

Podcast 109: Caribbean on a Budget Part Two

{INTRO:

ADAM: *Why is the rum ... always gone?}*

{intro music – jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a podcast looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Enby with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

It's getting cold enough for me in my apartment that I'm starting to need socks. I remember the chilblains in my toes from last year and I have no desire to repeat that experience. It therefore feels weird to be doing a second podcast about my Caribbean adventures in the summer, but I'd like to think that you, dear listener, are sat listening to this pod in your warm furry PJs in front of your fake fireplace providing a nice ambiance, or curled up in bed with a hot chocolate. Unless you're in Australia in which case 'Happy Springtime'.

Before I get onto the Caribbean though I have a couple of housekeepings. Firstly, this is a sad but momentous occasion as my travel companion and flatmate of the last couple of years is leaving me. She's going back to London to live and be the most Laura she deserves. She moves out this upcoming weekend, so once I'm done with my co-incidental regular Londoneering admin in the first week of November, I'll be back in West Yorkshire on my own again. Which is sad. But also, rebirth, repositioning, recycle, or something. It'll be weird not having her about. Obviously I'll miss her, but the little things, you know? Things that I might only realise after she goes.

Though it does make me more likely to do Parkrun, oddly; I've only been once since my Ultra. It's because we had a habit of going out on Saturday late mornings, often to go do some work while sat in libraries, and on Saturdays they close at 4pm and they're a walk away so we always need to have left before I'd've come back from Parkrun. Because I live in a pretty but quite out-the-way place where it takes a while to get anywhere. And I need to keep my fitness up now I'm getting old, and while I'm plotting my next couple of Ultras before I get even older. The 5k-to-50k express pipeline is niche but strong.

By 'Londoneering admin' I mean it's that time of the year again when it's Traverse Creator Awards and World Travel Market. Squashed in between is the British Guild Of Travel Writers annual gala, but I'm far too much of a barefoot backpacker to go to that sort of thing. My most formal, elegant, ball-worthy outfit of any kind is a long black A-line midi dress with flourishes (and pockets) that I got from Amazon for £26. Apparently it's designed with wedding guests in mind, so it might qualify, it's just ... well, you know.

I wasn't nominated for anything in the Travel Awards this year, but then I didn't really do anything in the previous 12 month qualifying period to warrant it. It's been quite a quiet year on the blogging front, I'm still developing my video content, well, V is still developing my video content, and none of my podcasts really fitted in to any of the categories. They have, at least, released information about what posts/videos were nominated this year, as opposed to just telling us the name of the nominees, so it's going to be an interesting task to sift through them and work out what kind of things I need to create in order to be nominated next year. I do have some ideas in mind already, but we'll see how I manage to go about them.

As for World Travel Market, V knocked up a few conceptual introductory 'hi I'd like to meet with you' type e-mails and sent them out, but no-one's responded to me yet. I am hopefully on the edge of being in quite a good position – the British Guild of Travel Writers' new website will have documentation and training on it to help me do things like speak to magazines and newspapers and go 'hey, I've been to 100 countries and I'm quite unique as well, you want me to write a piece for you on Suriname don't you' which would always go down

well with a tourist board. And it's not as if I'm new to it all – I have *been* in newspapers, albeit not always for travel-related content. But yeh, I'll pop along to WTM this year, probably just for the one day, and do my usual flittering between stalls and have chats along the lines of 'I love your colour, but why are you wearing shoes, that's very off-brand'. It pays to be recognised, but if only I had the wherewithal to follow-up, or to have the confidence in my own abilities.

My other main notable is something that isn't going to happen until the New Year. I was having a chat a couple of months ago with one of my Travel Blogger friends, Sarah (The Urban Wanderer) who appeared on one of my very early podcast episodes, and she dropped the news that there was a comedy club in Manchester that ran workshops and would I be interested. Anyway, some back-and-forthing followed but the upshot is we've both booked ourselves on an 8-week intro course into stand-up comedy, starting in the New Year. And I'll talk more about that another time, probably a bit nearer to the kick-off. Suffice to say it's going to be something that's somewhat outside my comfort zone, but life's too short to be beige.

But back to the travel tale in hand. We left our gruesome twosome waiting for a ferry to Dominica. Would the second half of the trip be any more or any less aesthetic than the first?

