

Caribbean Christmas

22nd of December 2007

What are we getting ourselves into?

Seattle is cold and dark at this time of the year. The sun sets around 4pm, but that is a theoretical time only, as sunbreaks are few and far between with the winter cloud cover. Lydia has reached the limits of snugness that her jackets, scarves, hats and gloves can supply, so there was only one option left to us - to spend our holidays in the Caribbean to soak up the sun in traditional Australian style on the beach.

The only trick to it was how to see the Caribbean. It would be nice of course to see a few different islands, and we didn't have time to organise transport and accommodation at multiple locations. If only there was some type of pre-organised trip which allows you to travel to islands where you can do your own thing, but then gave you transport and a place to stay.

There is of course, but with one potentially fatal catch - it is a Cruise Ship.

Lydia performed the background checks on the strange American cruise ship culture. We had to know what we were going to get ourselves into. Lydia lurked on CruiseCritics.com to see what the passengers on board our ship, the Crown Princess were worried about. Mostly it was the food. How many lobsters tails would they let you eat? Were they really unlimited? Could you order seven lobster tails? Oh it comes on a seafood platter - no problem you just eat the lobster tail then tell them to take away the platter and bring a new one. One lady was concerned to know if they sold Bud Lite on the trip - her husband would only come on the cruise if they sold Bud Lite, and to her great relief they did. Another lady was concerned that some of the beaches had Europeans on them - did any one know which beaches were European free? Afterall, she had to think of her children.

We flew from Seattle to Chicago to South Carolina to Puerto Rico, where we finally reached the hulking monstrosity of the Crown Princess. Over 110 000 tons, 290 metres long, 36 metres wide and 18 stories tall, the ship held 3150 passengers and 1200 crew, 2654 metric tons of fuel, 2731 metric tons of fresh water and vast numbers of lobster tails. Next stop - the US virgin islands.

Yesterday was our first port of call, Charlotte Amalie on St Thomas in the US Virgin Islands. The virgin islands were purchased from Denmark in 1917 for 25 million dollars in rum and gold, with a bit of arm-twisting from the US (concerned that Germany may have taken them over if they didn't).

23rd of December 2007

The virgin islands

Probably more than any other place in the Caribbean, Charlotte Amalie has been shaped by the cruise ship industry. There are only 19 000 residents in Charlotte Amalie, yet

every day 7-9 cruise ships pull into the port, each disgorging 3000 tourists eager to buy duty free. Today was a Sunday, which is usually quiet (normally only 1-2 cruise ships), but during the week there is an influx of 25 000 people every day, more than doubling the size of the town.

The Virgin Islands have only two seasons, Hurricane Season and Tourist Season.

We started our day in the Virgin Islands by taking the ferry from St Thomas to St John. Our ferry captain told us that the big news in St Thomas at the moment was the opening of their first Hooters the week before. We sailed past Buck Island, where rebellious slaves were sent to fend for themselves during the plantation period (most Caribbean colonies had a Buck Island just off the main island). He also pointed out the islands Big St James and Little St James, which are currently for sale by Kevin Costner (at \$30 million), and Alan Alda's and Michael Jordan's houses. Another island between St Thomas and St John was Loveungo Island, so called as it was once inhabited only by prostitutes, which the pirates used to "love 'n go".

75% of St Johns is part of the Virgin Islands National Park. Most of it was given to the US government in 1956 by Laurance Rockefeller, who's motives may not have been entirely pure considering he kept the rest to build a resort on. When we got into port we drove to Trunk Beach to go snorkelling. Before they would give us our snorkel, the guide told us some very important information - it was mandatory to know how to swim if we were planning on going out into the ocean deeper than we could stand. They also told us not to worry about our stuff - even though the Virgin Islands (unlike much of the rest of the US) has only public beaches, they have very tight security and don't let any locals onto it, and sarcastically told us that there was a snackbar nearby if the cruise ship wasn't feeding us enough and we needed something to tide us over.

The beach was beautiful, nice white sand with just a hint on pink, the sunlight soaked warmth into us, and the water was like a hot bath. We watched the brown pelicans catch fish, then snorkelled with parrot fish and soft corals out in the water. Lydia had a nap on the beach while I did some sand engineering, then it was time to head back. Lydia was very blasé about the time, figuring that she could shower and still beat the rest of the tourists, but by the time she was ready they had all left, so we had to get an emergency taxi to hot-foot it to the port before our ferry left.

