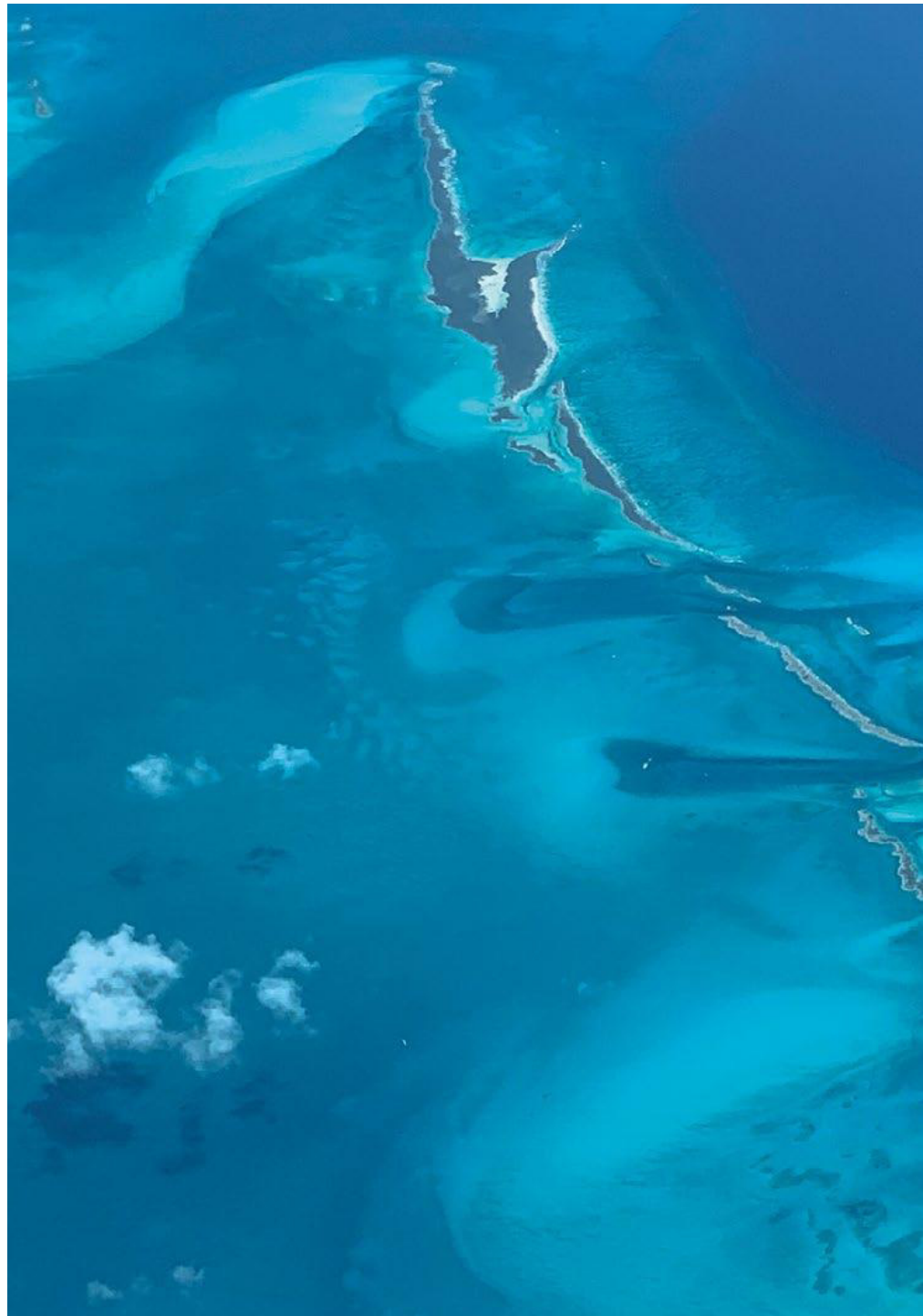


TRAVELOGUE

» *Places to Fly and Explore*



AMIR AND TAMRA HYSTER are active aviation travelers, flying themselves throughout the world and writing about their experiences. The Vision Jet is their fourth Cirrus aircraft, a progressive move from their previous SR22N, SR22TN and SR22T that they previously flew on their world adventures. Visit their website for more stories and information: www.VisionJetTravel.com



Traveling the World in a Vision Jet ... **The Caribbean**

by Amir and Tamra Hyster



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 nations and 15 dependencies that were developed in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries by the colonialism of the British, Spanish, French and Dutch. This has created a melting pot of different cultures mixing together and fighting for survival, with a population of over 40 million.

