Front Porch Travels
Ideas for armchair traveling, trips, and outings

Caribbean Cinderella

This month the Front Porch Travelers were craving the high seas and a little rest and relaxation. They got that, and more, with June’s trip to Palm Island.

Traveling How-To’s and Tips

- Print the complete trip. This activity can be presented in its entirety as a large print skit or read aloud with participants representing the six different Front Porch characters. Check out the links in the article for additional information to bring to the activity.

- Don't have time for the complete trip? Take an abbreviated tour consisting of the Introduction, Trivia, and Travelogue with Pictures sections.

- Pictures can be printed out and passed around during the activity or displayed on the computer or television.

- Prior to starting the activity, you may want to play the YouTube video of the song “Sail Away” to put everyone in a sailing mood.

- If desired, end your activity with this YouTube video of Caribbean Music. Encourage everyone to move with the music.

- Also, if you want, download this PDF slide presentation to go along with the discussion. Show it on your widescreen TV. If this slideshow is useful and you would like to see more in the future, let us know.

- If your group isn't familiar with the Front Porch Travelers, have them Meet the McGivers (and friends).

Caribbean Cinderella

Sail away with me honey
I put my heart in your hand
Sail away with me honey now, now, now
Sail away with me, what will be will be
I wanna hold you now, now, now.

From the song “Sail Away”

Introduction – Nell gets us started

June, with its fun-filled days, warm summer nights, and numerous weddings, is a month tailor-made for romance. In trying to decide where to go on our trip, we all agreed it should be somewhere old “lovebirds” like us could be comfortable. Sailing in the Caribbean sounded quite romantic, and so it became a matter of deciding on which island. We had been to St. Lucia in June 2011 and wanted something a bit different this time around. Maude, having had a difficult winter thanks to her old nemesis “Art H. Ritis” (the name she has bestowed on her arthritis), was looking forward to spending
time on a beach soaking up the warm sunshine. The rest of us, with similar aches and pains, were thinking the same thing. Okay, not so romantic but definitely comfortable!

**An Island with a Cinderella Story – Truman sets the stage**

Bert and I were charged with finding someplace technology-free, off the beaten path, quiet but fun, non-touristy, and where we can wear our bathing suits and not worry about how we look (this last one from Nell, of course). A tough order you might say, but no challenge is too great for the team of McGiver and Davis.

After a great deal of research, we came up with Palm Island in the Caribbean. What is most intriguing about this place is its origin. Once an uninhabited island infested with mosquitoes, it was nothing more than a swamp. It became a leper colony and was named “Prune Island” (why I do not know). All that changed when an American by the name of [John Caldwell](https://example.com) (a businessman and sailor) and his wife, Mary, visited the island and saw its possibilities rather than its obvious flaws. As the story goes…

In 1966, the Caldwells arranged with the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to lease the island for 99 years for a reported one dollar a year. The family (kind of like a modern-day Swiss Family Robinson without the shipwreck) undertook the formidable task of cleaning up the beaches and draining the swamps after irrigating them with seawater to kill the mosquitoes. John, who went by the nickname of “Coconut Johnny” because he was known for planting coconut trees wherever he went, planted so many palm trees that the island became known as Palm Island. The family built a 10-room hotel in 1967 and named it Palm Beach Island Club. They lived and worked on the island for some 30 years before the current owner, Elite Island Resorts, took over. It is now one of the premier all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean. John died from an apparent heart attack at his home on his beloved island in November 1998. He was 80 years old and, by all reports, was still going strong.

**Discussion Questions**

- What do you think it would be like to live on your own private island?
- What is the biggest landscaping or renovation project you have ever undertaken?
- What five things would you most want to have with you if you were shipwrecked?