Back on St Thomas we walked around the downtown Charlotte Amalie, which basically consisted of the Post Office, Emancipation Gardens (over 70% of the population are descended from the black slaves the Danish West India Company brought to the islands, which I am sure is completely independent of the fact that the US Virgin Islands, like Washington DC, has no representation in the US Congress) and a row of perfume, jewellery and souvenir shops.

Despite the obvious American flavour of the city, there was a hint of the Caribbean and an obvious influence from the nearby British Virgin Islands, with cars driving on the left side of the road and some locals playing cricket near the cruise ship.

Back on board we had dinner in one of the three main dining halls. The food in the dining halls was much better than the buffet, the lentil burgers I had were great. In our role as cultural anthropologists we listened in on the conversations around us. Actually, truth be told we had no choice in the matter, we could hear the booming voices "as large as you can fit on the plate" and "if it doesn't come out exactly like I asked I'll send it back". The couple on one side of us kept on complaining about how much tax they had had to pay on their lotto win.

The couple on the other side of us were actually really nice (I think it is considered standard cruise practise to chat to your neighbours during dinner) and we spoke to them for about an hour. It was very amusing though when we were trying to decide which dessert to have, and they advised us that "the good thing about being on a cruise is that you can order the entire dessert menu". When we politely laughed they assured us that they were serious, and we should try it.

After dinner we went to the comedy show to "watch the antics of Bono the Crazy Frenchman". Bono was a juggler, who amused the crowds by making reference to the fact that since he was French he had to be rude, and by pulling out a man from the audience and kissing him on the cheek.

The show was saved though by an audience member Jen, who was picked to help him out in a trick where he juggled two apples and a banana. She was to peel the banana and give it back to him, so he could eat and juggle at the same time, but she accidentally broke the banana, ruining his trick.

24th of December 2007

Our day at sea

Today is our only day with no port of call, as we travel between the US Virgin Islands and Aruba. The cruise ship operators understand that this long time between ports gives potential for quite contemplation and spending time with loved ones, so they try to fill in those gaps with non-stop stimulation. There is a theatre, two movie cinemas, a casino, two pools, a cyber golf course, a mini-golf course, a jogging track, several spas, a basketball court, a library, a nightclub, several bars, and constant events occurring. I think we will end up missing Princess Popstars, Are They Real or Statues, Majority Rules Trivia Night (where the most popular answer is the correct answer), the seminar on How to Eat More to Weight Less, the Ionithermie Super Algae Detox ("you will lose 3-8 inches of external toxins in 1 session") and Scrapbooking@Sea (It's the Latest Craze at Sea, Bring your Creativity!!!).

This morning we started with a tour of the ship, then we entered the Gingerbread House making competition. Like the Iron Chefs we had one hour to make our creation, which Lydia lept into with great gusto. It was a lot of fun actually. Later on in the day we had a formal tea, served with scones by silver service, we briefly saw a martini demonstration and at the moment there are carols being sung outside. For my sanity they have not really

gone overboard with the whole Christmas Eve thing - I guess the Cruise ship probably reached the pinnacle of decadence, hedonism and consumerism during the regular cruises, so they don't really have any ability to knock it up a notch for Christmas. At the moment Lydia is painting a pot in a ceramics class up on deck. Now I have to get ready for cocktails with the captain, a formal dinner and a magic show.

25th of December 2007

Christmas in Aruba

We had a very fun night last night. Lydia put on her wedding dress (with an added purple sash) for the formal dinner, we we sat next to a really nice couple (he was a truck driver and she was a banker). We taught them about the tradition of Christmas bon bons, paper hats and bad jokes (they were actually very high quality bon bons, I had a tape measure inside and Lydia had a sewing kit). We then went to cocktails with the captain and a magic show. We were sitting in the front row, so I got called up on stage which was a little painful. The best part was when he called a kid up on stage and asked him what was his favourite part of the trip - when he said it was swimming the magician replied "Well that's great, you couldn't have done that at home could you? Yet your parents had to fork out thousands of dollars to go swimming in the pool of a cruise ship".

