



Dancing with Divers

James Cameron the film director whose credits include Titanic knows a thing or two about ships and the sea. The level of perfection he works to is legendary and he is reported to have completely re-shot several scenes during the making of his films because he was not happy with one small technical aspect. Hardly surprising then is that James when he was choosing his private yacht from which to enjoy his passion for diving choose a hull being built for commercial fisherman and had her fitted out to his own personal requirements.

WRITTEN BY CAPTAIN MICHAEL
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Wind Dancer is now owed by Peter Hughes; another man famous for his passion for diving. He has placed her into his charter fleet and based her in the waters of Tobago in the southern end of the Eastern Caribbean where she is available for diving. White sandy beaches tranquil turquoise water, rain forest, mountain ranges, a continents worth of bird species and a plethora of world class diving sites; what more could an island need? Oh yes, Tobago has got golf courses as well. We have come to this sister island of Trinidad and together these two islands make up a single country that is perhaps the most pros-

perous of independent states in the Caribbean.

It is the crystal sea the majestic corals and playful footballer fish in tropical warm waters that has brought us to this corner of the globe. The waters that caress the shore of Tobago are rich in nutrients swept out to sea by the mighty Orinoco River in Venezuela. This is just what large pelagic fish are seeking, so they flock to the area and add to the enchantment of swimming underwater. These are the waters in which manta rays swim, huge B52 bomber size fish that move with such grace beneath the waves. Here too are sea turtles, hammerhead sharks, tarpon and Barracudas. These plankton rich waters also jumbo size other varieties and even bigger angelfish, trunkfish and parrotfish are bigger here than elsewhere in the Caribbean. This is a treasure chest for divers where visibility is often good as 120 feet and water temperature seldom differs from 80°.

Wind Dancer was built in 1989 she carries 18 passengers in nine double staterooms, her crew of eight are all from the Caribbean basin and clearly enjoy their work looking after guests. Meals are served in her saloon on the main deck above which there is a large and spacious lido deck for sunbathing with an covered section ideally placed for those who prefer not too cook.

We joined her in Scarborough the islands raucous hot and dusty capital. The precipitous little town is no more than an untidy village in reality but is nevertheless an immensely appealing place; with houses and roads spilling higgledy-piggledy down the hillside. Sat the foot of the town, the Atlantic Ocean and on top of a hill overlooking it all: the Fort of King George and its lighthouse dating back to 1762. Scarborough is a working town and it makes little pretension to being anything else and does little to deliberately attract the tourist and of course that in itself is the very attraction to travellers who are intent on watching local life.

It is from here that the ferry to Trinidad comes and goes and despite the frequency with which the event occurs the spectacle always draws the crowds locals and onlookers.

Our departure is less spectacular, for a start it is at 5 am on the morning after our arrival. Wind Dancer sails around the southern tip of the island leaving the Atlantic rollers for the relative calm of the Caribbean leeward side. By breakfast time we are at anchor in Mount Irvine Bay for lunch. We look up at the fabulous homes on the hill and wonder if Harrison Ford is looking down at us from his hill. That afternoon we sail northwards past Plymouth site of the second oldest settlement on the island. It was here that Courlanders from what we know call Latvia came to settle with the Dutch who were at the time settled in Lampsinsburgh the settlement that would change hands and names many times in the wars that followed to eventually become Scarborough.

Tobago has always been the haunt of Pirates. These marauding band of buccaneers would use it as their base from which the organised their attacks an unsuspecting merchantman sailing home fully laden and therefore slowly bound for Europe. They brought their booty back to their lairs in bays that line this coast and their names today bear testimony to their past. Bloody bay, Englishman's bay, Black bay, Man of War Bay and pirates bay. Anchoring in these bays is peacefully blissful. Dusk is a rushed affair passing quickly in to night but not before the parrots have set up their squawking which in turn sets of the monkeys who bicker in the trees until the frogs tell them all to be quiet and listen to some serious croaking. Maybe it is this that coaxes the fireflies to begin their illuminate fire under the star-studded sky. Sit on deck sip sum rum after dinner and drink it all in from a huge glass of experience.





