

A Non-Cyclist's Experience

Since my husband, Paul, took up cycling I have traveled with him to exciting destinations but none so beautiful and relaxing as Camp Caraib on Guadeloupe.

Winter at our home in Pittsburgh during the early months of 2003 was a cold and ever snowy time. The anticipation of an early March week on the beach could not have come at a better time. We had to look on a map to figure out where Guadeloupe was located but we knew that it was the Caribbean and it would be 85 degrees Fahrenheit there every day. I bought Fodor's Caribbean guide and attempted to read up on Guadeloupe. Everything sounded just perfect for a beach vacation but then there was the matter of learning the French language. We attempted to study on our own but by the time we were ready to leave we hadn't accomplished much and my high school French had long since been just a faded memory.

We had traveled with Velosport Vacations to the 2002 Tour de France so we were fairly confident that although we had a very limited French vocabulary, Velosport would help us get through the language barrier. All the Velosport guides were fluent in French and made it so easy to enjoy our time.

The connecting flight from San Juan was late in arriving in Point-a Pitre so we were unsure about the ground transportation to the resort. Thankfully we met Diego and Christy from Dallas who were on the same plane and in the same predicament so we worked together to find our bus. The driver to our surprise was waiting right outside baggage claim and we boarded the bus for the 45-minute ride to the Resort.

It was midnight by the time we arrived at the Resort. We had been traveling all day and were exhausted. It was such a pleasant surprise when Kathy Gutowsky greeted us and handed me a beautiful flower as welcoming gift. Paul and I checked in and Chris Gutowsky escorted us to our room. Velosport had taken our bags and delivered them to our room so they were waiting for us.

Our room was tastefully decorated with French and Caribbean touches. It had a small kitchenette on the outside balcony complete with a refrigerator, oven and all flatware, dishes, and pots and pans. Velosport had kindly prepared a snack for us so we could eat after our late arrival. After unpacking enough of our luggage to get by the next morning, we collapsed into bed for a sorely needed night's rest.

While Paul woke up at 6:30am the next morning to go cycling, I slept in, woke long enough to eat a little breakfast and then continued my sleeping at the gigantic main pool at the Resort. The sun felt so wonderful and the sea breeze kept it from getting too hot. After what seemed like such a short time (it had actually been 4 hours), Paul tapped me on the shoulder announcing he was back from the day's ride. We walked along the water's edge to a little beachside lunch spot and ordered Panini and baguette sandwiches for lunch. Several of the other Velosport vacationers joined us and we spent almost 2 hours getting to know each other and sharing and laughing about our travel experiences.

After lunch, it was down to the beach. Families and couples dotted the white sand in each direction. It was so beautiful and uncrowded. There was even a bikini fashion show that visited each blanket or beach chair. We strolled the beach back to our room and prepared for dinner at 7 pm.

The restaurant at the resort was a short walk down the hill from our room. Upon entering the main reception area, music and laughter filled the air. An open-air market had been set up in the pool area with local merchants selling jewelry, clothing, swimwear, and other local goods. It was very festive as we met the group in the restaurant and sat together before diving in to the enormous buffet spread. Each night was a different motif for dining, from Cuban cuisine to Italian Night. Dining was always a new adventure during the camp.

While walking back to the room after dinner, Paul and I noted that this was our first night there and we had so much time left on our vacation. For me the next several days we much like the first, relaxing days at the spectacularly beautiful beach and enjoyable evenings with the Velosport group, laughing and recounting stories. We were so privileged to enjoy Frankie Andreu's company during our week. He was so nice and all of us had such a great time with such an honored guest.

On Thursday (the day off from cycling), many of us took the short bus ride into Saint Francois for shopping. The little shops and markets were lined up and one could spend so much time shopping at both the marina and downtown. We had a wonderful lunch with our new "Velo" friends, and even missed some of the shopping as we forgot that the stores close very afternoon for several hours for a midday break. Several of the Velo travelers told us of the fabulous Coconut sorbet that a little local lady sold just up the hill from the hotel, so after we returned from shopping we strolled up to her little trailer and enjoyed the most wonderful sorbet on a warm sunny day.

After another gorgeous day at the beach on Friday, the Velosport group enjoyed a beachside Caribbean barbeque together. By this time we had all gotten to know each other fairly well and the conversation and laughter got louder and louder as the night went on. Everyone got along so well with each other and we developed such camaraderie during the trip. That's what was so interesting and fun. Everyone from all walks of life come together in these trips for the love of cycling and in this vacation's case, great weather and the beach.

On Saturday as the group had its last dinner together before many of us headed back to the states, there was a real sense of sadness that the trip was coming to an end.

I highly recommend Velosport Vacations from a non-cyclists point of view. I know my husband, Paul, tells everyone he knows how great a job they do in caring for the needs of cyclists. Members of their staff couldn't be more knowledgeable, friendly or caring.

We can't wait for Camp Caraib 2004!! Allez!!