

## Dominica: The Unspoiled Caribbean

by Ann Weber, PassPorter Guest Contributor

On our recent cruise to the Caribbean, we stopped at the unspoiled island of Dominica. Dominica seems to be one of those islands that people either love or hate. Before I started planning for our trip, I hadn't even heard of Dominica. If you are looking for extensive shopping and the Diamonds International type stores found on other Caribbean islands, or pristine white beaches, Dominica may not be the island for you. On the other hand, if you are looking for amazingly green rainforests, beautiful waterfalls, and unspoiled nature, than this is definitely the island for you.

Dominica, a volcanic island located between Guadeloupe and Martinique, is an independent nation. The island is still undergoing continual volcanic change. Banana exports have been the main source of income on the island. Recently, tourism has become a larger part of the economy. Although the primary language of the island is English, most of the islanders speak with a nice French accent.

I believe that being prepared and knowing what is offered on this beautiful island is the key to a wonderful visit. Because Dominica is a fairly poor island and has only recently started focusing on tourism, the roads are narrow and windy and a fair amount of walking will be involved if you want to see some of the natural wonders on this island. But, if you are prepared with drinking water and good walking shoes, you can see beautiful areas without overwhelming yourself.

We took a private tour of the island with Antours, a local tour company. They offer tours to both cruise passengers and those staying on the island for a longer stay. You can find more information about Antours at <http://www.antours.dm/home.htm>. When I initially wrote to Antours, I mentioned that I was not in the best of shape and could walk short, but not long distances. I also mentioned that we would like a private tour so that we could tour at our own pace. The tour that we were quoted was \$45/person for 5 hours. We were to see the Watten Waven Sulphur Springs, Trafalgar Falls, Emerald Pool, and Mero Beach (a black sand beach). When we arrived, I asked if we could go to Morne Bruce, an overlook that I had seen pictures of if we were willing to shorten or skip our trip to the beach. Because this was a private tour, they were great about meeting our requests.

Although the walks on our tour were rated as easy, I had read online reviews stating the paths were uneven and hilly. When the first path had some stairs heading to and from the viewing platform, we were

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ready for that. Trafalgar Falls were beautiful and well worth the walk. One thing we were not prepared for was the added difficulty that the elevation added to our hikes. When we were in the rainforest at Emerald Pool, the elevation was around 4,000 feet above sea level. We found ourselves breathing more heavily than usual on our hike. The walk to the pool was also a little longer than, but not as steep as at Trafalgar Falls. By the time we got to Emerald Pool, the area was fairly crowded. It would have been more enjoyable with smaller crowds. If you plan to stay on Dominica for several days, I would try to avoid visiting the most popular cruise ship locations on days when a ship is in port. After viewing the pool and small falls, we took the longer route back so that we could see something new. The walk was enjoyable, but we were tired when we were finished.

You should also be prepared for rain. The high mountains create their own weather systems on Dominica. It rains approximately 350 inches a year in the forested areas. Because daytime temperatures range from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties year-round, the rain does not need to ruin your hike, just be prepared for some mud and have something to protect your camera. We had a rare day, with only a few sprinkles on our way back to the bus after our visit to the twin falls at Trafalgar.

Our tour did not include guides at the falls or pool. Guides must be approved by the National Forest, and were available for \$5 per person. You do not have to use a guide, but they are available if you are interested in learning more about the area along the way. Another important fact to know before going is that the bathrooms at popular sites are \$1 per visit. We made a short stop at one of the black sand beaches so that my son could collect some of the sand for his chemistry teacher. The sand was very pretty and sparkled in the sun, but didn't really look black, more like a silver grey. When my son let us all feel the plastic bag with the sand in it, I couldn't believe how hot the sand was. I don't think I would have enjoyed spending time at the beach.

When we made our reservations, we had to pay 50% upfront through PayPal and the remaining amount was to be paid in cash after the tour. This process has been changing, so please check the required deposit amount when you contact them. One of their tours offers includes river tubing. Although we did not select this option, I have read many positive reviews about the tubing experience.

The one hotel that we saw was close to the cruise port in the capital of Roseau. Although we only saw it from the outside, the Fort Young Hotel looked very nice. It was interesting to see how it had been built around the remains of an old fort. I hope to someday have the opportunity to

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visit Dominica and stay longer than a day.

*About The Author: Ann Weber is an avid traveler who loves exploring new places as well as returning to old favorites such as Walt Disney World with her husband and two teenagers.*

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