Man of War Bay. The impressive spires plunge down to about 120 feet and offer a multitude of dive combinations depending upon personal skills and sea conditions. Underwater rocks are encrusted with a low-profile reef growth of flattened brain and star coral formations, and a maze of canyons with alpine like slopes. Mantas Rays, not as common as they were a few years ago, are still around and this is a site where they you may see them. This is a dive that repays keeping a good lookout in all directions: look up to get a feel for the enormity of the landscape, look around to spot mantas, eagle rays, barracudas and shark and of course down at the reef for the rich fish life, eels and occasionally a turtle or two.



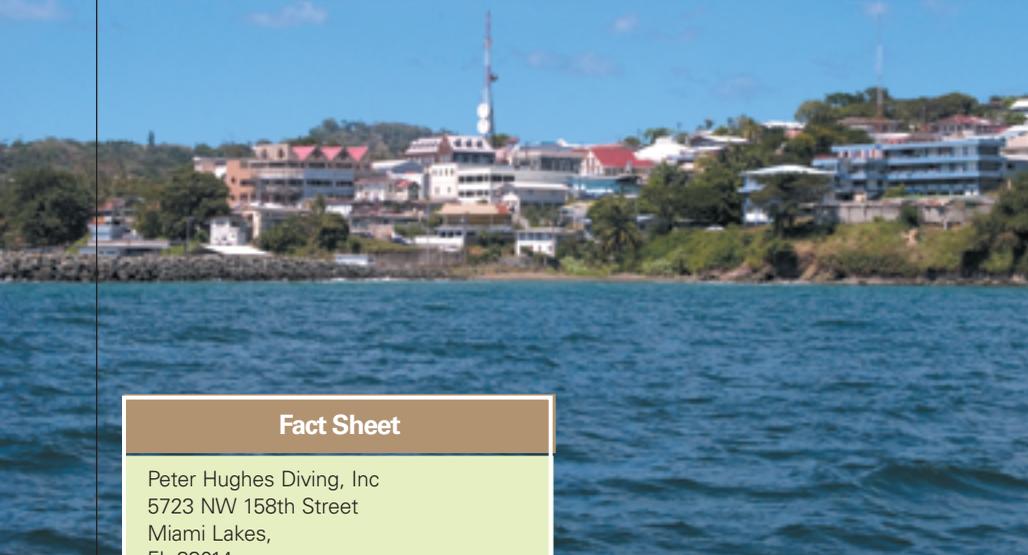
Charlotteville is an unspoilt fishing village set at the head of Man of War Bay. Clusters of local fishing boats called Pirogues bob at anchor their twin out rigging poles looking like the feelers for some prehistoric lobsters. Ashore seine nets hang from the Machaneel trees to dry. More than 60% of the Islands catch comes through Charlotteville and it frequently plays host to fishing competitions. Here the prizes go to Wahoo, Mahi Mahi and King Fish. Blue Marlin are game fish much in demand and there are frequent landings of fish in excess of 350 lbs.

Tobago is an island to enjoy natural beauty and the anchorage of Man of War Bay is a favorite spot. As dusk falls, relax, watch glow worms with an aperitif, listening to the parrots in the rainforest that come to the waters edge. It is from this bay that we dive on the Sisters, a line of five rock pinnacles rising out of the water just one and half miles off the coast south of

Leaving the peaceful anchorage of Pirates bay we sail around the northern tip of the island passing St Giles island and the fabulous rock whose arch resembles and therefore is named after London Bridge. We enter the bay at Speyside through the narrow channel between Goat Island and the main island. Here stands a solitary house said to be were Ian Flemming the author created his character James Bond. Whilst seeking inspiration for a name of his super hero he came across the Caribbean Book of Birds authored by a James Bond and his hunt for a name was over. The book remains today the definitive work on birdlife in the area. Twitchers or bird spotters come from around the globe to visit Goat Island because it is a wildlife sanctuary on an island that sees more varieties of birds than the entire continental block of North America.