{section separation jingle}

The ferry from Martinique to Dominica took about two and a half hours, so a shade longer than the journey *to* Martinique. Owing to the respective cities' locations on their west coasts, the bulk of the sailing ran alongside both islands' coastlines, from where it was clear just how steep the hills were and how close to the seafront they got. These are absolutely not the beach paradises you might be looking for, or at least, not this side of the islands at any rate. But it did show how cool they would be to hike. That said, the sailing passed Mount Pelee, the volcano that erupted on Martinique without much warning in 1902 and destroyed an entire town, so maybe be a bit careful where you're stepping, and keep to the East for better chances,

The ferry was relatively busy, but again I think less so than the impressions of the ferry terminal gave. It took quite a while to go through emigration, though I wonder how much in part that was because of a couple of large groups, and that there were only two border agents in situ for much of our queueing time. But after confirmation that yes, we could bring a couple of cans of beer on board (we'd bought them in the shopping centre but didn't get round to drinking them all), we were through and sat down fine. It wasn't quite as smooth a trip as Friday's, but that for me was only really apparent by being a little unsteady trying to take pictures on deck. No change there.

It did take a while to enter Dominica, partly again because of a relative dearth of border officials both at passport control and at customs, but mainly because the customs officers were checking everything that everyone was carrying through. We had the specific misfortune to be in the same line as a lady travelling alone with a couple of large bags, which when the customs officer opened them, were seen to be filled with, well, a huge amount of small boxes underneath a 'throw'. Quite what was in them was undetermined, and after a bit of a conversation, she was taken into one of the side rooms. Honestly, she might still be there now. When it was finally our turn, we were given no more than a cursory glance and sent on our way. Quite underwhelming, not gonna lie.

That it took so long to pass through meant by the time we left the terminal it was nighttime. We'd arranged to be picked up by the hotel, so again it was one of the owners who'd come out to collect in a taxi. Where we'd booked was four miles from the capital Roseau, up a hill, in a very rural location. In our tired state, we didn't think to take advantage of Roseau's facilities to draw some money out of an ATM – we were running a bit low on cash and, of course, the hotel didn't take card payments. We only realised this would be an issue when we learned that the next day, the Monday, being Pentecost, was a public holiday and nothing would be open or running. Including the bus from the village into the town centre. And we were loath to take a US\$20 taxi ride both ways. And we live in an area that's a couple of miles uphill from the nearest towns and we were on holiday and we'd rather not be doing that here in this heat thank you very much.

It just meant that we couldn't do a lot on our first day in Dominica. Now, I need to impress upon you where the hotel was. The road from Roseau was uphill pretty much for the entire length; it was a winding country lane through the rainforest; thick tree coverage on either side, and an occasional side lane leading to a small collection of houses and the occasional B&B. The hotel itself was down one of these side roads, in the middle

of a very small village made up entirely of houses, a church, and a sports field. There was one building that looked like it would have been some kind of small drink stall had it ever been open when we passed it. At the junction with the main road was what purported to be a mini-mart but again I don't think I ever saw it open.

Our hotel vibed a bit like a few outhouses in someone's house; again I had the impression we were the only people staying. Our room was long, and contained two decent sized beds at one end, and a bathroom at the other. The room had no aircon, and while the room contained one large fan on a stand, the humidity and stickiness meant we had to ask them to bring us a second one so we could effectively have one each; fortunately it not being tourist season meant this wasn't a problem. Indeed the only issue was we spent three nights negotiating a series of scattered wires in the dark, due to a lack of convenient power sockets. In front of the house, down a narrow alleyway, was an open-plan living-room in the yard, with a small attached kitchen and a couple of settees. The main house was on a kind of dais alongside this open area. The shower in our room seems to have been fed from a house-wide rainwater collection tank, and we were casually advised not to use it for too long lest we run out of water, but, in fairness, we're a few hundred metres up a hill in a rainforest so it's not as if we were in any danger of drought conditions.

So, in the event all we did do on the Monday was walk the lanes a lot. But to be fair, it was an incredibly chill and ideal place *to* just have a calming wander. The main road continued up the hill and past a scattering of other houses, before splitting in two. One way went deeper into the rainforest and ended at a car park serving a pathway to a waterfall, the other turned back on itself and meandered to another small village, albeit a bigger one that contained a couple of street bars and one restaurant, and three small sulphur springs. We'll come back to all of these later. It was while wandering past one of these though that we managed to find some food – an unexpectedly open stall run by a lovely local lady grilling chicken, big hunks of chicken, that cost just enough that we could afford with the cash we had. We ate it sat on a barrier on a nearby bend in the road and let me tell you, it ranked high amongst the food we had all trip, in much the same way that anyone eating jollof rice for two years craves a McDonalds burger.