**Trivia – Bert has the facts**

- The island, comprised of just 135 acres, is so small that it takes only 30 minutes to walk all the way around it.
- It is situated at the southern tip of [St. Vincent and Grenadines](https://example.com), which are comprised of 32 islands and cays.
- We reached Palm Island by first flying to [Barbados](https://example.com). Then we took a 45-minute ride on a very small and somewhat rickety plane to [Union Island](https://example.com). Truman and I remained calm, but the ladies were quite apprehensive. From Union Island, it was just a short (and thankfully gentle) boat ride to Palm Island.
In addition to his restoration of Palm Island, John Caldwell is known as the author of the book *Desperate Voyage*. Published in 1949, it is about his ordeal at sea after a hurricane wrecked his boat and set him adrift.

The resort has 43 guest rooms, about half of which are situated directly on the beach. The rooms are beautiful with bamboo and wicker furnishings, rich colorful fabrics, and ceilings of woven rattan. Prepare to be spoiled.

On many of the walls in the guest rooms, you will find original artwork by resident artist and retired physician, Dr. Patrick Chevalier. I let Ethel know in no uncertain terms that I would love to see one of his fish paintings hanging on a wall in our house for my next birthday.

There are also about 20 privately owned villas on the island.

Palm Island offers a welcome break from the world of technology. There are few televisions, telephones, or Internet connections. You are encouraged to put away your cell phones, laptops, and iPads and forget about everything but this tropical paradise. There are even signs hanging from the trees that say “Shh.”

For those who can’t live without television or the Internet, don’t despair; there are places on the island where you can get your technology fix.

We did not meet anyone who lives on the island on a year-round basis. It is first and foremost a resort populated by tourists with kind and friendly people available to meet our every need.

Iguanas and tortoises were our constant companions as we walked or biked around the island. Nell has determined she wants an iguana when she gets home, and Truman is understandably worried. From past experience, he knows there is probably a big lizard in his future.

**Discussion Questions**

- Have you ever been to the Caribbean? If so, share your recollections of the trip.

- Do you think we would be better off if the world were driven more by people and less by technology?

- What technology would you be unable to live without?
Travelogue

What to Do on Palm Island – Mabel plans our day

Whether you stay active and busy or simply sit and enjoy the beauty of this island, you will find much to make you happy. We were free to do as much or as little as we wanted, and it was wonderful. Here are some of the highlights:

The Beaches

There are five beaches on the island, complete with palm trees for shade and hammocks for napping. We were able to warm our aching bones and joints in the sun to our heart's content, and the sights on the beach were better than any television show. There is no shortage of magnificent yachts anchored offshore with gorgeous people relaxing on board. At one point, everyone on the beach got excited and started pointing at one particularly impressive boat. They told us Rihanna was on board, but, since we didn’t know who she is, we didn’t bother getting up to look. (We have since learned she is a popular singer and Nell and Truman’s youngest granddaughter was horrified we didn’t attempt to get her autograph.) We had the best time “people watching” on the beach. We saw weddings being performed, honeymooners so much in love, young couples with children in tow, and a surprising number of people our age—all having the time of their lives.

Water Sports

Divers come from all over the world to enjoy the waters. Palm Island is known for its brilliant sea life, rainbow-colored reefs, and shipwrecks to explore. We thought we’d try our snorkeling skills and were quite pleased with the results. We had a very patient instructor who calmed our nerves and had us looking like pros in no time (at least that’s what we kept telling ourselves). We were reluctant to go very far or deep, but we still managed to see amazing fish and sea turtles. Poor Nell had the greatest difficulty of all of us. She is not a confident swimmer, and for some reason, she could not get her body to stay underwater. She maintains the weight she added to her “caboose” over the winter kept her afloat. (The pictures we took show she was indeed bottom-up.) Bert and Truman spent a happy day deep-sea fishing while the ladies headed to the spa for much needed pampering.