After chatting with many pilots at various aviation gatherings we learned that most are a little apprehensive to fly much further than The Bahamas. The main reason was to stay within the U.S. “control,” however the other islands have a lot to offer. Also, the challenge of performing short water crossings and getting familiar with the process of international permits and procedures provides a good steppingstone for larger international flights. Both the SR22 and Vision Jet are more than capable of flying to any destination

in this beautiful world; we think we have proven this! One destination at a time is the key. Several years ago, as we were preparing to fly over the Great Lakes of the U.S. and new to water crossings, our good pilot friend Ian Bentley asked, “Do you trust your aircraft to fly over land?” “Yes, of course,” we answered.

He replied, “Then what is the difference if it flies over land or over water? If you trust your aircraft then the territory shouldn’t make any difference.” That simple statement was a game changer in the

(continued on page 50)

» **Landing** at the Providenciales International Airport (MBPV), which serves Turks & Caicos Islands.



perspective of where we fly. There are a few things we do to be extra cautious.

Preparation: We choose to carry survival equipment in accordance with Part 135 operations. We consider the more stringent requirements and extra expense worthy of our lives in the case of an unlikely incident, although Part 91 is legally sufficient. For example, in Part 91 a life raft with a single layered floor means that if you ditch in cold water you will freeze or become hyperthermic in a very short period of time, while on the raft. The Part 135 life raft requires a double layered floor, providing you longer term survivability.

Flight Planning: The Caribbean region is very friendly to general aviation, still it requires choosing and negotiating with FBO and handling agents and approvals such as landing permits, over-flight permits and landing entry permissions. This adds an extra layer to the process of flying to these provinces and territories.

Each island is like flying to a different country! Right at the doorstep of the U.S. are literally six different international cultures: French, British, Colombian, Venezuelan, Cuban (Spanish) and Dutch; take your pick. The following are a few we chose.

Turks & Caicos

We departed from the panhandle of Florida with full fuel to get us all the way to the British territory of the Providenciales International Airport (MBPV) that serves Turks & Caicos. Just to show how adaptable the Vision Jet can be on fuel efficiency, the first leg of 855 nm 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-hour of the flight causing a much higher fuel burn. To compensate and conserve fuel, we slowed down to 180 knots, but we were again diverted an

extra 100 nm and given altitude changes that caused more fuel waste. The careful management of speed allowed us to conserve fuel and after 1,000 nm of flight, we still landed with fuel levels over the IFR reserve requirements.

The approach to MBPV 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 appeared – an absolute photographer's heaven.

We were warmly welcomed by Provo Air Centre's CEO Deborah Aharon; the FBO has great service and good fuel prices. On our worldwide travels we usually don't book our accommodations until we land, but if we dared do that in Turks and Caicos, we would be sleeping under the wing of the airplane.

The island has some very luxurious hotels and many mansions of the rich and famous, however we like to stay a



“ ... after clearing the low level clouds to the IAF ... the most magnificent turquoise sea and white sand appeared – an absolute photographer’s heaven.”


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little more secluded and lower key and were lucky enough to find a cottage called “Wishing Fish” on Taylor Bay, positioned on a very quiet beach. Be aware when food shopping on these islands as the grocery bill can set you back a small fortune! As our host gave us a quick tour of the facilities around the island, she explained that they receive most of their produce from the Dominican Republic. 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 their way to make your stay comfortable and memorable.

St. Maarten

Our next destination was Princess Juliana Airport (TNCM) in St. Maarten, 565 nm and around two 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 as there are several YouTube videos of people standing on Maho Beach, just a few feet away from the threshold of RWY 10. They hang on to a flimsy fence as the jet blast from aircraft throws them into the water

– a crazy fascination that’s very dangerous. I’m sure they won’t get thrown too far on our single jet blast!

When flying commercial, most people just want the flight to end as they can’t wait to get to the destination. For us, it’s the flights that are the most fun, and it is almost disappointing to reach the destination! So, it was all too soon that we positioned for the RNAV to TNCM, sitting on the Dutch Caribbean side of the island. As we approached the final fix you can see the people on the beach and in the water enjoying the roar and the buzz of the jets. We also had a full view of the large bays packed with huge super yachts and cruise liners. We lined up to the runway hovering over the beach at an altitude of less than 100 feet, to our right on the white sand was Sunset Bar & Grill and to our left was the Driftwood Boat Bar; all packed with airplane spotters, aviation enthusiasts and people enjoying the takeoffs and landings. The beach was full of photographers grappling for that prized shot of the aircraft and the people being swept away by the jet blast. As usual the Vision Jet drew a huge interest and we could see people pointing their cameras and phones toward us as we landed.

We selected Signature as our FBO and handlers, but they somehow lost our reservation, so no one was waiting for us upon our arrival to marshal us in. Luckily someone from the airport authority came to our rescue and waived us into a parking spot which is limited due to the high volume of private and commercial airplanes. Signature eventually found our confirmation in their system and continued to take care of us.



