

Dancing with Divers in TOBAGO

Film director James Cameron, whose credits include Titanic, knows a little something about ships and the sea. In 1989, when Cameron wanted a yacht from which to enjoy his passion for diving, he chose a hull being built for commercial fishermen and had her fitted out to his own personal requirements. Wind Dancer is now owed by Peter Hughes; another man famous for his passion for diving.

Words Et Images © FRANCES AND MICHAEL HOWORTH



Hughes placed *Wind Dancer* into his charter fleet and based her in the waters of Tobago in the southern end of the Eastern Caribbean. Here, she is available for diving charters as she is fit to carry 18 passengers in nine double staterooms, with guests looked after by a crew of eight, all of who are from the Caribbean basin.

Together with sister island Trinidad, Tobago makes up a single country and is perhaps the most prosperous of the independent states in the Caribbean. The crystal sea, majestic coral and abundant fish life have brought us to this corner of the globe, which boasts some of the best diving sites in the world. These are the waters in which manta rays swim; huge B52 bomber-size fish that move with surprising grace beneath the waves. Here too are sea turtles, hammerhead sharks, tarpon and barracudas, not to mention angelfish, trunkfish and parrotfish, all of which seem bigger than elsewhere in the Caribbean. This water is a treasure chest for divers, with visibility often good for a depth of around 36 metres, and water temperature seldom dropping below 27°C.

We joined *Wind Dancer* in Scarborough, the island's raucous, hot and dusty capital. In reality, this precipitous little town is no more than an untidy village but is nevertheless an appealing place; with houses and roads spilling higgledy-piggledy down the hillside. At the foot of the town lies the Atlantic Ocean. On a hill overlooking it all: the Fort of King George, with its lighthouse dating back to 1762. Scarborough is a working town and it makes little pretension to being anything else. This is, of course, what most attracts visitors who enjoy watching local life, sampling new cultures and getting a taste of traditional fare.



You are able to see life differently.

It is part of your style.

56 FLY



Wind Dancer set sail very early on the morning after our embarkation around the southern tip of the island, leaving the Atlantic rollers for the relative calm of the Caribbean leeward side. By midmorning we were at anchor in Mount Irvine Bay, and by afternoon had set sail northwards past Plymouth, the site of the second oldest settlement on the island.

Tobago has always been the haunt of pirates. Marauding bands of buccaneers would use the island as their base, bringing their booty back to lairs in bays whose names bear testimony to their recklessness: Bloody Bay, Englishman's Bay, Black Bay, Man of War Bay and Pirates Bay. Anchoring in these bays nowadays is quite different, with no evidence of this turbulent past. It is peaceful but by no means quiet. Dusk is a rushed affair in the tropics, and passes quickly into night, though not before the parrots have started their evening squawking, which in turn sets off the monkeys, who bicker in the trees until the frogs tell them all to be quiet and listen to some serious croaking. Perhaps it is this that coaxes fireflies from their hiding places and beguiles them to begin their luminous dance under the star-studded sky.

The anchorage in Man of War Bay is a perfect spot from which to enjoy the natural beauty of Tobago. Charlotteville, an unspoilt fishing village, nestles at the head of the bay with clusters of local fishing boats, called Pirogues, bobbing at anchor close to the beach. Ashore, seine nets hang to dry from what seems like each and every manchineel tree, firm evidence of

the importance of fishing in these communities. More than 60 percent of the island's catch is landed here. It is from this beautiful bay that we dived on the Sisters, a line of five rock pinnacles rising out of the water just 2.5 kilometres off the coast, south of the bay.

The impressive spires plunge to a depth of around 36 metres, and offer a multitude of dive combinations depending on 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. Manta rays, though not as common as they were a few years ago, are still seen in this area. This is a dive that rewards the motto to keep 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 sharks; and, of course, look down at the reef for its rich fish life, eels and the occasional turtle or two.

Leaving this serene anchorage we sailed around the northern tip of the island, passing St Giles Island and the rock named London Bridge for its arched formation and the site of yet another excellent dive. We entered the bay at Speyside through the narrow channel between the main island and Goat Island. Some of the Caribbean's best diving is to be found in here, and there are those who rate these sites as some of the finest in the world. At times, the effluence from the Orinoco River is brought to Tobago by the Guiana Current, which may adversely affect

underwater visibility in Tobago. However, it is these same nutrients that provide sustenance to the reefs, supplying a wonderful variety of healthy coral, invertebrate and fish life. Sometimes this site offers a gentle drift with plenty to see, while at spring tide, it can be a very different experience: wild and thrilling.

No matter what time of month, one site in particular – Japanese Gardens – offers a very rewarding dive. The dive starts at one end of Goat Island, swimming over a reef covered with corals and sponges and swarming with sea life, which makes it easy to imagine an oriental garden and reveals the reasoning behind the name of the dive. The exciting turn at a depth of 14 metres leads you through a rock passage at high speed. If you hold your arms out in front of your body like superman, you can enjoy the closest sensation to what it will ever feel like to fly underwater.

We voyaged back to Scarborough along the windward side of the island, where our last evening aboard *Wind Dancer* was made extra special by one of the crew, Roland "CNN" Williams, a talented musician and an excellent dive leader, who gave us a personal concert on his double second steel pan.

White sandy beaches, tranquil turquoise water, lush rain forests, dramatic mountain ranges, numerous bird species and a plethora of world-class diving sites; what more could you need? Peter Hughes is based in Miami Lakes, Florida. For more information and prices, contact Peter on +1 305 669 9391, or email him on dancer@peterhughes.com.

AICON YACHTS COLLECTION

FLYBRIDGE

85

75

64

56

OPEN

82

72

62

Official dealer for South Africa
Wiltel Marine
 1st Floor, Block A, 7 West Quay, West Quay Road,
 Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, Cape Town, 8001
 0860 MARINE (0860 627463)
info@wiltel.co.za