In the interests of anthropology we stuck around for majority rules trivia, which was actually a lot of fun (especially after a few beers). The British cruise director called out questions and the most popular answer won - so this is what a room full of Americans thought other Americans would think:

- 1) What extreme sport would you want to do? Skydiving.
- 2) Who is the most famous person in the world, living or dead? Tie between Elvis, Michael Jordan and Jesus.
- 3) What famous site would you want to visit the most? It was a tie between the Eiffel Tower and the Pyramids of Giza, but there was an answer for "the leaning tower of Paris" which could have been the tie breaker. Lydia and I said the Okavango Delta, for which he labelled us the best travelled people in the room.
- 4) What is the best way to pick up a rabbit? By the ears.
- 5) Who is the most popular animated character? Mickey Mouse.
- 6) What most attracts women to men? Eyes.
- 7) What most attracts men to women? Breasts (if boobs, boobies and puppies were combined).
- 8) Who is the hottest man? Brad Pitt.
- 9) Who is the hottest woman? Angelina Jolie.
- 10) What is the second most romantic city in the world after Paris? Rome (Lydia insisted on writing Dubrovnik, which the cruise director mocked).
- 11) What pet would be cool to have but difficult to look after? A monkey.
- 12) What car would you most like to have? Ferrari.
- 13) What is the second best dessert after icecream? Cake.
- 14) What is the best show on TV? American Idol.

15) If you won the lotto what would you change first? Your job. I guessed that it would be breasts - Lydia was mortified when the director asked who had written that down and then said that nothing was wrong with Lydia :)

After trivia night we were feeling mellow and in good humour, so we went to a comedy show by Sarge. It was a horrific car wreck that we could only stare at in shock, yet everyone around us was wetting themselves laughing. It really was not funny in the slightest. His jokes ranged from "imagine if Santa was black, what white kid would believe that a black guy would come around to their house at Christmas and leave stuff?" and "If you are a kid from a non-Jewish family and you show any talent they slowly nurture your interest and skills, but if you are from a Jewish family they just try to work out how they make money from you".

A few more jokes about people with accents and then becoming serious and telling us that the war in Iraq was going well, and we just had to walk out.

So today we are back on land, this time in Aruba "One Happy Island" as the official motto goes. We were quite confused when we got off the ship - there was no passport officer. We walked through and found a tourism counter, when we asked they said "the passport officer must be out at lunch or something, you can wander around in town for a while and if you feel like it come back and go through immigration". Being Christmas Day the capital Oranjestad was essentially closed down, so we just walked through it and looked at the Dutch colonial buildings now brightly painted and heavily decorated.

Anywhere else they would have been garish, but here they looked festive. I really love the Aruban accent, it is slow and rhythmic. We went snorkelling on one side of the island (just sand beads, but with schools of white bait and wrasse, and also a few large cow fish which was great to see). The best part was the small brightly coloured lizards (blue and green) that fluidly flickered across the rocks, and the seabirds (mostly gulls and brown pelicans) diving for fish. Lydia asked our driver what the lizards were and he laconically answered "they are part of the wildlife, and I can't tell you any more than that". We then drove across the island (which is comparatively arid, full of cacti and a few transient wetlands) to the main hotel beach. It was full of people having fun in the sun and with water sports. We walked along the beach and interspersed short swims with sunbaking. It was a really beautiful day in Aruba.

26h of December 2007

Diving in Bonaire

Last night after getting back on board after Aruba we watched Pirates of the Caribbean while drinking champagne in our cabin as the sunset over the ocean through our port window. We then had dinner with a nice couple from Puerto Rico and a family from North Carolina with solarium tans and ultra-white teeth. The couple from Puerto Rico told us that they visited Australia for the Sydney Olympics and thought that it was one of the coldest countries in the world. We also talked about whether Puerto Rico should

become the 51st State of the US, or whether it should become independent. The couple actually wanted Puerto Rico to stay in the American Commonwealth, but for them to be independent in foreign affairs and trade, more similar to the position of Australia in the British Commonwealth than the status quo.

Last night was the first night where the ship noticeably rocked in the waves of the Caribbean, I guess it is more choppy here close to the South American continent.

This morning we reached our port in Bonaire. Lydia had arranged to meet a naturalist, Dee Scarr, to take us scuba diving. The diving was simply fantastic. We dove off the beach in the harbour, swimming first over the sandy bottom then to the reef. The reef was in really good condition, because anchorage in Bonaire is banned, with all the ships using moorage. There were beautiful hard corals, such as the bright orange brain coral, and finger-like pale purple soft corals. We were surrounded by different species of tropical fish in every direction. Dee's partner David went ahead of us to find the best spots for the wildlife, so we were able to feed Yellow French Grunts with some shrimp that Dee brought down and to watch Snapper Shrimp filter feed from their homes.