I need you to imagine the setting here though. Though without pavements/sidewalks, the roads were pretty wide and not at all busy; the number of vehicles that passed us in either direction were probably countable without recourse to toes; and on either side the trees were huge and dense – even just looking down some of the footpaths meant you could barely see the cabins in the woods they went to, and since the roads were quite undulating, it was incredible to stand on one of the crests and look out at nothing more than rainforest below and to the sides. Everything was so green and so quiet; it was hard to believe we were only four miles from the capital. We felt very much on our own, surrounded primarily by birdsong and small lizards. It would be a great place for a writing retreat or something similar. In addition, there was almost no street-lighting, so once the sun set it got *really* dark and, rather than it feeling foreboding, it actually felt kind of special and exciting. It didn't feel at all scary or troublesome.

We were in Dominica for three full days, and in fact we spent quite a bit of all three just wandering the lanes. Pretty much all the buildings we passed felt, to me at least, like they're not at all out of place in the environment they're in; they all feel quite natural, rather than appear at odds with it. Or maybe I'm just used to a world of grey and brown buildings everywhere, regardless of the location. Many were two storey, with balconies, and brightly-coloured – no 1960s grey here – but they felt dwarfed by the surrounding trees, and at no point did it feel that we as humans were invading the rainforest; indeed I got the impression the trees could probably squash us all if we even *looked* like we were about to come at them with an axe.

That all said, the first thing we did on the Tuesday morning was take the bus down the hill to the city. I say 'city' – as international capitals go, Roseau ranks as one of the smallest, with a population of around 15,000. This makes it very slightly smaller than my local town of Todmorden. Indeed the population of Dominica as a whole is only about 71,000 – for my UK listeners this makes it about the same as the town (not district) of Barnsley or Stafford, and slightly smaller than Crewe. In area it covers an area of about 750 km², making it slightly bigger than the Welsh island of Ynys Môn (Anglesey), in fact on both counts. Wikipedia also tells me it's about the same size as New York City, although clearly not similar in population. It's not a very big country, and is one of those places that destroys the lie that an independent Scotland would be too small on the world stage to survive. Given its name, it's also easily confused with the Dominican Republic, a much bigger nation at the north end of the Caribbean, and as such searching for information about Dominica tends to be slightly more difficult than it should be. Confusingly, citizens of both are called Dominicans, just like the religious order. We know we've broken a technological barrier once AI can easily differentiate between the three

without additional prompting.

The most obvious thing Roseau has in common with many of the other places we visited on our little Caribbean jaunt is the colour of its buildings. The heart of the city is made up of a rough grid pattern, and along each street – but especially at the corners – the houses and shops are generally quite vibrant with colour or design. This could be the way they're painted, or the styling of their walls, or the décor on and around the balconies and canopies. Even the main church, which otherwise is mostly plain and slate-grey / yellowy-beige has a crenellated tower roof and fancy arched windows. In comparison with other Caribbean towns we visited, it's maybe not as generally pretty as Soufriere (which in population terms is about half the size but honestly, it doesn't feel it), but that I think is more a setting issue than an actual town issue. It's much, much, more aesthetic than Castries, which might be a low bar, but honestly, I probably need to find a better comparison. It's probably going to be easy to get 'bored' by Roseau if you spent a large amount of time here, and there's no beach near the city centre to distract you, but as capital cities go, it's definitely reflective of the country it represents, and let me tell you now, that's definitely no bad thing,

We actually went there twice, first thing on both the Tuesday and the Wednesday. Finding an ATM that accepted Laura's card was a slightly fraught experience, but we managed, which was a great relief. We made an agreement that all my US\$ I'd change in Barbados because Laura already had East Caribbean Dollars and this would save her having a second inconvertible currency, and as I say we'd sort it all out afterwards so it would be fine, but I was still mildly irked at my bank, Not irked enough to change banks, but still, irked enough to rant about it on a podcast episode.

We found a small bakery place a block inland from the pier and lighthouse that served *the* most delectable bagels for lunch; 'everything bagels' with a fabulous smoothie. We also popped into a pretty decent supermarket for snack food and nibbles, where I got distracted by a bottle of what was described as 'peanut juice'. It looked distinctly beige but drank very much like a peanut milkshake. Would definitely have again; nicely textured and creamy, but with a very nutty vibe. I even did a video Short about it that's on my YouTube channel.

