

Letter From Constante

Leaving Harbour On A Friday

After a month in Charlottesville, Tobago, **Constante** sailed for the Windward Islands of the Caribbean—Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia and Martinique. Franck and Meng Ngee Ibanez share some candid moments of a freaky Friday and their journey into paradise.

the green flash was on this sunset in St Lucy

Franck painting



The girls with local puppies

Dear Readers:

Leaving on a Friday from a harbour is bad luck! Many sailors believe in this... how should I call it... fact of life, or naive superstition, or old wives' tales perhaps? Right!

We left French Guyana on a Friday (Christmas Day to be precise). The run towards the first island of the Caribbean arc, Tobago, was fast and uneventful despite the fact I had to fight against a growing flu. It flared up and nailed me down only one hour after arriving in the clear waters of Tobago. Bad luck? Three days later, while helping a German sailor lift his dinghy onto the beach, my back quit and sent me to the forward cabin of our boat for five days, followed by two weeks of walking like an old man. A coincidence?

On the way to Grenada, hundreds of boats welcomed us in each busy bay. The presence of two yards and many marine supply shops attracted sailors from all over the world. We stayed awhile to enjoy the beautiful beach of Grand Anse before heading off to Carriacou: home of friendly people and the cheapest and fastest yard in the Caribbean. Here is where we gave **Constante** a face—I mean, bottom-lift. In five days, I transformed the crackly blue hull to a fresh sparkly brown hydro-dynamic surface. With an understanding, efficient and reliable (a rarity in the Caribbean) yard manager, Paul, standing by, I could focus on working on the boat without worrying about the family's safety.

We planned to reach Petite Martinique which offered a great dock with affordable fuel and water from a big water-maker. Fending off a chartered catamaran, which had lost control as it was trying to leave the dock, I broke one rib on the left side of my chest. Great place, good people, but excruciating pain! How could we have left on a Friday?

After two hours of pleasant sailing with a skipper in agony, we arrived in Union Island, the first island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Thereafter to the wonderful paradise bay in Mayreau. By then, I couldn't sneeze due to the extremely sharp pain. Three days and a lot of painkillers later, we moved to the incredibly beautiful Tobago Cays which Meng will tell you more about. The malediction finally seemed to wear off and fade away. We had an awesome sail towards Bequia, St. Vincent, St. Lucia and finally, Martinique, where we will rest for almost a month. However, leaving on a Friday did not let me off the hook so easily: The hard sun burnt a small spot on my lower lip which got infected and annoyed me for a mere ten days before I could kiss my wife again.

The Caribbean is truly a magical place on earth: crystal clear waters, small mosquito population, lots of sun and a great flow of trade winds to cool us down and fill up our sails. If you like making friends, this is the perfect place. In one anchorage called Le Marin in Martinique, we counted 1,600 boats! Remarkably, none of them leave on a Friday.

Franck

Two months of exploration, many still ask me: "Aren't you tired by now? Another island, another beach?" Well, open your eyes and mind, because each island reveals its own unique character and attractions. Every new arrival to an island leaves us mesmerised and fulfilled.

In Grenada, we were swept away by the grandeur and clear blue waters of Grand Anse beach. In Prickly Bay, we witnessed a groovy performance by a professional steelpan band, dressed in brightly coloured costumes and accompanied by drums and bass guitar. Grenada and the Grenadine islands topped our list of having the most welcoming, friendly and helpful customs and immigration officers by far.

Meanwhile, the girls and I spent a few morning lessons on how to keep our beaches and earth clean. We gathered bags of plastic bottles, glass bottles, cans and even diapers. It is absolutely shocking and sad to see what ends up in the sea. During our few weeks on this island, I established friendships with women who ran restaurants, bakeries and vegetable stores. I tasted all kinds of mouthwatering Creole dishes, which used marine ingredients such as conch (with a texture similar to squid and abalone) and calallou soup (which resembles spinach when cooked).

Next stop was checking into Union Island for the Grenadines where enthused fishermen on speedboats would scream out "Welcome to Paradise!" salutations and offer us a mooring. We declined since we were only here for a night and half believed their paradise claims; but the next day, when we arrived in Mayreau, our jaws gaped in awe. Fresh air, swaying coconut trees, clean beaches and the quietness at night.

In Tobago Cays national park, which many rate as the best in the Caribbean, we had our first family snorkeling experience with sea turtles, multi-coloured parrot fish, yellowtails, snappers, jack fish, pink corals, odd-looking trunk fish and even rays. My favorite sighting from afar is a ballet of popping heads (Franck's, the girls' and the turtles) just to catch a quick breath and return immediately to a sunny, quiet and isolated underwater world. Think twice before beckoning to any fisherman holding a wiggling lobster in his hand. It is often overpriced and meant for tourists on charter boats with a bigger budget. Personally I'd rather see a lobster in the blue water than in my iron pot.

Approaching St. Lucia, we marveled at the twin-towering Pitons. This exceptional volcanic mountainous beauty will enthrall you completely! We decided to spend an evening respite in Marigot Bay, where we caught our first sight of "the green flash" as the sun slid down behind the horizon. A perfect, tranquil Paradise Island!

Meng Ngee