
Caribbean

Turks Caicos, St Maarten, St Lucia, Barbados, Dominican Republic.



The Caribbean is officially a region of the Americas that consists of the Caribbean Sea, its islands and the surrounding coasts. The region covers an area of 1.6 million square miles and has 13 official sovereign states of international countries and 15 dependencies that were developed in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, by the colonialism of the British, Spanish, French and the Dutch, creating an incredible mix of diversity in each island. A melting pot of different cultures mixing together and fighting for survival, with a population of over 40 million.

We chose just a few Islands to visit:

Florida to Turks and Caicos

We departed from the pan handle of Florida with full fuel to get us all the way to the British territory of the Providenciales MBPV an airport that serves the Turks & Caicos.

Just to show how adaptable the Vision Jet can be on fuel efficiency the first leg of 855NM was to take us directly to MBPV however due to air force activity and heavy traffic throughout Florida we were only assigned FL170 for the first half an hour of the flight. This causes a much higher fuel burn. To compensate and conserve fuel we slowed down to 180 knots, to still be able to make our range in one flight. It got worse; we were diverted a 100NM extra and given altitude changes that caused even more fuel wastage.

The careful management of speed allowed us to conserve fuel and after 1,000NM of flight we still landed with fuel levels over the IFR reserve requirements.

The approach to the Providenciales is spectacular, after clearing the low level clouds to the IAF (Initial Approach Fix) ADVIL for our assigned RNP RWY 10, the most magnificent turquoise sea and white sand view appears, an absolute photography heaven.



We were warmly welcomed by the CEO Deborah Aharon of Provo Air Centre, the FBO has great service and good fuel prices. Everywhere around the world we usually don't book our accommodation until we land but if we dared to do that here we would be sleeping under the wing of the plane.

The Island has some very luxurious hotels and many mansions of the rich and famous however we like to stay a little more secluded and low key and were lucky enough to find a cottage called "Wishing Fish" on Taylor Bay, positioned on the very quiet beach, it was almost like being on your own private beach. We went to the local supermarket for our 5 day supply of groceries and was set us back a small fortune! They receive most of their produce from the Dominican Republic, our host and real estate agent explained as she gave us a quick tour of the facilities around the island. The service on this island is the best we found throughout the Caribbean, the people are warm and welcoming and very eager to assist and go out of the way to make your stay comfortable and memorable.

St Maarten

Our next destination was St Maarten - TNCM, 565NM around 2 hours of flight time; over water and a scattering of islands surrounded by the bluest azure waters, a unique area in the world that is beautiful to fly.

The airport in St Maarten is a well known tourist attraction for all those YouTube videos of people standing on Maho Beach, just a few feet away, from the threshold of RWY10, they hang onto a flimsy fence as the Jet blast from planes throws them into the water, a crazy fascination and pretty dangerous. I'm sure they won't get thrown too far on our single Jet blast!



The flight path takes us along the Dominican Republic, we will stop there on our way back.

Most people when they fly commercial just want the flight to end and can't wait for the destination to appear however for us it is the flights that are the most fun and it is almost disappointing to reach the destination. So, it is all too soon that we position for the RNAV to St Maarten Princess Juliana International Airport, sitting on the Dutch Caribbean side of the island.

As we approach the final fix you can see the people on the beach and in the water enjoying the roar and the buzz of jets. The approach gives a full view of the large bays packed with huge super yachts and cruise liners. We line up to the runway hovering over the beach at an altitude of less than 100 feet, to our right on the white sand is Sunset Bar & Grill and to our left Driftwood Boat Bar all packed with plane spotters, aviation enthusiasts and many people enjoying the landings and takes-offs. The beach is full of photographers all grappling for that prized shot of the aircrafts and the people being swept away by jet blast, as usual the Vision Jet draws a huge interest and we can see people pointing their cameras and phones towards us as we land.