We saw several Goldentail Moray eels, and also a Spotted Moray Eel. This one Dee offered a shrimp to, it grabbed it in its main jaws and we saw it get racketed down into its throat using its pharyngeal secondary set of jaws. It then became irritated and swam towards me with its fanged mouth, before swimming off into a coral. We also found some sponges and Dee showed us how they filter feed by squirting a little food dye in the water near them. The sponges sucked the dye in and squirted it out of the top. We saw the touchmenot sea squirt, bonefish and held a sea cucumber. We visited a cleaning station and we watched Sergeant Majors guarding their nests of tiny purple eggs. Dee tried to show us how tidy they were by placing a small piece of coral onto the nest, the Sergeant Major just ignored it though, so she moved it onto another nest where the more diligent father immediately swept down to move the offending piece.

Finally, we also saw an octopus. She had made a nest between two pieces of coral and had gathered some bright pieces of coral and a Sprite can in it. Dee tried to remove the Sprite can but the octopus was very attached to it, suckering onto Dee's hand until she let it keep the can. It was really great to go for a dive with a naturalist who would stop and show us the animals, writing on her Magna Doodle while still under the water. After the dive we had a walk through the main shopping street of Kralendijk, before heading back to the ship.

Over lunch we had the misfortune to have to share a table with the most obnoxious couple I have ever met. When asked if they had enjoyed Bonaire they curtly replied "we don't get off the ship", and proceeded to complain that at the end of this cruise they had to get off the ship and recheck in for the next cruise, even though they were staying on the same ship.

Then unprovoked they started to talk about global warming and how environmentalists were a cult just like Marxism, and they were making it up because they wanted to keep

their jobs as activists. They said that "to understand the environment you had to appreciate that God started the universe and created Man". They then started to rail against all the immigrants in the US, with a mangled complaint that the Mexicans were flooding in and going on welfare, and then their babies that were born in America were considered Americans and ended up squeezing "real Americans" out of Medical Schools, and that real Americans then had to go to foreign Medical Schools (a very specific complaint). When Lydia mentioned that we were immigrants in America, and that the work visa system was incredibly expensive costing around \$1000 a year and involving huge amount of red tape (making it essentially impossible for anyone intending to work on minimum wage), they asked us where we were from.

On hearing it was Australia, they then started to say that it was just as well that all those convicts were sent to Australia, as they were able to build the country just like the American pioneers, and that the Australian Aborigines had had thousands of years there and hadn't built anything. Just to make sure that we understood how racist they were they went on to say that Africa was just the same, never developing any civilisation because the people didn't work. I'm sure that the list of close-minded topics would have been longer if we hadn't wolfed down our meals and left the table.

As a plus we just had an interesting talk about St Kitts. I thought it was odd that the cruise would organise a session talking about the history of the Caribbean, but it turned out that it was just a passenger giving the lecture.

He was a great(x7) grandson of Sir Thomas Warner, the first European to colonise the West Indies. While the Spanish had been in the area for years they weren't interested in building colonies, so it was only after the 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada broke their grip over the New World that colonists moved in. The first was Thomas Warner in 1624. He landed at Sandy Point on St Kitts and grew a crop of tobacco. He returned to England in 1625 and gained a letter of patent from Charles I as governor over the island. Back on St Kitts the colony was swelled by a French party. This alarmed the Caribs, who realised that the Europeans were growing in number. They attacked, but Warner was warned by his Carib mistress Barbie, so he ambushed and massacred the Caribs. He slaughtered the entire population, such that he had no workers left for his plantations, and so he started the slave trade from Africa. He was known to boil alive or tear apart with horses rebellious slaves. They separated the slaves by skin colour - the darkest worked in the fields, while the lightest (the children of black women raped by their owners) were the house slaves. It is a horrible legacy that the Caribbean has to deal with.