Speaking of food, on both the Tuesday and the Wednesday evenings we wandered along the lanes to the neighbouring village, Wotten Waven, and had food and drink there both evenings, The Tuesday we had chips (fries) and fried chicken from a simple shack on the road, and it was incredibly lush, thought it loses marks for the incredibly loud radio that was on. And it was radio, not YouTube or Spotify, given we had a news and politics programme at one point, which really doesn't vibe with a Caribbean drinking shack. The chicken was obviously it was washed down with the local lager (Kubuli) which I seem to have noted on UnTappd as 'drinkable'. I am aware the Caribbean is much more of a rum-centric region but let it not be said I'd forgo beer. A more interesting event that occurred at that shack was Laura losing a fight with the beer fridge door and losing an ear-ring, which was tugged out and fell on the floor. I genuinely don't know how she managed that, and to be fair nor does she, but the result was blood was produced and at the time of podding, she's literally only just managed to get the offending ear-ring reattached. This, by the way, is the main reason why I don't have my ears pierced; a dyspraxic with earrings is absolutely not A Good Idea.

The following day we ate in a restaurant; not gonna lie, the idea that there *was* a restaurant in a small village in the hills in Dominica not in the tourist season impressed me, and even though it was attached to a guesthouse, we only saw one other person there for the entire time we were there; an older white man who, in a parallel universe, would very much have hit several boxes in 'Colonialist British Bingo'.

It was a lovely setting for a meal; the dining area was on ground level with regard to the road, but it was built in the side of a hill so the balcony edge looked out over one of the many valleys and the views across the landscape were green, lush, and wide. All we were really missing to complete the ambiance was a thunderstorm, although that would have made our walk back to the hotel a little dubious. And even the view from the toilet was similar; the window looked out over another edge of the hill so all you could see in the closet was a valley side covered in forest. The meal we had was very nice and again a good mix of meat, plantain, rice, vegetables, and flavour.

On the way to the restaurant we passed by a very colourful street shack that sold sugar cane juice, in plastic bottles that in another setting would have made it look like moonshine or possibly distilled petrol. It was not moonshine; it was very sweet and sugary and probably unhealthy for you, but at least in a way that's easily

trackable.

Dominica isn't a beachy island – it's far too rocky and mountainous for that – but that's not why you'd go there; rather you'd go for the scenery and the forest. Indeed there's a through-hike across the entire island that's waymarked and advertised (it goes very close to the restaurant in fact); one of my Instagram friends from Australia has even done it and thoroughly recommends it. It's known as the Waitukubuli National Trail, it's about 115 miles (185km) long, and while that doesn't sound much compared with other routes I've talked about, it not only covers a total altitude gain of several thousand metres, but also it's likely to be very humid and uncomfortable for much of the way, so definitely one to be fully prepared for. The name is that of the island itself in the native Carib language and means something along the lines of 'tall is her body', reflecting the mountainous nature of the island.

Obviously we did not do any wilderness trail hiking. Rather we did do another sulphur spa; Dominica being another of the very active volcanic islands in the region. The spas here were very much more low-key; there were at least three of them in the lanes a couple of miles from the hotel, in and around Wooten Waven, though the one by the lady who sold us the chicken looked, frankly, quite deserted when we popped by a couple of days later; the only life being a guard dog who barked at us. That said, the one we did go in, attached to a small restaurant and guesthouse in the centre of the village, also didn't seem to be staffed – we hung around for a few minutes wandering through the clearly closed tables of the dining area until someone finally noticed us and said 'yeh, it's just down the stairs, take your time, no worries'. I don't remember how much it cost but it wasn't more than US\$10.

It was a long flight of stairs down, surrounded by intense flowers. The spa was a much, much, smaller affair than the one in Saint Lucia, but probably a nicer setting and ambiance. It was located very much in the deeps of the rainforest, so all around were trees rather than barren rocks, and that also gave it a bit more of an intimate vibe. It had far fewer facilities – a couple of shelters right next to the pools to store your stuff, two changing shacks, and that was about it. There were several pools, set on a couple of ledges, and one of them was much hotter than the others, and took a few more tentative steps to get used to, though in the end it was fine. This spa felt like a place to chill, rather than a place to go for a health vibe. They didn't have mud to exfoliate yourself, but then they also didn't have people around to apply it – it was literally just you and the trees. And as regard to rules and regulations, whereas the Saint Lucia spa had a whole billboard, here there was just a hand-written sign that said 'no diving, no jumping, no littering'. It was very much more low-key, and that made for a different atmosphere. In addition, we were there for maybe an hour and the only other people we saw were another couple of popped by for maybe twenty minutes; they stayed in one of the lower pools and we relocated to the uppermost one, so both of us could feel we were there on our own.