We selected Signature as our FBO and handlers but somehow they lost our reservation so no one was awaiting for us upon our arrival and there was no one to air marshal us. Luckily someone from the airport authority come to our rescue and waived us into a parking spot which is limited due to the high

volume of private and commercial planes. Signature eventually found our confirmations in their system and continued to take care of us. We found accommodation at Flamingo Beach resorts on Simpson Bay a very nice white sand and sparkling blue waters beach in a village atmosphere. There are many options to stay on the island if booked well in advance. We hired a car and drove to the French side of the Island that is a little run down but has some excellent restaurants and the best find for us was the supermarket Le Grand Marche with the best selection of French cheese, wines and other fine ingredients. They supply many of the super Yachts chefs with produce.

St Lucia -TLPL

After waiting for fuel for almost an hour at St Maarten the weather changed to hot and windy, which impacts dramatically on the take off and climb performance of the Vision Jet. The wind direction on the island is constant for take-offs and landings on the same RWY 10 directly into a line of Mountains. The heat gives a sluggish take-off, as we follow the departure procedure, heading straight to St Peters Hill with an elevation of 1,037 feet. The terrain awareness warning starts within seconds of rotation. The required departure turn needs to be done at 400 feet, by that time the mountain is seconds away. We noted that most pilots turn a lot earlier than that - and very soon after lift off we can feel why. On commencement of the turn the first mountain waves hit us and for a few seconds it is a little uncomfortable, then another mountain comes too close for comfort. As we continue the turn the powerful mountain waves and down drafts also continue. It is a slight compensation that the view over the bay and beaches is spectacular. We are soon clear and climbing away from the island and the conditions are much smoother but not without some moderate turbulence on the way to flight levels.

On approach for landing at Hewanorra International TLPL we receive the ATIS and can see on our Garmin Connect that the weather at the airport has thunder storms with heavy rain and 25 knots cross wind on the runway, we slow down and let the cell move north west. As we get closer it is not an issue and we established on the IAF for RNAV RWY10, to our left the clouds are on the 3,000 feet granite mountains. We turn left towards the final fix the wind reports become more favorable. We land on the very wet runway with a cross wind of



12 knots, well within the Vision Jet's limitations. We are welcomed by Alwyn Harris the owner of Harris Handling & Logistics Services and after swift clearance through customs and cool drinks at the FBO facilities we are invited to the Harris farm house for a short welcoming.

They organized a car from a private vendor, it was old and very well used but on such short notice this was the best we could get.

St Lucia county is a part of the the West Indies, the terrain is mountainous jungle with peaks called Pitons. Pitons is also the name of the local beer, a very good clear fresh lager which we enjoyed after the flight. We were unable to get accommodation at the most luxurious resorts on this Island even at a mere \$2000USD a night and situated on a private beaches so we just took a day drive to one positioned alongside the two famous Pitons for lunch. The drive to this area is via a very winding steep zig-zag road, car sickness is assured and the trip is a whole day event but the views are spectacular and great interaction with locals and the villages they live in.

Castries is the main town of the Island and has the top end resorts that also have all the best beaches. We joined the locals and some tourists for the public beach. The accommodation options in St Lucia are very expensive for the value for money, we opted for a newly built apartment on Rodney Bay. This is the main tourists area full of restaurants, bars, shops and entertainment.

Barbados - TBPB

Just a 95NM so there was no requirement to fuel up as we had plenty for the very short 20 min flight. Getting out from TLPL with Alwyn's team was a breeze, a quick visit to the tower to pay \$76 for the local landing and navigations fees. Smaller airports usually prove to be friendlier and easier. ATC clears us immediately and we climb on to FL150 with nothing but sea the entire short way. Barbados appears in the horizon and it is surprisingly flat in comparison to St Lucia and St Maarten.

The FBO and handling agents here are; Private Aircraft Services Inc they also manage the new large and modern FBO facility lounge. The staff were phenomenal, friendly and professional and within minutes we are in the limousine on the way to our hotel. They tell us the Island has just been declared a Federation breaking from the UK by unanimous parliamentary consensus which was not hard to get as the ruling party, just recently elected, has over 80% of the parliament. (2022)

Barbados is much more urbanized than our last destinations and our research before we came told about the rich history dating back to middle 17th century, an old haute of famous pirates and the originators of the rum distillery and trade. The 350 year history of St Nicholas Abbey makes an excellent rum that can only be bought on this Island.

