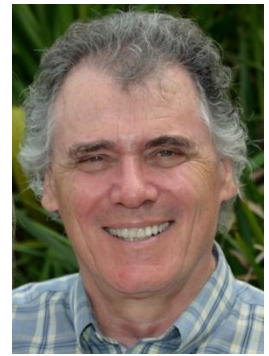


From the Bridge Room – A Cruise Diary – #3

Slow Down

by John Arblaster



Wow-----what a trip! Believe it or not, we are now well out on the windward side of the Caribbean islands speeding along at a leisurely rate of 15 knots towards San Juan.

Woke up yesterday morning to reggae music, threw on my straw hat, opened the balcony door, and magically there appeared the little flat-topped mountain peak called Grand Turk basking in the sun and waiting for the beach people. What was even more magical was how this huge ship was perfectly poised at a tiny jetty very close to shore... I could easily pick out my favorite chaise, and a stool for an ice-cold Corona.

This place has history...Christopher Columbus is claimed to have been here on his first famous voyage; Ponce de Leon of fountain fame; and definitely many of Johnny Depp's predecessors as Pirates of the Caribbean. All that, and the Brits, the French, the Brits again, but now a commonwealth of several islands where the official visitor website proclaims: "Slow Down Mon...You're Here!"

And here—if what you want is pristine beach, and long, lazy days absorbing the wonder of perfectly turquoise water and gently slipping into the water now and then—is just so, so OK.

Audrey teaches again this morning, and then we have an afternoon and an evening duplicate game. Remember yesterday, when I talked about her teaching being seemingly effortless but underpinned by very sound andragogy and an appreciative audience because of it? Well, there are the 2-hour, 16-board duplicate games too. And, yes, they are sanctioned, and there are masterpoints to be won...but...there are three stratifications of each section (0-20, 20-300, and 300+) and only the names of the masterpoint winners are posted after the game. This is good because I never want to publicize my 42% game, even though I know it is my turn to have one now and then. The general philosophy towards the games on Better Bridge cruises is to de-emphasize the focus on results and winning and to emphasize a friendly, supportive game. In short, "Slow Down Mon...You're Here!"

It's so wonderful to have a hotel that moves, and opening the suite's drapes in the morning is like turning on a new TV show...and today the show is San Juan, Puerto Rico. The ubiquitous Columbus came here on his second voyage in 1493, and that was long before the massive 18-foot walls of Morro Castle were built. As you sail into the port, you see what a formidable bastion they were. Originally a military fort, they were attacked many times but now house shops, well-preserved Spanish architecture, and churches. Among the buildings is San Juan Cathedral, which houses in its crypt the bones of Ponce de Leon himself.

We enjoy walking the city, and the day includes another lesson, and two more duplicate games. As you may have guessed by now, even though everyone tries to make all of Audrey's lessons, some miss the occasional duplicate game in favor of enjoying more of the charms of ship and shore. It's a moveable feast.

And tomorrow...probably the hottest shopping in the Caribbean...the legendary St. Thomas and Charlotte Amalie.

More to come...