That was pretty much all we did; I know it doesn't sound a lot but I cannot impress too much on just how chill and aesthetic it was. It very much felt like a place to truly get away from it all. Our last morning there was spent in a taxi to the airport which, obviously, was on the opposite side of the island, but the road there literally went across the centre and the heights, so we had a couple of hours of just driving through the rainforest, which is always a good thing. In addition, the taxi driver we had treated it a bit like a mini-tour so he regaled us with information about the history and the landscape and the vibe, including pointing out the effects of recent hurricanes – it's clear to see bits of forest that's completely missing, for instance.

The airport is quite small, and set between the hills and the seafront so it's a very nice location. It's also not a terribly busy airport; our flight was delayed by an hour or two but it honestly didn't really matter. Laura's main concern was that we didn't take off during an ominous rain shower, but honestly, the flight was fine. And not two hours later, we were landing in our final county – Barbados.

{section separation jingle}

Me: Hello :) It's time for a mid-episode break. Half time. Seventh Innings Stretch. That sort of thing. Put the kettle on. Grab a snack. Get comfortable. I'm just here to remind you ways in which you can get in touch and help this podcast out. You probably know this already, but in case you don't:

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The second best way is to appear on the pod yourself; if you sign up to my newsletter you'll be able to see what episodes are being planned, and see which you'd like to contribute a voice recording for. It's also a great way to keep in contact if and when the soch meeds undergo a lingering heat death. Newsletters should come out in the first week of each month, and sign-ups can be found at barefoot-backpacker.us14.list-manage.com/subscribe.

Now, on with the show}

{section separation jingle}

“Oh, I’m going to Barbados, woah, back to the palm trees.” as the song goes, which I’d use a sample of, but I don’t have the broadcast rights to do that and I wasn’t going to ask. Barefoot backpackers can’t afford flashy podcasts.

We were only there just to have a quick couple of days, in part to tick off a new country, but mainly because that’s where the most convenient flight back to the UK on the Saturday in the region left from. We in no way intended to explore the island nation that fully or comprehensively; we were simply going to go ‘yep there’s the beach, yep there’s the rum, yep there’s the hotel’. Honestly that was probably a slight shame but when you only have two weeks to travel, you have to make the best use of it as you can.

Our arrival in Barbados was easy, and comfortable, with swift immigration, an easy local bus to pretty much directly outside our hotel, and an airport whose check-in and land-side shopping was under a canopy in the open air rather than in a large bland beige warehouse-like room like most airports. It made it feel a bit more lively and down-to-earth.

There was, alas, one problem, and a remarkably unexpected one. Here’s a thought experiment: in an environment where the primary reason for visiting a building is to either arrive or leave the country, what do you think would be a really useful thing to provide? What practical resource, either in person or via the use of self-service machine, would you expect to be an essential part of the airport experience?

Barbados Airport has no money exchanges. Or, in fact, ATMs.

Now it’s not that we couldn’t find any, it’s not like in Azerbaijan where there was precisely one and it was hidden away in the arrivals lounge up an escalator. No. We asked at the help desk and were told that, no, there wasn’t one of either on site, and the impression we go was this was perfectly normal and expected behaviour. They suggested to us that what we should do is go to a particular one of the shops on the concourse, buy something with US\$, and we’d get the change in Barbadian currency. The most absurd currency exchange ever followed, where I bought a small packet of sweets with a US\$20 note, and hoped that’d be enough to get us at least a nibble from one of the food stalls, as we’d had a really early start and not eaten yet in the day, and then for the bus to the hotel. We did, though the nibble, some kind of saltfish pasty, wasn’t terribly flavoursome. Once we’d reached the hotel, our first task was to change money – fortunately there were a couple of banks nearby and we managed to get to one before it closed. This is why I’d been keeping hold of my US\$ for the whole trip, and it ensured I had the challenge of spending it all, but not overspending, over the next two days, because buggered if I was going to try to change it back.

Our hotel was in the area known as Worthing Beach. This part of Barbados, between Bridgetown and Oistins, felt like the most touristy place we’d been on our whole trip; a lot of people, a lot of white people, let’s be specific about this, and a lot of tourist infrastructure – there was a section along the main street, which itself was full of cars and buses, where every other building felt like it was either accommodation or food. There was definitely enough around the hotel to keep us fed and watered well, including a supermarket that sold American cheese, though by the time we went there it was too late to make full use of it. We did, however, visit the local branch of Little Caesars twice, at Laura’s insistence; we don’t have them in the UK and while it’s comfortably mid, as pizza restaurants go, they sell breadsticks to die for. Note for my UK listeners; when I say ‘breadsticks’ I don’t mean the thin hard crunchy finger-like things you get in Italian restaurants as ‘table food’, no, what I mean is something more akin to a long bread roll, not quite a baguette and more interesting than a sub, which is covered in cheese and garlic, and served with a saucy dip of choice.

