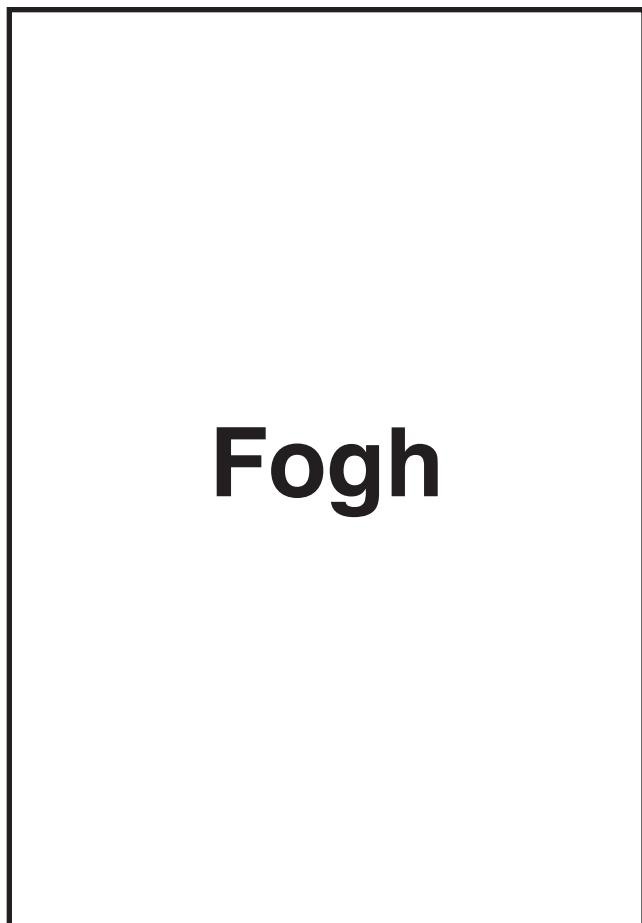


We had a delightful lunch at Dennis Bar and Restaurant overlooking this beach where the red snapper (inset) just melted in our mouths.



hard to believe the foaming Atlantic breakers that crown here have travelled more than almost 5,000 kilometres from the African coast to create such a magnificent archway carved out of limestone.

Give yourself a break from the galley and stop by Dennis' Cocktail Bar & Restaurant. Order the red snapper and



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I am definitely a consumer of locally made goods and although not everything sold in these beachside kiosks is "local", it's really fun to barter with the shopkeepers. Long Bay is not the only beachside mall, but it is one of my favourites. If you're looking for something more upscale, head to St. John's, Antigua's capital. Because this is where the cruise ships come in, there's lots to choose from. **Inset:** I prefer the calmer and just slightly off the beaten track shops of Redcliffe Quay with its brightly coloured shacks and restored buildings. There is an unlimited selection of clothing, local craft, jewellery and cafes.

a bottle of Carib and enjoy a spectacular view of Ffryes Beach.

And last, but not least, make sure that wherever you are on any given Sunday, it's a short haul back to English Harbour in time to attend the world-famous party at Shirley Heights. Festivities start at 4:00 p.m. when the music of a steelpan band starts up and the mouthwatering BBQ scents lure locals and tourists alike. For less than \$20, you can enjoy the music, the entertainment, spectacular views and a sunset that beats most.

Bet's are, you'll be back to Antigua next year if only to party again at Shirley Heights. •

Useful Websites

Admiral's Inn	admiralsantigua.com
Antigua and Barbuda Department of Tourism	antigua-barbuda.org
Antigua Sailing Week	sailingweek.com
Carnival	antiguacarnival.com
Copper and Lumber Hotel	copperandlumberhotel.com
Horizon Yacht Charters	horizonyachtcharters.com
Nonsuch Bay Resort	nonsuchbayresort.com
On Deck	ondecksailing.com
St. James Club	stjamesclubantigua.com
Sunsail	sunsail.com