



Schooner sailing at sunset

Outlook over a fishing village.

Calm after storm

Eastern Caribbean post-hurricane Dominica rediscovered

By Jacquie D. Durand

My first sight of Hurricane Maria's September 2017 devastation on Dominica was seen through an airplane window as my flight prepared to land. My heart wept for the 70,000 residents who had to bear this burden. The island and its three National Parks that constitute this first UNESCO World Heritage Site in the eastern Caribbean, were battered by 257 kilometre an hour (160 mph) winds. Also impacted were the rainforests that cover two thirds of the island's surface, with more than 1,000 plant species, 170-plus types of birds, and hiking trails over a dozen mountains.

Prior to my visit, I had heard about various possibilities for volunteers to assist with clean-up and rebuilding projects around

the island ravaged by the hurricane. One such program was devoted to the revitalization of Indian River. I met up with Andrew "Cobra" O'Brien of the Dominica Yacht Agency, and the person responsible for putting together the river clean-up project. Trees were uprooted and left lying across the river, completely blocking all transit along the way. This is the same river seen in 'Pirates of the Caribbean: The Black Pearl'. Paddling up river to the Bush Bar, I was struck by the number of trees still lying beside the river. Ahead of us, it looked like beavers had built a giant log-jamb. This is what Cobra faced all along the river immediately following Maria.

Hotel the Champs is a small, five-room hotel situated on a hillside in the Picard, Portsmouth area of north-west Dominica.

Lise van de Kamp is a goal-setter who, in 2007, was finally able to realize her 20-year dream of beginning a bed and breakfast in paradise. Her paradise was on 'Nature's Isle' of Dominica. Lisa and her partner, Hans Schilders, were not about to let Maria take it all away from them. They are reinforcing the foundation of 'Champs' to make their property more 'weather resistant', using propane instead of gasoline for an emergency generator, concrete pillars now support the pool and deck, an updated system has been installed for rainwater collection, new solar power panels will collect energy for electricity and outdoor charging stations have also been installed on the pool deck for their patrons' convenience.

Walking along the Wai'tukubuli Trails in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park, I

headed off to the Emerald Pool at the bottom of a 12-metre waterfall. I was amazed that I could see the sky as I walked along the familiar well laid-out path. The once splendid rainforest had been viciously stripped of its leaves. I continued to the pool, still as beautiful as I remembered. Stepping into the cool, clear water, I felt all the rest of the world lift away. I was disheartened to learn that I would not be able to see the rest of the trail I had once explored. Unfortunately, the restoration crew had not yet completed that section of the path.

The Kalinago Territory holds the traditional culture and way of life of the Carib Indians. The Kalinago name for their island is Wai'tukubuli (Tall is Her Body), but was renamed Dominica by Columbus. The Kalinago had suffered damage as extensively as the rest of the island and faced loss of crops as well as homes. They are, however, faring well in their many rebuild projects throughout the territory. The Kalinago people stand strong and are accepting visitors. They work to continue teaching others about their history and their customs.

After my walk through the Kalinago, I felt the urge to relax in a Sulphur spring. Stopping by Da-S' Cape Spa along the way, I found they had three pools of varying temperatures to enjoy, dependent upon your personal preferences. They will soon be expanding with a Sulphur Mud bath for additional relaxation, with its many other health benefits.

The Papillote Wilderness Retreat and Tropical Gardens sits on the slope of Morne Macaque, near the small mountain village of Trafalgar. After Hurricane Maria, owner Anne Gray is faced with rebuilding and reimagining her paradise. While the resort has suffered severe damage, Anne told me, "We are taking advantage of this and restructuring. The hot pools are now functioning, and we hope to reopen the restaurant by the end of March 2018." You can be sure it will be even more alluring than ever.

The Botanic Gardens, though once badly damaged by Hurricane David (1979), made a brilliant return to its former brilliance. Lise Cuffy, Visit Dominica Tourism stated, the "Botanic Gardens is fully reopened for normal activities. Home to many tropical and native plants, the Gardens is set to be restored back to its former glory, that will see it become one of the capital's most popular tourist attractions. Some of the plants are very valuable, some trees are estimated to be over 125 years old, since the Botanic Gardens were established in 1892."

In Roseau, Fort Young is open to guests, with approximately half of its rooms in readiness, many already filled. As in the past, their



(Above) Colourful Roseau market stalls. (Bottom left) The entrance to Fort Young. (Bottom right) Andrew 'Cobra' O'Brien of the Dominica Yacht Agency on the Indian River.



dining room and bar areas are open to walk-ins and cruise ship clients. With my own room on the ocean-side, I relaxed with my morning coffee on the balcony, the better to watch as the cruise ship du jour came into port. Fort Young is perfectly located, a two-minute walk from the cruise ship pier and The Old Roseau Market.

From the pier or market square, it is an easy stroll through the nearby food market and further on through the town. Here you can find many interesting shops and a selection of excellent restaurants where you can sample any number of favourite local dishes.

Rainforest Riding is a small, family-run business owned by Canadian Valerie Francis and her children. Their stable of horses includes thoroughbreds, local ponies, St Lucian horses and their own home-breeds. Located between the National Park and the beach, family members will take you by horseback through the rainforest and along a section of the Waitukubuli Trail; ride beside the Roseau River, or swim with your horse in Prince Rupert's Bay. They have also sustained some losses from the hurricane but are returning to 'normal' life.

Lise commented that, "The people of Dominica have found strength and, their tenacity and steadfastness has brought added

strength to others. The Government of Dominica has put out a call to rebuild Dominica into a climate resilient country."

The verdant rainforests that Dominica was well-known for have been seriously depleted. Although the forests are beginning to show some growth, it is going to take years before it has all been fully replenished. Thankfully, expediting the viability, are several volunteer projects around the island that tourists are invited to join.

Dominica encourages visitors to get involved in meaningful tourism by considering a voluntourism package. These unique packages are offered to assist Dominica with the cleanup of sites such as the Indian River dive sites and the Waitukubuli National Trail. Packages are being offered by the Tamarin Tree Hotel, Fort Young Hotel, Secret Bay, Cobra Tours, Cool Breeze Tours and Cabrits Dive.

IF YOU GO:

Discover Dominica: www.dominica.dm/
Voluntourism Packages in Dominica: www.dominicaupdate.com/
voluntourism/#1516290000609-e2712c52-5e33
Kalinago Territory: www.kalinagoterritory.com/
Rainforest Riding: www.rainforestriding.com/
Papillote Wilderness Resort: www.papillote.dm/about/

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