27th of December 2007

Wandering around Grenada

We spent today in port at Grenada. We docked at the capital St George, where it was announced that no people wearing camouflage print would be allowed on the island. I am guessing this was either due to an enlightened sense of fashion on Grenada, or a legacy of the 1984 US invasion. We walked up to the old French built fortress (Fort George, built between 1706 and 1710) and looked down onto St George, which is a gorgeous harbour

city. Most of the town is built up of low 19th century French and British colonial buildings, with a few tall churches standing out above the low skyline. Most of the churches are still roof-less after Hurricane Ivan damaged 90% of houses in Grenada in 2004. The largest structure we saw was the stadium built for the 2007 World Cup.

It was built by the Chinese government as a gift, but now the locals are complaining that the Chinese are getting concessions from the government for local contract work, which they are doing at half the price in half the time of local contractors. The Grenadan economy is still doing quite well so it is only grumbling, but it is interesting at how much influence China is building in the small countries around the world with soft power, while avoiding confrontation with the US.

We then drove inland into the rainforest of Grenada. We visited the Grand Etang Lake (a volcanic crater lake) and went on a walk to the Seven Sisters waterfalls, where several a few locals made a dangerous living by getting tips for jumping down the waterfalls.

The hike was really nice after a sedentary week, and Lydia went for a swim at the base of the waterfall. After the hike a little boy came up to Lydia and I and wanted us to take his photo, then he said it was his turn and he took my camera and went around saying "cheese" and clicking. He wasn't quite up to aiming the camera, so he ended up taking around a hundred photos of people's feet, it was very cute.

After our hike we walked around St George and had a roti for lunch (which was fantastic). We visited the spice stands by the harbour and just enjoyed the walk around the town. We also watched the ferry unload both cars and cows.

After we had to reboard we tried watching a movie under the stars (Transformers) but it was terrible. We saw the milk and cookies brigade (they wander around with a backpack full of milk and a basket of freshly-baked cookies then they use a squirt gun to fill up your glass with milk and give you a cookie to dunk it in). We then had a formal dinner and Lydia went to the onboard musical and champagne fountain, while I am having a quiet night.

28h of December 2007

Race around St Kitts

Today was the most enjoyable day I have had in the Caribbean. We docked at Basseterre, the capital of St Kitts and Nevis on the island of St Kitts.

We wanted to visit Fort George on Brimstone Hill, so we caught a bus towards Sandy Point. The buses are just 15-seater minivans and there are no numbers - just a sunwise and widdershins route as they take the single main road that circles the island. We hopped in a van and sped through the countryside passing tiny towns. We got off at the entrance to the National Park and enjoyed a forty five minute walk up to the top of Brimstone Hill, which juts up 240 metres in an imposing silhouette over the coast.

The Brimstone Hill Fortress Complex was started in 1690 by the British as part of an effort to recapture Fort Charles from the French.

Over the next 100 years it was continually expanded by African slave labour into a large complex including a citadel, two bastions, a magazine bastion, a barrier redan and the accompanying barracks, canteens and officers quarters. There were multiple water catchments and cisterns, the largest of which could hold 400 000 litres of water to allow them to withstand siege.

In 1782 the French attacked Fort George and the 8000 soldiers forced the 1000 defenders to surrender on the 12th of February, after a month-long siege. The British regained the fortress in the 1794 Treaty of Versailles, and strengthened it further - making it into "the Gibraltar of the West Indies". The fort was never seriously challenged again and was decommissioned in 1852.

We walked down the hill again, coming across a troop of Vervet Monkeys running across the track, and waited by the side of the road until another mini-van/bus drove past.

This began a pulse-racing chase into Basseterre, as our driver drove at break-neck speed around winding corners and through the towns, flickering onto the other side of the narrow road when cars or people got in his way. When combined with the fast-beat loud calypso music throbbing, and the unpredictable stops as the van filled up, this other-wise white-knuckle journey became exhilarating.

We saw the Independence Square and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, then had a late lunch in Ballahoo overlooking the Circus. We were in Basseterre for Carnival, so the endless Calypso was playing everywhere in the streets as well. Finally we checked out the National Museum before returning for our final night on the Crown Princess.

Overall I have been really happy with the cruise. The ship is an embarrassing indulgence in hedonism and seems to bring out the worst in some people, but it also let us get around cheaply and gave Lydia and I lots of time to spend relaxing together. The US Virgin Islands and Aruba were disappointing, a gorgeous beach (not as novel to Australians) but geared up completely to tourists. On the other hand the diving in Bonaire was amazing, and I really enjoyed exploring Grenada and St Kitts.