I'm not saying I travel to tropical destinations so Laura can feed me American food, but it does seem to be a developing theme.

Also in the vicinity was a petrol station with an attached shop that felt more like a mini-mart, with more available in it than my local mini Morrisons, though that's a low bar. This included an array of Barbadian craft beer, of which I bought a couple of cans. The Caribbean isn't a region often noted for its decent beers - obviously generic local-branded lagers are widely available like Carib - so this was pretty much the only chance I'd had to have a few crafts. Behind the petrol station was a large open-air street-food complex selling everything from nachos to burgers to Chinese. Obviously we went one evening and took back with us a large tray of jerk chicken with rice and peas, which was great to have with the beer.

We also had a plate of jerk chicken from a bar/café on one of the short side streets leading to the beach, which was pretty good despite being very rough-and-ready. In addition, the beach itself had a couple of sizeable casual restaurants, with table seating stretching onto the sand itself so absolutely not the sort of place that would throw you out for wearing beachwear. Service was a trifle slow, but I guess that's just the way of things in these parts. I did have my obligatory rum (Mount Gay, local to Barbados), but quickly reverted to beer, even if it was Carib (local to, er, Trinidad I think).

I will say though, in general, compared with our experiences elsewhere, it did seem very easy to find food in Barbados at whatever time of day, although again that might have been because of the tourist factor.

Our hotel was more like a mini resort, complete with a small pool that we, we, did not make use of. Our room was pretty substantial, more like a small apartment; one room with two large beds, aggressive aircon, and a decent size bathroom with shower just off. There was also a living area large enough to dance around in, and a small kitchen attached. It was a couple of floors up and pretty quiet in there, and we didn't make *too* much of a mess of it, did we Laura?

Not that we spent much time in it as we were mainly on the beach, or next to the beach. It was an okay size, creeping at various widths around the slightly rocky coast and disappearing at points where beachfront properties jutted out just that touch too far, but all along the coast road there was easy access to the different sections of it. There were many coconut trees, the sand around which was littered with fallen fruit so we were definitely careful where we set our stuff up to sit. Much of the eastern end of the beach was covered with layers of sargassum which isn't conducive to a good beach aesthetic but it's fun to walk through. Laura took a few trips into the sea for a swim, and said the water wasn't quite as warm as she'd have liked, and, just as in Saint Lucia, the waves were a touch too vibrant to be truly comfortable. Also like Saint Lucia, the sand sloped away quite steeply away from the shoreline so I was just content to paddle, or sit on a beach towel and listen to more podcasts. I'm sure there are better beaches in Barbados, but given our limited time on the island, it didn't feel worth it to go seeking them out, as this one was 'good enough', as it were. It was certainly 'good enough' for the small green lizard that wandered by as I was there, distracting me from my listenings.

And to be honest, that was pretty much all we did. It was pretty calming, a relaxed and comfortable ending to a pretty chill trip. Our flight back to the UK left mid-afternoon so that meant we weren't even rushed on our last day, we just had another beach wander and had a sandwich-type lunch from the beach bar café, before catching one of the many, many, easy local buses back to the airport. I've pretty much no memory of the journey back, save that it was overnight and I did manage to doze a little, though was still very knackered when we arrived in Heathrow at 6.30am or some equally ridiculously early time. Although I'd pre-booked my train tickets so that wasn't a problem, Laura lent me some ready cash so that I could grab lunch and get the bus home (Laura was staying down in London with a friend for another couple of days); I was pretty sure my new bank card would be waiting for me when I arrived but obviously I still had to get there.

You may be pleased to know that it was.

{section separation jingle}

So having been to four Caribbean islands, what was our impression of them. Well, while Saint Lucia may not have been our favourite, it can't be denied it's probably the island that has the most variance, albeit you might have to go a little out your way (or spend top dollar) to really appreciate it. But it has great scenery, pretty

towns, decent beaches, quite a few things to see and do, and incredibly friendly people. Soufriere was very nice; most of the other towns maybe not so, but I guess tourists really only go there or Rodney Bay anyway. It is very clear tourists and locals don't often mix, and there did feel a bit of a divide.

It was the island Laura most wanted to go to, but I don't think it quite lived up to her expectations in her mind.

