

S61 47th Reunion 2014 Cruise - Eastern Caribbean - Report of Proceedings

Episode 4 – Runs Ashore

There were 4 runs ashore; St Thomas in the American Virgins; Antigua; San Juan in Puerto Rico and Nassau in the Bahamas - in that order. None of our group went on any of the vast array of excursions that were made available, at cost, not cheap, by the cruise line. We were a bunch of experienced ex-matelots, who didn't need any help concerning runs ashore for chrissake! Piso ex-matelots too!

Our first instinct in St Thomas was to get away from the 'sheep' - off the beaten track. We jumped in a taxi, whereupon Eddy specified to the driver exactly where we wanted to go; a proper drinking den, frequented only by the locals; a place where your average cruise ship passenger wouldn't dare to tread! Off we went, bumping and rattling along, away from the main road and down narrow, rutted back streets; definitely the wrong side of town, baby! A scintilla of excitement rippled through us as we alighted at the destination. Eddy emitted a hearty 'Wha-hey' as he pushed open the door - and entered a spotlessly clean, all glass, chrome, and shiny floored, background music playing, Tesco restaurant/greasy spoon hybrid!



Happy Hour in St Thomas – Happiness!



Happy Hour + 1 minute.

We actually had a great time in there, as our waitress was great fun, and served us 'special' rum punches (yeah, I know, everyone gets 'special' ones, but let's not spoil a good dit, eh!). 'Anything you want; just ask', she says. 'What do you call a group of frogs?', we replied. Oh, how we all laughed!

We never really saw Eddy ashore again after that.



Eddy stomps off to find some real action!
“Bunch of bleedin' frogs, for chrissake!”



Mike gets into the swing of things.



A display of formation drinking from Carolyn and Marisa.

Me, Mike and Phil soon came to terms with the fact that we were never going to be able to recreate the runs ashore of old. We were has beens; a bunch of lightweights - too old, too sensible, too saddled with responsibility - and too accompanied by our womenfolk! We stuck to the touristy things of getting to see the local sights, shops and places of cultural and historic interest; and having a taste of the local cuisine. Bloody marvellous! Eddy and Marisa meanwhile, rolled off the ship to the nearest bar, had a gut full of chicken wings, grits and pizza, washed down with lashings of beer and rum, got filled in, lost their ID cards and

staggered back on board, adrift! Wha-hey!!

OK, so I've embellished things slightly - artistic licence and all that! However, our next run ashore, in Antigua, illustrates the point nicely. Me, Mike, Phil, and the girls hired a local; 'Ambassador Derrick', to drive us around the Island, taking in all the usual touristy places. Nelson's Dockyard, at English Harbour, the highlight of which, of course, was seeing the Capstans that I helped refurbish as a Baby Chippy on the Fighting 42, the good ship Phoebe. Shirley Heights, where we were greeted by Sexy Lou, and treated to some stunning views of seascapes and Eric Clapton's Rehab centre. And on the way back; the Tropical Forest; Mount Obama, and a sample of Antigua's 365 beaches. Ambassador Derrick was a charming host, and knew everything there is to know about Antigua; a bit of a smart arse to tell the truth - but he didn't know what you call a group of frogs! After a super day, we retired on board, tired but happy.



Ambassador Derrick



One I made earlier!



Twin Peaks!



T I told you I'd been here before!

But not before bumping into Eddy and Marisa in a bar, no more than a stone's throw from the ship - and you could tell they'd supped a few! Wha-hey! They'd actually been treated to a parade of the Island's Defence Forces, complete with Band and Guard; they were so close to the action that they were almost part of it! And finally, how much rum would it take to persuade YOUR wife/girlfriend to join a steel band (stand fast John Waddington!)? See exhibit 1, in which Marisa can clearly be seen, at the end of the Jetty, shaking a wicked oil drum! I rest my case!



Hoola-la! Maris takes to the floor at the Hard Rock



Meanwhile; outside.



Exhibit 1: A few Rum Runners later!

Me, Mike and Phil spent the day of the reunion, Thursday 11 September, strolling around the Old Town of San Juan, Puerto Rico, with Carolyn, Toos and Shirley. I think the girls were pleasantly surprised by the Old World charms of the Spanish quarter, unblighted as it is by Commerce, and full of interesting sights and sounds. We all enjoyed visiting the Old Forts, which have guarded the sea and land approaches to the city since the days when San Juan dominated the trade routes between the Old World and the vast treasures of the New. And of course, we enhanced our tourist credentials by sitting down to a tasty platter of Mofongo, the local delicacy, at a delightful little kiosk, which resembled a Victorian public convenience, on our way back to the ship.



“I'm sure I've seen that bloke before, Shirl”



What happened next?



Bring on the Mofongo!

Eddy, meanwhile, had other ideas! As soon as 'Libertymen' was piped, he hit the jetty, with Marisa in tow, hailed the nearest fast black, and went into a huddle with the driver. Marisa heard garbled snatches of Eddy's conversation; 'backstreet', 'beaten track', 'local's', 'fear to tread', etc.. But not even Eddy had the nerve to include those immortal words, 'Black Angus'! With a loud 'Wha-hey', he and Marisa leapt into the back of the taxi, and off it sped, towards the dark underbelly of the city, where life is cheap, and thrills lurk round every dark corner. Five minutes later, they rolled up at the Old Forts, where Marisa spent a pleasant afternoon lapping up the culture - with Eddy in tow!



“Take us to the dark side, Drives!”



“Hey Guys, you'll never guess who I've just seen”

Nassau was, well, Nassau! Most classmates will have visited there, and so no description is really necessary. The old colonial undertones, the horses and carts, the smart Bobbies, complete with white jackets and Pith Helmets - and the jewellery and craft shops - hundreds of 'em, are still there, though I couldn't remember the shops at all! My abiding memory now, though, will be of Shirley's performance at the jewellery shops, and the way she had all of the shop assistants at her beck and call, and virtually drooling over her, as she hummed and ha'd over some cracking, and very expensive, items. It helped that Shirley has just come into an inheritance, and that jewellery sellers the world over can smell a person with wads of cash burning a hole in their pocket from across a crowded fish market on a hot day. Shirley didn't actually buy anything, but, boy, did she put them through their paces!



A happy snap that needs no caption!



Yup, he's still there!

What I can say, with absolute certainty, is that we all thoroughly enjoyed our runs ashore, and whilst we could never relive our rip roaring escapades of old, we revived a few good memories. And talking of memories brings me neatly to the whole point of us being on the cruise in the first place; remembering our 47 years together, and all our fellow classmates who, for one reason or another, some good, some sad, couldn't be there with us. Our reunion!