Walking

There are walking trails everywhere on the island. We walked to the highest point in the island and were amazed at how small Palm Island is. The view was breathtaking! We spent two hours with a charming guide who taught us how to tell the difference between the various kinds of palm trees. He showed us how to properly open a coconut, drink the milk, and eat the “meat.” I can’t wait to demonstrate my newfound skills to the Eudora Garden Club when we get home. To add to our delight, there were hummingbirds everywhere. The first thing you notice when they are nearby is the whir of their wings. Then you see their bright, tiny bodies hovering about. I think I saw more hummingbirds on our walks than I have in my entire life.
Games to Play

We got our exercise playing tennis (did I ever tell you I used to be a champ?), shuffleboard (don’t ever play with Nell; she’ll try to kill you!), golf (we spent more time looking at the scenery than the ball), and croquet. When was the last time you played croquet? It was my absolute favorite game when I was growing up. Maude likes it, too, except I always beat her, so she doesn’t love it as much as I do. When we get home, I’m going to run right out and buy a new game set and restart the croquet wars.

Union Island Day Trip – Maude takes us on a day trip

Union Island is just a hop, skip, and jump (by boat) away. It is another small island three miles long and one mile wide. Its distinctive steep mountain ridges are of volcanic origin. It has a market, shops, bars, a small health clinic, banks, the Internet, and telephones—essentials we learned to live without on Palm Island. It has two main towns—Clifton and Ashton. Approximately 2,000 people reside on Union Island (a number of whom work on Palm Island). Mount Toboi is the highest peak on the island and in the Grenadines.

We were fortunate to be there during the Turtle Watch. This is a relatively new event conducted during the period of time (March 1–July 31) when it’s illegal to catch or kill turtles. Sea turtles are amazing creatures, and to see so many of them up close was quite an experience. We also enjoyed seeing the many goats that roam free throughout the island. Nell, of course, had to try and pet one of them. All she got for her efforts was a nibble taken out of her new straw purse. Truman, however, snapped a picture of the encounter and plans to post it on his Facebook page when he gets home.

Discussion Questions

• Would you rather spend your vacation on the beach or in the water?
• What are your favorite games to play? Was croquet a game you played when you were growing up?
• Are you a good swimmer? Or, like Nell, do you have a fear of the water? If so, why?
“It Must Be Love” – Ethel dishes on the food

Given our age and the number of years we have all spent together, the closest we came to romance on this trip was when we were sitting around the dinner table rhapsodizing about the food. **Caribbean cuisine** (a fusion of African, European, East Indian, and Chinese fare) is spicy, richly flavored, and absolutely delicious. The adventurous blend of flavors and delectable aromas brings a decided “sizzle” to any dining experience.

With the resort’s all-inclusive package, we were provided three amazing meals a day at our choice of two different restaurants, **the Royal Palm and the Sunset Grill**. We feasted on such delights as banana pancakes for breakfast; Caribbean jerk chicken for lunch; and fresh fish, lobster, and vegetables for dinner. Our evening meals were served by candlelight on the deck overlooking the water. Is it any wonder we fell in love with this incredible place and its food?

A big part of the whole experience was the island people. They went out of their way to make us feel welcome and special. By the end of our trip, we felt we had made many new friends. We have definitely added Palm Island to our list of places we hope to revisit.

**Discussion Questions**

- Do you like spicy food? Does spicy food like you?
- Do you prefer to eat fish or meat?
- What do you think makes for a romantic dining experience?

The Front Porch Travelers hope you enjoyed this trip and look forward to next month when you join them again.

**Additional Activities**

1. Revisit the Swiss Family Robinson by [book](#) or [movie](#).
2. Check your local library for John Caldwell’s book, **Desperate Voyage**. We guarantee it is a fascinating read for all would-be voyagers. Choose excerpts to read aloud to the group.
3. John’s wife, Mary, also wrote a book, titled **Mary’s Voyage**. It tells the story about how she and John and their two young boys attempted to sail around the world. Choose excerpts to read aloud to the group.

**Sites to Visit**

- [A tourist’s account of Palm Island](#)
- [YouTube video of Union and Palm Islands](#)
- [Beautiful pictures of Palm Island and the Grenadines](#)
- [Simple recipe for Caribbean Jerk Chicken](#)