⏏ **An Airbus 320** landing over Maho Beach at St. Maarten (TNCM), a well-known, but dangerous tourist attraction; (inset) a jet blast warning sign posted on the fence at the beach.



We found accommodation at Flamingo Beach Resort on Simpson Bay which had a very nice beach with white sand and sparkling blue water in a village atmosphere. There are many options available to stay on the island if you book well in advance. We rented a car and drove to the French side of the island that is a little run-down but had some excellent restaurants. The best find for us was the supermarket, Le Grand Marche, that had the best selection of French cheese, wines and other fine ingredients. They supply many of the super yachts' chefs with produce.

St. Lucia

After waiting for fuel for almost an hour at St. Maarten, the weather changed to hot and windy, dramatically impacting the takeoff and climb performance of the Vision Jet. The wind direction on the island is constant for takeoffs and landings on the same RWY 10, directly into a line of mountains. The heat gave us a sluggish takeoff, as we followed the departure procedure, heading straight to St. Peters Hill with an elevation of

1,037 feet. The terrain awareness warning started within seconds of rotation, as the required departure turn needs to be performed at 400 feet, at which time the mountain is seconds away.

We noted that most pilots turn a lot earlier than that and very soon after liftoff we could understand why. On commencement of the turn, the first mountain waves hit us and for a few seconds it was a little uncomfortable, then another mountain came too close for comfort. As we continued the turn, the powerful mountain waves and down drafts continued. It was a slight compensation that the view over the bay and beaches was spectacular. We were soon clear and climbing away from the island and the conditions became much smoother, but not without some moderate turbulence on the way to flight levels.

On approach for landing at Hewanorra International (TLPL), we received the ATIS and could see on our Garmin Connect that the weather at the airport had thunderstorms with heavy rain and 25-knot crosswinds on the runway. We slowed down and let the cell move past.

As we approached, it was not an issue and we established on the IAF for RNAV RWY 10; to our left the clouds were on the 3,000-foot granite mountains. We turned left toward the final fix and the wind reports became more favorable; we landed on the very wet runway with a crosswind of 12 knots – well within the Vision Jet's limitations. We were welcomed by Alwyn Harris, the owner of Harris Handling & Logistics Services, and after swift clearance through customs and cool drinks at the FBO, we were invited to the Harris farmhouse for a short welcome.

They had reserved a car from a private vendor; it was old and very well used, but on such short notice it was the best we could get. St Lucia is part of the West Indies and the terrain is mountainous jungle with peaks called Pitons. Pitons is also the name of the local beer, a very good clear fresh lager we enjoyed after the flight.

We were unable to find accommodation at the most luxurious resorts on the island, even at a mere \$2,000 USD a night and situated on a private beach,



Pitons Bay at St. Lucia, with the Pitons on the left.



