

Our First Caribbean Beach

By

Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.

It was almost time to disembark from the ship. I finished packing my backpack and my wife, Bonnie, finished stuffing things in her tote bag. This was the first port on our first cruise. It was April 2002 and we were about to go to our first Caribbean beach. We read in the travel brochures that the French side of the island has a “Mediterranean ambience,” but we really did not know what to expect. All packed and waiting for something to happen, we looked out the porthole and saw several sailing yachts docked beside our ship. We could see the rugged cliffs and dramatic landscape around the port. Colorfully painted houses were nestled along the lush green steep hills. We had docked in Philipsburg, Sint Maarten, in the Dutch West Indies.

After a few minutes, an announcement came over the intercom directing all disembarking passengers to report to the gangway. Once on the dock, Bonnie spotted someone holding a sign that read, “Orient Beach Tour.” We followed the guide to a small brightly painted bus. As soon as we left the dock area, we began climbing and winding up through the hills that would take us to another country and our beach.

After about 40 minutes of driving, we reached the summit. In the distance was Orient Bay, a majestic setting with the mountains rising up all around. The white sand sweeps around a blue cove with two small islands in the middle of the bay. Soon, we arrived at the Kakao Beach Bar and Restaurant. We walked through the grounds, past tiki huts and palm trees to the beach. It looked like a post card. The sand was velvety and white as pearls. The water had an aqua tint close to shore. About 20 feet off shore, the water was a deep turquoise blue. Chaises with pads, cloth umbrellas and colorful chairs dotted the beach. We found a spot, removed our clothes (we had worn our swim suits underneath) and went into the ocean. We spent several hours enjoying the warm tropical water.

Some of the locals told us that Orient Beach was a clothing optional beach. We discovered that Orient Beach is located adjacent to La Playa Beach, which is an all-nude affair. We did not think anything of it until we saw a nude man, who was probably in his seventies, strolling towards us from the direction of La Playa Beach. Then we saw women taking off the tops to their bathing suits. I was quite surprised when Bonnie removed her bathing suit top. I decided to keep my swimsuit on. We could hear Reggae music coming from the restaurant bar, so we decided to have some lunch. In one of the tiki huts close to the beach, we ate lunch while watching the people go by. We did not want to leave this paradise. We have a vivid memory of Orient Beach and its “Mediterranean ambience.” It was our first Caribbean beach.