

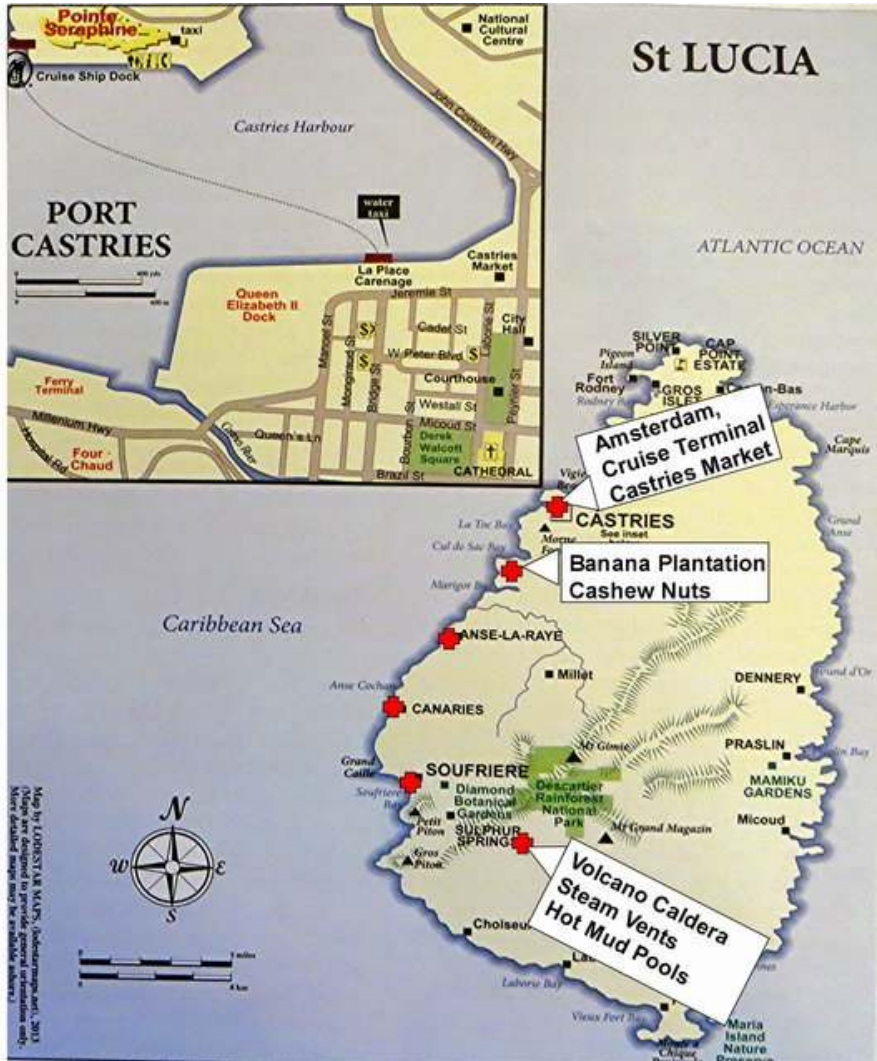
4/27/13 - Day 111 – Castries, St. Lucia–Twin Peaks “Pitons”-Drive-In Volcano: We were sailing up the West Coast of St. Lucia about 8am when we went out on deck and saw the famous twin mountains of the large and small “Pitons” (French for “sharp peak”). The photo below, taken from the Amsterdam, shows the coast line of St. Lucia with the Pitons in the distance. Later in the day we would take a tour over the hills and



valleys to a place near the Pitons.

St. Lucia is a volcanic island that is part of the chain of islands that leads southeast from Cuba in an arc down to South America, as shown in the map on the right.





The island is 27 miles long and 14 miles wide with the Caribbean Sea on the West Coast and the Atlantic Ocean on the East Coast. The island has an independent government but is part of the British Commonwealth, much like Canada. The capital city is Castries which is located in the northern part of the island, as shown in the map on the left. Also shown on the map are some highlights of a tour we would take later, after the Amsterdam had docked in Castries.

As we approached the Castries harbor the small airport for “island hoppers” could be seen as shown on the right. Captain Mercer had mentioned this airport as a point of interest because the ship has to coordinate with the airport control tower during entry and exit from the port. The superstructure of the Amsterdam is high enough to cause a problem for airplanes that may be landing or taking off from the airport.



The Amsterdam sailed into the harbor and docked at the pier shown in the photo on the right. We were happy to see such a clean and colorful cruise ship terminal after the last few ports we have been in.



About 9:30am we left the Amsterdam on this bright and sunny day. The first item on the agenda was to document the visit of Barbara's library card to St. Lucia using an attractive welcome sign, as shown on the left.

We hadn't arranged for any tour of St. Lucia before today. However, Steve had emailed us a picture he had taken on St. Lucia in 2008 and that got us thinking about touring the same part of the island he and Becky had covered back then. We were looking for a tour that would take us south along the coastline of St. Lucia to a volcanic caldera containing hot sulphur springs, as shown in the

map above.