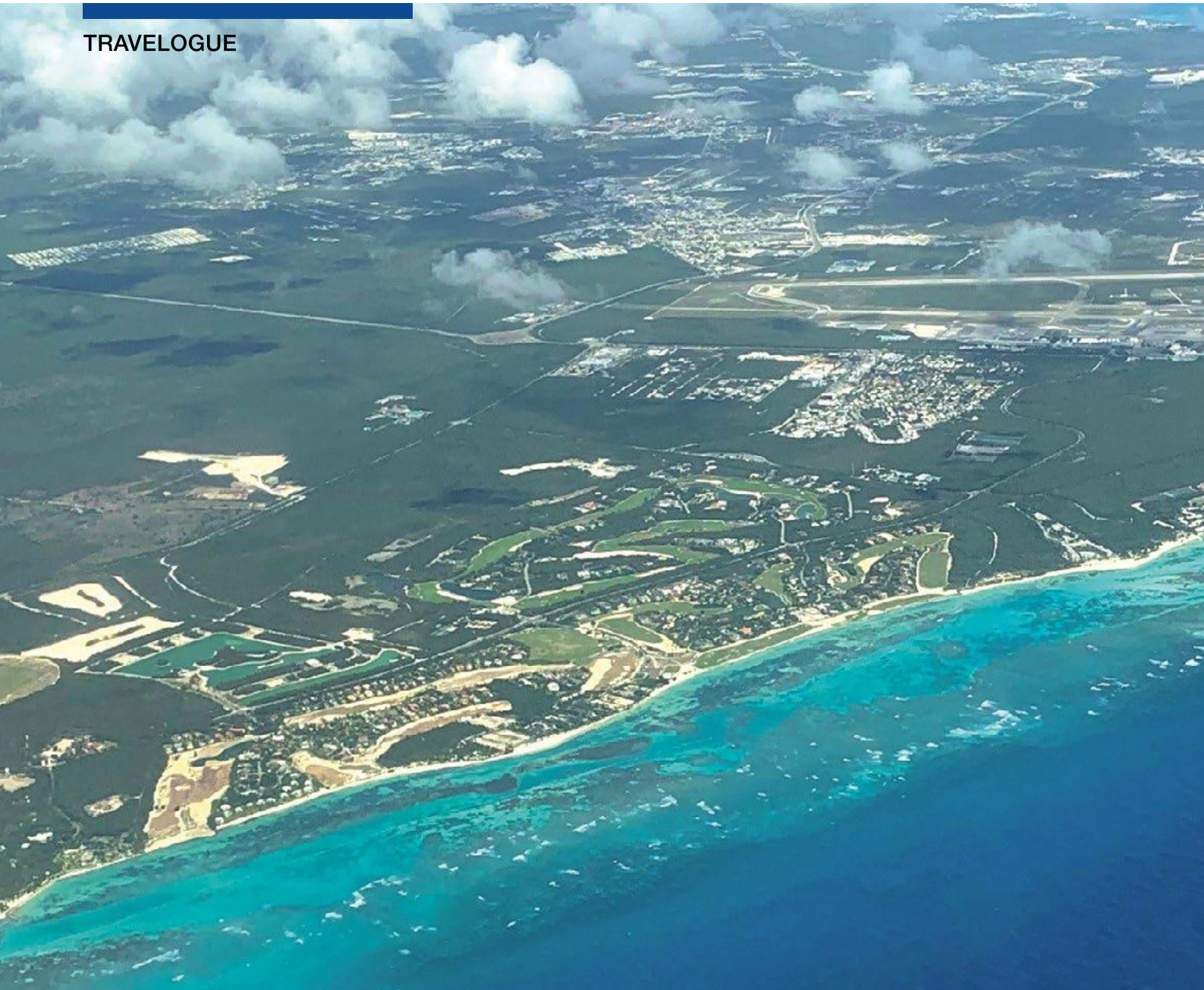
⏪ **Amir, with the FBO crew** at Hewanorra International Airport (TLPL) on St. Lucia, who were very welcoming.

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 steep and winding zig-zagged road, where car sickness is certain. The trip takes a whole day, but the views are spectacular and we enjoyed great interactions with the locals and the villages they live in.

There is a very nice Sandals Resort in Castries, which is the main town of the island. We found out that the resorts are the best place to enjoy the beaches. The accommodation options in St. Lucia are very expensive for the value of money; we opted for a newly built apartment on Rodney Bay. This is the main tourist area full of restaurants, bars, shops and entertainment.

Barbados

Our next island visit was to Barbados (TBPB), located just 95 nm away so there was no requirement to fuel up as we had plenty for the very short 20-minute 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 to work with. ATC immediately cleared us and we climbed to FL150 with nothing but sea the entire way. Barbados appeared on the horizon and it was surprisingly flat in comparison to St. Lucia and St. Maarten.



The FBO and handling agents there are Private Aircraft Services, Inc. which included a new large and modern FBO facility lounge. The staff was phenomenal, friendly and professional, and within minutes we were in a limousine on the way to our hotel. They told us the island has just been declared a federation breaking from the UK by unanimous parliamentary consensus.

Barbados is much more urbanized than our last few destinations and our research had revealed its rich history dating back to the 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, the accommodations were very difficult to find, but at the last minute a room became available at the Hilton. Lucky for us, we were upgraded to a very nice, newly renovated

suite with Caribbean Sea views and a white sand beach. The deep blue color waters were difficult to swim, as the currents were strong. The beach had 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 behavior, 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 flies there regularly.



“ ... pure azure blue waters washing up to fine, white sand beaches ... 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 ... ”

« *On approach to Punta Cana International Airport (MDPC) at the Dominican Republic.*

Dominican Republic

Our next stop was the Dominican Republic (MDPC), a 609 nm trip. Leaving Barbados, we climbed to FL300, flying along the Caribbean chain of islands of St. Lucia and Martinique to our left and Dominica, Montserrat and St. Kitts to our right. We were busy taking photos until we flew over Puerto Rico, where we encountered some very nasty rain clouds; we could feel the powerful pressure in the air as we flew above that weather – it was good to be at FL300.

On our approach to MDPC, we were vectored around the airport, due to weather, until established on IAF for GPS RNAV RWY8. Flagged into the terminal FBO, we were charged \$75 (in cash payments only) for services and it soon became evident that cash was the preferred currency on this island.

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

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

As all good things must come to an end, it was time to depart paradise and head back to the U.S. It was an 800 nm leg back to Miami-Opa Locka Executive Airport (KOPF) to clear customs and continue on our adventure of visiting all the great locations that the United States 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. ⊕