We have come to Speyside to dive for it is here in this north east corner of the island where some of the best diving can be found. There are those who rate the sites here as some of the finest in the world. Certainly if there names are anything to go by they all have an exciting and somewhat daunting appeal. The names rattle off the tongue of our dive master as he gives us our briefing. We will visit most if not all of them before we leave and are excited to learn about Caliston Drain, Superman's Flight, Japanese Garden and the Washing Machine to name but a few. At times, the effluence from the Orinoco River is, brought to Tobago by the Guyana Current, and may adversely affect underwater visibility in Tobago. However, it is these same nutrients that provide sustenance to the reefs, giving a wonderful variety of healthy coral, invertebrate and fish life. Diving here can be extremely exciting with wild drift dives and Japanese Gardens is a perfect example. Sometimes this site offers a gentle drift with plenty to see, while at spring tides, it can be a very different wild and thrilling experience. Whatever the time of month Japanese





Fact Sheet

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One day Rain Forest Tour or Bird Watching at various locations. Price US \$55. Per person

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Gardens offers a very rewarding dive. The dive starts at one end of Goat Island swimming over a reef covered with corals and sponges, swarming with sea life, that makes it easy to imagine an oriental garden and explains the name of this dive. As the current picks up it is important to stay close to reef and secure any loose gear. The exciting turn at a depth of 45 feet leads you through a rock passage at high speed, hold your arms out in front like superman and enjoy the closest you will get to flying under water.

The voyage back to Scarborough is along the windward side of the island and there are times when the Atlantic ocean can demonstrate its strength here, but our passage is one of peaceful serenity and we motor southwards towards our destination port. It is not goodbye to Tobago just yet however. The tiny island still has more to offer the inquisitive traveller and even those who enjoy vacations on yachts have been known to venture in land occasionally. Here the opportunity is full of rewards for Tobago has a rainforest that is easily accessible and equally delightful. The Caribbean basin boasts a fair few rainforests. Tobago's tropical rainforest is unique, it has been protected by law since 1776 and is the oldest such protected forest on planet earth. In order to truly understand it and enjoy the experience of walking through to discover what is on offer, it often pays to don a stout pair of rubber boots, arm your self with an umbrella and join a tour lead by a knowledgeable guide. If he has a fund of witty anecdotes and experiences with which he can engage the visitor then so much the better. David Rooks, a lifelong ornithologist and naturalist with 30 years experience is one such fellow. He is perhaps the most experienced and knowledgeable bird and nature guide for birdwatchers and naturalists visiting the island of Tobago in the southern Caribbean Sea. Four times elected President of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalist Club, a prolific speaker

and author of nature articles it has been said of him that "you can learn more in a morning in his company than is possible through any other source." So wide is his subject knowledge, that he was engaged by the BBC Natural History Unit during the filming in Tobago of Sir David Attenborough's "Trials of Life" and "Vampires, Devilbirds and Spirits, the Calypso Isles." He now lives and works in Charlotteville at the edge of Tobago's Main Ridge Forest Reserve. His sightseeing tours can be structured to meet individual desires and he continues to lead regular groups of nature and bird lovers on tours of Tobago taking in the rainforest, The off-shore island sanctuaries and the mangrove swamps and marshes. Those with a love of turtles should visit Tobago in April/May and be prepared to stay up all night watching the truly magical experience of witnessing Leatherback Turtles laying eggs on the beach. 🐢

About the Writer/Photographer

Frances and Michael Howorth are a freelance photo-journalist team who specialize in travel features on the ultra large yacht and boutique cruise ship market. They are regular contributors to Yacht Vacations and Charters and have been traveling together for the last twenty five years initially working aboard cruise liners then as crew aboard luxury private and charter yachts. Their voyages of discovery have taken them to Africa North and South America, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, India and plenty of islands in between with such variety as to include Tristan de Cunha, St Helena and the Maldiv Islands.

Michael is a member of the British Guild of Travel Writers and is a qualified Captain certificated to command large luxury yachts up to 3000 tons. Photographs taken by Frances have featured on the covers of travel magazines and in the pages of the yachting press as well as other quality periodicals. The couple have written several books mostly about yachts, yachting and survival at sea.

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