We went into the terminal building where we found several independent tour companies offering various deals. We hooked up with Ed and Louise who were another couple from the Amsterdam looking for a tour down to the volcanic area. We arranged for an enthusiastic driver/guide named Lucus to take the four of us in his van on the desired tour for \$40 USD each. The four of us loaded into the van and we set out on our tour at 10am with plans to return by about 2:30pm.



As we climbed the hill next to the port we passed the Government House, shown on the left. That was the official residence of the Governor who is appointed by the Queen of England. The St. Lucia citizens have a Prime Minister whom is elected by the people.

There were plenty of nice looking homes nestled into the side of the hills, as shown below.



We passed over some hills and then in a valley we came upon a large number of banana plants growing in a field. We had read that 70% of the island's earnings come from export of bananas and this looked like a significant plantation. There were blue plastic bags hanging from each banana plant, as shown on the right. We were curious about the blue bags. Lucas knew something about growing bananas so he stopped the van and we got out for a quick course in growing bananas.



Lucas pointed out the blossom of a banana plant which looks like the purple growth on the plant shown on the left. Young bananas can be seen on the stalk just above the purple blossom.

It turns out that the blue bags were placed on the stalks of maturing bananas to protect them from birds and insects. A banana plant produces a stalk of bananas about 9 months after being planted. Then the old banana plant is cut down and a young banana plant grows from the base of the old plant. The

stalks of bananas mature at different times so different colored ribbons are attached to the bags to indicate when that bunch of bananas should be harvested.



After our lesson in growing bananas we drove on for a few miles when Lucas again brought the van to a halt. This time it was because he had spotted some cashew trees on the side of the road and wanted to show us what cashew nuts look like when still hanging on the tree. We had been shown cashew nut fruit during our visit in Fortaleza but we didn't mind a second look. A cashew nut grows from the base of a soft fruit. At first the nut is almost as large as the soft fruit, as shown on the right, where the nut is growing from the base of the fruit. However, the fruit continues



to grow and, as shown on the left, eventually the fruit is much bigger than the nut. Lucas cut open one of the soft fruits, as shown below. He said some people eat them but he warns his tourist guests that they may have an upset stomach if they eat one.

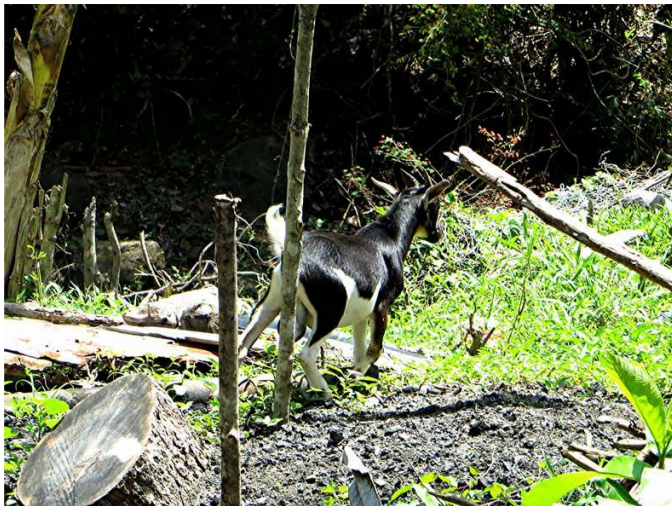


After the cashew nut demonstration we proceeded on our road headed southward.

There were frequent small scale roadside businesses like bars, diner shacks and craft booths selling trinkets. This one on the left was advertising a local beer called Piton, in honor of the twin peaks to the south. Del's Café is shown below.



It appeared that goats were a popular farm animal among the local farmers.





There was evidence that usual household chores, like washing, were being accomplished in the modest houses we passed on the road.

The first village of significance that we came to was Anse-La-Raye. Lucus told us the village name meant “Sting Ray Beach”. A photo of the village is shown below.





At one point Lucas pointed out a calabash tree with calabash fruit growing on it, as shown on the left. We had always thought the hollow gourd-like calabash was from a gourd plant. It turns out the tree fruit has a hard spherical shell and is filled with a soft material that is easily removed to produce a container for water or other liquids used around the home.

Traveling up and down the hills on the narrow twisting road we eventually came to the village of Canaries, as shown on the right.



We came to a wide spot in the road



where we stopped at a roadside “shack” restaurant. There was a demonstration of native cooking underway for some other Amsterdam tourists who had arrived earlier. We got a picture of our friends as they were preparing to sample

the food that had been prepared. They looked busy so we decided to move on. Before we left Lucus identified a couple native fruits that were on display in a tray, as shown on the right. He pointed out the calabash seed pod and



cocoa bean pod. He said the cocoa beans were suspended in a slimy material within the pod. The slimy material had to be washed away to prepare the cocoa bean for further processing.

Now we were moving into a region of rain forest. We started to see giant tree ferns growing alongside the road as shown in the photo on the left and below.



At a roadside viewing area we recognized the twin Piton peaks that we had seen in the photo Steve had sent us from the visit he and Becky made in 2008, as shown on the right. Now here we were in the same vicinity and couldn't pass up the opportunity to get a photo of our own, as shown below.



This was fun to retrace the steps of our kids.