Again accommodation was very difficult but at the last minute a room became available at the Hilton, luckily for us we were upgraded to a very nice newly renovated suite with Caribbean Sea views and fine white sand beach. The deep blue color waters are difficult to swim as the currents are strong. The beach has a few wave breaking rock walls to provide a little protection but the weather was rainy and the waters were rough, at least the surfers were having a great time.

All those interesting points aside, it is not often that we encounter a place that we cannot recommend a visit to however this might just be one of those places. From the experience through the airport (Outside of the handling agents) to the customer service throughout the Island there is a general feeling of unfriendliness, maybe the fear of Covid has driven the locals to this behaviour but we suspect it is far more imbedded from centuries of colonialism, political unrest and economic uncertainty, we were warned about this by a German airline crew who fly there regularly.

The most fascinating story that we encountered here was when we visited the Jewish Synagogue, graveyard and museum in Bridgetown. Built in 1654, it is the oldest Synagogue in the Americas.

We were perplexed by the Jewish grave stones that carried the symbol of the skull and cross bones alongside the Hebrew inscriptions. This is a most peculiar combination for Jewish symbolism and as we read through the history in the museum it becomes clear that the true Pirates of the Caribbean were the Jewish population that stemmed back from the Spanish inquisition; being expelled from Spain in 1492. They were excellent navigators and well versed in maritime trade. With this knowledge they set out to settle old scores and to ruin and punish the Spanish. Raiding and capturing Spanish Galleons throughout the Mediterranean region and eventually settling in the New World and Amsterdam. They brought the windmill technology to the New World settlements in South America and mainly Brazil. They were expelled from



Brazil by the Portuguese and moved onto the Caribbean Islands bringing with them their expertise in sugar cane growing and production of molasses, as it was easier to ship for the Rum trade. It is also thought they brought the first distillery to Jamaica and Barbados. They were granted safe haven by Oliver Cromwell and given the commission to plunder and pillage the Spanish and Portuguese with free reign! They were encouraged to settle and create a base

in Port Royal Jamaica and Bridgetown Barbados. The Jewish community are still prevalent in the society to this day.

Dominican Republic

Dominican Republic - MDPC - 609NM
Leaving Barbados we climb to FL300 flying along the Caribbean chain of islands, St Lucia and Martinique to our left, Dominica, Montserrat and St Kitts to our right and over Puerto Rico we were busy taking pictures all the way until Puerto Rico where we encountered some very nasty rain clouds we can feel the powerful pressure in the air as we fly above that weather, it is good to be at FL300.

On our approach to MDPC we are vectored around the airport, due to weather, until established on IAF for GPS RNAV RWY8. Flagged into the Terminal FBO Services, which costs, for all its services \$75 in cash payments only and it soon becomes evident that cash is the preferred currency on this Island.

When booking an Uber via the app there was a prompt pick up but he didn't like the fare quoted by UBER and refused to drive us unless he got triple the Uber quote and in cash. We called another driver who with a little hesitation accepted the fare, we gave him a generous tip and he was very happy.

The Hilton La Romana adults only all-inclusive in Punta Cana, was a place of just pure indulgence for us, we kept extending our stay as we enjoyed the resort that much, it is a huge resort but feels like a small boutique hotel as it has many pools and fantastic restaurants and entertainment for all ages. The beach is beautiful and the hotel is managed to perfection, we didn't want to leave.

Departing from Dominican Republic, was a 800NM leg back to the United States to the KOPF Miami-Opa Locka Executive to clear customs and continue on to keep visiting all the great locations that the USA has to offer.

The Caribbean conjures up images of pure azure blue waters washing up to fine white sand beaches, good fishing and total relaxation in luxurious resorts. For the spirit of a pilot, that is not the only reason to fly the Caribbean, it is the challenge and the adventure; the Island prize at the end of the flight is just a bonus, and a good enticement.