I don't really have much to say about Martinique really. It's one of those places that on the face of it looks like it might be quite a good place to go, in terms of size and convenience, but in reality it's very much more a place to live than a place to visit as a tourist, especially I think if you don't know anyone there. And we got a bit stymied by visiting during a particularly bad weekend for tourism; we didn't get the chance or opportunity to visit anywhere outside the city itself, so we can't really say what attractions the rest of the island has, including beaches. I don't know if we'd've been better off skipping it completely, or alternatively if our impressions would have been more positive had we been there midweek, but it was what it was.

Dominica is small, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in scenery. It is probably the greenest place I've ever been. Everywhere around was forested, and we'd look across the landscape at the nearby hills and there'd be nothing but foliage in between. It's also a very hilly place – the island is basically a series of volcanoes surrounded by water; this leads to swift rocky streams and the occasional waterfall.

There's not much to do there, but honestly, in a setting like this, there probably doesn't need to be. It's very much a place to amble slowly and take pictures.

Although we didn't see that much of Barbados, we definitely had the impression it was quite dissimilar to the ones we'd been to, to the west. For a start it has four times the population of Dominica despite being slightly more than half its size. Its highest point is only 336m, as compared with Saint Lucia's 950m and Dominica's almost 1,450m, so it feels a lot flatter and a lot more open. It's also not a volcanic island, and it tends to not be in the path of most hurricanes. It's not far from the main island chain – about 100 miles east of Saint Vincent – but that's far enough to feel and vibe very different. Martinique was also equally urban but I'd say Martinique definitely felt more like a bigger Saint Lucia in terms of style, aesthetic, and mood, whereas what we saw of Barbados felt not at all like that, being very much its own thing in the colours (Barbados was more beige and less green), the structure of the buildings (more like concrete blocks), and the town layout. I'm not going to say it felt more British or Australian, as compared with Saint Lucia which felt definitely more Caribbean, but that's the sort of best way of thinking of it.

It is, though, hard to formulate impressions of a place you only basically had one full day in, of course, and we were centred on literally a block of town about 700m by 400m in area. I am slightly minded to go back one day and see what the rest of the country offers – I mean, we didn't even make it to Bridgetown!

I was asked by a couple of friends if I felt it was an interesting trip: I'd say on a personal level very much yes; I visited places that would never have been on my radar and which I'd've never thought to go to. I'd say largely too that while the reason they weren't was because of my impression that they were little more than 'small hot islands full of honeymooners', there's definitely more to them than that, even with what little we saw. We barely even touched on the remnants of history of the place – not that there are as many as you'd imagine, but still. We also didn't visit either any distilleries or chocolate factories, of which there are legion, but I think because of where they are located on the islands, they're probably best served by driving anyway. Or being driven, at least.

Now, all that being said, I don't think I'm the target market for them for a medium-length holiday. I enjoyed what I saw but I do feel I, personally, might get bored after a short while in a couple of those places; while I didn't see everything they had to offer nor everything that I'd wanted to (expect possibly Saint Lucia), I suspect after about 4-5 days in any of them and I'd start to get a bit angsty and itchy to move on elsewhere. Like, even if I'd seen a distillery and a chocolate plantation, I'd've probably personally only needed to have seen one, and then I'd've been sated – catching them all on every island would have felt more a completist tickbox exercise. But that's very much a Me issue; if you're the sort of person who does like to chill and have a day where your longest movement is between a beach towel and a beach bar, then they've a much better vibe and surroundings than an all-inclusive resort type setting. Though with the caveat that across the whole region, I think if you're in a resort you get easier access to the better beaches, if that's what you're going for.

On that note, by the way, having been to Maldives earlier in the year, it would be tempting to try to compare them, but I don't think it's a sensible question. They're very different types of places catering, even for beachy types, to a different type of audience. The Maldives, having much clearer and shallower water, is much more suited for snorkelling and fish-spotting, while the Caribbean lends itself better to more casual and more local experiences. It's like comparing, I don't know, Rome and Las Vegas. Both are comprehensive cities with lots to see and do, with a good array of food, and are high on many people's bucket lists, but those are very different kinds of people.

Given the title of these last two podcasts has been 'Caribbean on a Budget', the obvious question to ask is, well, *can* you visit the Caribbean on a budget? I'd say you can, but with a couple of caveats, one of which is obviously: you need to define what budget means to you.