Finally we came to the town of Soufriere. Lucas told us that the name means "sulphur in the air". The name seems appropriate since the nearby sulphur springs in the volcano caldera continuously give off vapors that cover the town when the wind is blowing in the wrong direction. Today we

couldn't smell anything bad as we drove through the town. A view of a street in town is shown on the left, as taken through the windshield of the van.



A short distance south of Soufriere we spotted the road sign directing us off to the Sulphur Springs Park, as shown on the right.

We drove for about a mile and then came to a guard station where we paid \$8 USD each to go into the park and see the sulphur springs. The park fee included a guide who went along with us and explained the history and behavior of the springs.



Our guide explained that hundreds of thousands of years ago there was a large volcano on the spot where we were. At one point the side of the volcano blew out one side, much like the 1980 example of Mt. St. Helen in Washington. As in the case of Mt. St. Helen most of the mountain remained but the caldera was exposed on one side where the mountain had blown away. The missing wall of the volcano is what allowed us to simply

drive in to the caldera today in this “Drive-In” volcano feature on St. Lucia. The volcano is dormant and not extinct. There has been continuous release of sulphurous vapors through all recorded human history and we could smell the sulphur today as we took the tour. Some of the pictures we took of the caldera and the sulphur springs are shown on the left and below.



The photo below shows our touring team of (left to right) Louise, the caldera guide, Barbara and Ed with Orlin taking the picture. The view shows the caldera floor and the gap in the wall of the volcano with the road and guard station in the distance.



We finished our tour of the caldera and the sulphur springs and headed out for the next item of interest which was a nearby waterfall. We drove a few miles and then came to a stop at the Toraille Waterfall.





We paid \$3 USD each at a ticket stand and walked a few hundred feet to the waterfall, as shown in the picture on the left.

We were not very impressed with the waterfall which was about 50 feet high. However, St. Lucia is trying to build their tourism base so the industry is putting everything they have on display.

We finished up our short visit to the waterfall and retraced our route back to Castries. As we neared Castries, Lucus stopped the van and pointed to a feature on the sea shore that we had not seen on our way south this morning.

There was a rock protrusion into the surf that had been penetrated by erosion to the point that a natural bridge was formed, as shown on the right. That seemed more impressive than the waterfall.

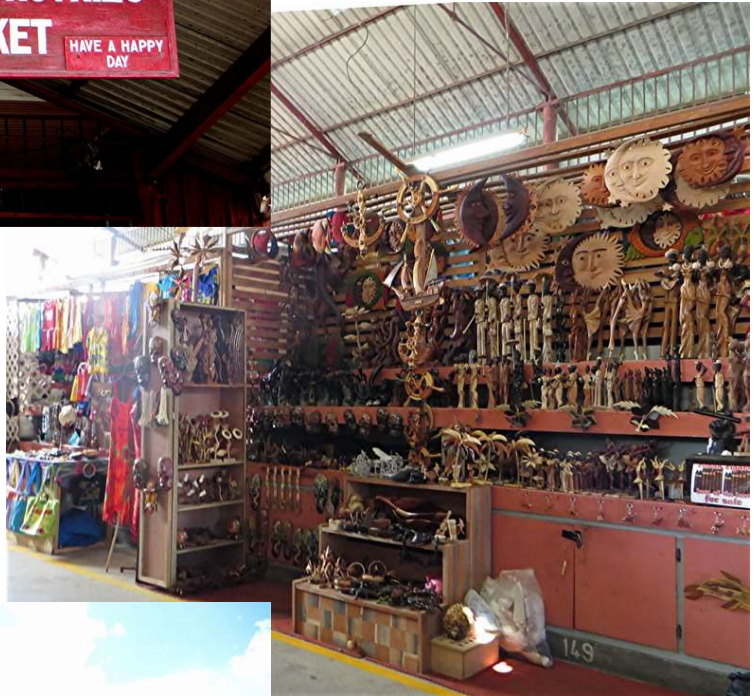


We were driving through the streets of Castries and saw a gasoline station. We wanted to get the cost of gas but there was no posting of the price. We asked Lucus about the price of gasoline and he said it cost \$6.75 USD per gallon. Wow – that would be hard to take on a minimum wage salary!



After we had returned to Castries we said goodbye to Lucas and our new Amsterdam friends, Ed and Louise. Then, before returning to the Amsterdam, we toured the local Central Market that

had a lot on display this Saturday afternoon.



When walking back to the ship we noticed the large letters proclaiming “World Voyage” on the forward superstructure of the Amsterdam, as shown on the right. Today in our last port of call for the World Voyage it seemed appropriate to pause for a moment



and contemplate how fortunate we have been to participate in this venture. We are very thankful for the support we have received from family and friends as well as the staff of the Amsterdam as we explored some old and new places on the globe.

After returning to

the ship we saw a brilliant rainbow, as shown on the left. We took this as a good omen for the future, whatever it may bring.

The Amsterdam got underway at 6pm and sailed slowly out of Castries Harbor. We were bound for Ft. Lauderdale, Florida where we expect to arrive next Wednesday on May 1st, 115 days after starting from the same port.