29th of December 2007

Old San Juan

We are staying for three days in a run-down guest house in Old San Juan. The city is amazingly gorgeous - 200 acres of walled city, filled with relics of the old fortress, gorgeous Spanish colonial houses, cobblestone paving, old fig trees and surprisingly tasteful public art, combining Spanish and First Nations themes.

We had some trouble getting in touch with the owner of the guest house, but one of the residents let us in so we could lounge around on the roof while we waited. We then set

off to explore Fuerte San Felipe de Morro, one of the major Spanish colonial Fortresses of the Americas.

Between our guest house and El Morro lies the Campo del Morro, a large parkland kept bare first for military purposes, later as a golf course, and now as part of the San Juan National Historic Site.

From the Campo we could look down over the cemetery, below the walls and looking out into the ocean. We climbed up to peer over the crenulations of the long wall and admire the amazing view.

El Morro itself is the fortress occupying the western tip of the Old San Juan peninsular, guarding the entrance into the San Juan Port. The fortress was first fortified in 1521, as San Juan was considered the key to the Caribbean by the Spanish, eager to protect their monopoly over the region. On the ocean side the fortress is 150 feet high, with six levels of fortifications. By its land approach it has a very low profile, designed to give attackers a small target (but still with significant wall height due to the dry moat). The fort also has a small sub-fort across the water, Fort San Juan de la Cruz, designed to allow crossfire at enemy ships entering the bay.

It also is built to withstand a year-long siege, with three cisterns holding 800 000 litres of water. There are vaulted casemates, where cannon can shoot cannon balls or mortar shells (hollow cannon balls filled with gun powder and irregular length fuses to create disorder in the ranks due to the unpredictability in explosion time).

The fort repelled its first serious attack in 1595 by the British under Sir Francis Drake, but fell in 1598 to a second British onslaught. The Spanish regained it after the British were forced to abandon the fort by a dysentery epidemic, and they significantly strengthened it before a major attack by the Dutch in 1625. The Dutch were repelled but were able to burn down the surrounding city. Learning from this attack the Spanish added the fortress of San Cristobal in 1634, the largest Spanish fortress in the New World, guarding the entrance of the peninsular from land attack.

They also started to encircle the entire city with massive walls. The fortifications were significantly expanded again in 1765, allowing a British invasion to be blocked in 1797, but with the decay of the Spanish Empire the fortress became archaic and easily fell to the US during the 1898 Spanish-American War. Now the flags of Puerto Rico and the US fly alongside the Spanish military flag of the Cross of Burgundy.

From El Morro we walked into town past the Parque de Beneficencia. We popped into the Catedral de San Juan (which surprised me by having a Christmas tree up inside, a pagan addition to Christmas if ever there was one). We saw La Fortaleza, the oldest continually occupied executive mansion in the Americas, and down the delightful Caleta de San Juan to Puerta de San Juan.

The Caleta runs past an art gallery with beautiful Mayan-inspired modern sculptures, and is shaded by large strangler figs. The Puerta was once the main gate into Old San Juan, and has the most spectacular view of the walls of San Juan and El Morro.

We then walked down the pretty tree-lined avenue of Paseo de la Princesa, with the unpredictable Raices Fountain and La Princesa (once a prison, now an art gallery). Afterwards we had to head back for a nap before tackling Fuerte San Cristobal.

San Cristobal is the eastern edge of the San Juan fortifications. It is essentially a series of bastions built into the city walls, with multiple batteries, ravelins and counterguards built further out as hornwork, interdependent multiple lines of advanced defence. We checked out the heights and tunnels of San Cristobal before having amazing Indo-Latino food for dinner and walking part the festive lights of the city back to our guest house. San Juan was far more beautiful than I had ever expected.

31st of December 2007

The Rainforest of Puerto Rico

We spent yesterday in eastern Puerto Rico. Our guide Joe took us up into the rainforest of El Yunque, where we walked along a beautiful track following a tropical stream over the rapids and waterfalls. Afterwards we spent the afternoon on the beach at Playa Luquillo, our last chance to soak up Caribbean sun. Joe gave an excellent talk about the current political status of Puerto Rico, which surprised the Americans on the tour who had not realised that San Juan was a non-voting colony of the US.

Today is time to take it easy for our long flight back to Seattle, our taste of the Caribbean over.