Remember we were travelling as two people, so sharing the hotel costs – I don't know if the rooms would be cheaper as a solo traveller or if they were a standard price, because I wasn't checking that. Honestly I was just grateful they had twin-bedded rooms available at all. Anyway, Dominica had the cheapest hotel, working out at \$70/night for the room. Saint Lucia was roughly an average of \$89.30/night, Barbados \$101.50, and Martinique the most expensive at \$119.50. So the most we were spending was \$60 pppn; I don't think that's terribly bad, especially if you look at standard hotels in somewhere like London where if you offered me a twin-bedded room for a total price of \$120, or just over £90, I'd grumble at how expensive London had got, but then still taken it because I've seen some ridiculous prices for even the Premier Inns recently – one in Aldgate I was looking at for late November was on offer for about £70-£80 for the Sunday and Monday nights, and then £210 for the Tuesday night, for no discernable reason. But as for the Caribbean, I'm sure if you were a married couple you could travel independently for cheaper than we managed as you'd have more choice. Accommodation's one of the biggest expenses of any trip and these aren't South-East Asia prices, but equally it's likely cheaper than many of your home countries so consider your budget accordingly.

The other thing to bear in mind around accommodation is it's much easier to get to the more instagrammable beaches if you spend more to be in a more resort type hotel. To the extent that staying in more budget hotels and taking taxis to those beaches because they're a bit out of the way might well not work out any cheaper. But if beaches aren't your thing, then this won't be as much of a concern, so maybe it's easier to visit the Caribbean on a budget if you're more interested in hiking, rum, and photography.

Getting around was a mixed bag. We took one flight, from Dominica to Barbados, which was \$130 each, to which we'd have to add on the cost of the taxi across the island from our hotel to the airport, which was about an extra \$50 or so. The two ferries we caught were both €79 each, or \$92, and the taxi from the ferryport in Dominica provided by our hotel was \$20 though I don't honestly remember paying it. The buses in Saint Lucia were, if I remember correctly, about \$1.50 (USD), and the bus to/from the airport in Barbados was about \$2 USD.

My other main caveat though that may affect costs was that we were travelling a little outside the tourist season. As I say, June 1st is the start of the designated Hurricane Season, so fewer tourists visit, and prices might have been a bit lower for us than they would be if you went a month or two earlier. The flipside of travelling in a more budget season of course is there's fewer options to see and do, and probably to stay too. It's all a balance. For the record, no hurricanes were even predicted, never mind formed, during our stay, though we *were* keeping a very close eye on two of the hurricane watch websites.

Now, all this of course leads to the question of: would I go again? Of the countries and islands we visited, I don't see the need to revisit Saint Lucia, though it would be pleasant enough if I did. I also don't see the *need* to revisit Dominica, but that doesn't mean I *wouldn't* – in the same way that I've no *need* to revisit Belgium but you know I will. It was a spectacularly pretty island and you know how I am with forest environments, big ol' wood-elf me. I could definitely be happy hiking on over to one of the boiling pools served by the volcanism, or deeper into the rainforest to the hidden waterfalls. Whether I'm tempted by the full cross-island hike, well that's a question for Future Nel – honestly I don't think I could fit it in to my life but you never know.

Barbados I'd like to go back to, but if only to properly see it – I don't imagine I'd need to visit thrice though. Like, I'd go again, have maybe four days pottering around, it's a bit far for a long weekend but that's kind of the vibe it gives, and then I'd feel like I'd seen everything I need to. One interesting logistical point of note tho is

Barbados seems to be a useful 'hub' to explore quite a bit of the rest of the Caribbean from, so there's a fair chance I could end up going back there anyway. Kind of like the Caribbean Qatar, except, well, clearly lot.

To be honest it's probably the same with Martinique – we were stymied by bad timing with our trip but honestly it wasn't a place I could really feel excited about anyway. There's certainly stuff there I should be interested in going back to see – not just the slavery museum site but also some places associated with the Mont Pelee volcano eruption – it's just a question of 'am I interested *enough*', given both types of site are, sadly, quite numerous across the world', plus also there's not a lot else in the surrounding area that's new that grabs my arm and pulls me inwards. And a trip visiting just Barbados and Martinique feels a bit 'excessive', for me at least.

My biggest lesson from the trip though? I re-learned I'm not a huge fan of rum.

{end pod jingle}

Well that's about all for this episode. Tune in next time for another adventure beyond the brochure. Until then, remember, always make sure you know where your ears are, and if you're feeling off-colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, tell your friends that I rocked your socks. If you wear socks when listening to my pod; that's your call not mine. And don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Show-notes are available on my website: barefoot-backpacker.com.

Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}