

SAINT LUCIA (con't)

III. TRANSPORTATION:

Transportation on the island is mainly by jitneys (reconverted flatbed trucks and small pick-ups to act as buses for as many locals as you can push into the back of one), small privately-owned cars, motorcycles and bicycles. The average islander ten years ago was a menace on the road for not only was the driving convention on the British left-hand side of the road, but the rugged island terrain provided too much of a challenge to the usually uneducated driver who understood little of the rules of the road and sped wildly around the narrow, winding routes. Today, the overall driving skill has improved but the roads off of the main routes haven't.

Travel to and from the island is accomplished by two methods. Locals mainly commute between islands in the Leeward Island chain of the Caribbean via their boats. Grenada, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Vincent are a few of the islands in this chain which sees any two adjacent islands usually not separated by any more than twenty miles. To travel further one takes to the air. St. Lucia has two airports while the Leeward Islands have their own airway called L.I.A.T. which flies mainly old commercial planes like the Convair and Viscount, although others and even DC-3's are used. Many tourists' planes can be seen landing at either airport.

One big problem with operating any type of vehicle on St. Lucia is that of maintenance. Parts for cars may be on order from the Barbados or even as far away as Australia or England. It is little wonder one sees the state of disrepair prevalent with most forms of transportation. The economy is not developed to a point where technology and business is good enough to support the purchase of new planes, cars, etc. every year and hence one often sees old transportation modes run out of necessity and lack of alternatives. The average local also knows next to nothing about how things work — from the car he's driving to a telephone or anything mechanical. Gas on the island is expensive.

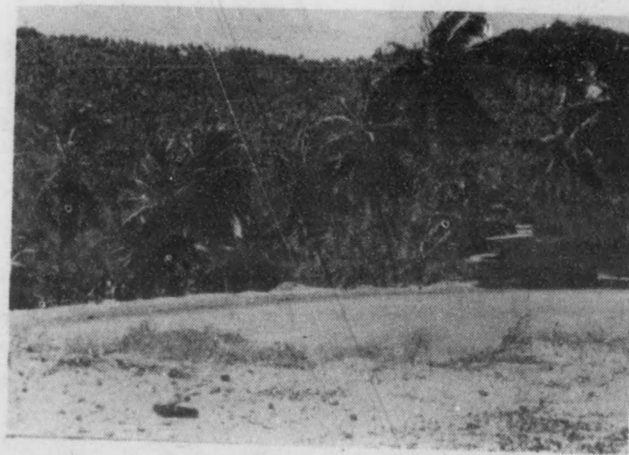
They pay about the same as we pay in Canada for a gallon of gas but they earn far less on the average per day for those who work (unemployment is estimated to run around 40 percent.). A banana plantation worker may earn \$8.00 East Caribbean per day but this is in East Caribbean dollars (which is British) and \$1.00 E.C. is equivalent to \$0.38 U.S.. So you can see gas is expensive to them. A new small foreign car will run them into \$8,000 to \$11,000 E.C. At any rate, the island is beautiful and problems of transportation can be overcome with acceptance of small inconveniences; over-zealous cab drivers abound on the streets of the cities. Cars can be rented for about \$25. U.S. per day. (Terrific little 2-seat Suzuki four-wheel drives can also be rented for about the same price.)



A band-looking band at the official St. Lucia Day Ceremony on December 19th. A confident air of the upcoming independence of the island from England pervaded the Crowd.

IV. POLITICS:

The political climate of the country is a matter of concern. The island is over-populated; there is not enough productivity to raise the standard of living of the average worker; England is exploiting the raw resources of St. Lucia and further exploits via trade agreements to buy finished products from England once they process such raw goods; the local natives are exploited by their own people like plantation owners who are in positions to change this system; finally, the people want independence from Britain. This above statement is for the most part sad. It made me wonder how a people so rich in natural beauty of surroundings and resources could be so poor off economically and politically. Their educational system is inadequate in so far as it does not allow enough emphasis on training the locals to run their own affairs. The average native I talked to wanted the wrong things to copy from the North American lifestyle and learned that it was desirable to do the least amount of work possible to attain this desired end. In downtown Castries I walked by a poorly built house that had a sound system blasting out some calypso songs while its inhabitants sat around in comparative poverty. Such are the paradisaical and harsh realities of a locals' life in St. Lucia.



A narrow turn through coconut country in the interior of the island. The Jitney Bus at night carries as many islanders as can be stuffed into it.

IV. TRAVEL TIPS:

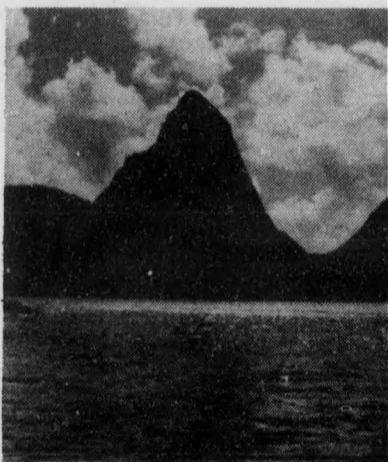
If one were to consider travelling to St. Lucia, the following advice is worth considering especially if you are a student. The best time to go would be at low season sometime in the fall until just before Christmas. This is when the travel packages are cheapest and the climate most pleasant. Transportation and accomodation would be all one would want to buy if you were to go to stay at the Halcyon Sands Hotel near Castries. I would recommend staying near Castries for this is where most tourists go and most things are happening. Castries offers the tourist things to see such as the craft shops, market places, restaurants, grocery stores, airport and beach. Hotel food can be quite expensive and a much better deal can be found at little restaurants such as the "Wicki Up" in Castries Harbour. The main accent of food is Creole and most meats are available curried. Rum is locally produced and cheap to buy. Food at the market is great and goes for a low price for those who are willing to mix with the market-goers, bicker over prices, and run the risk of getting pick-pocketed.

The available tours around the island for tourists can prove to be expensive and a little asking around can probably put you in touch with a local who can provide the same service at a lower price. The night life is not great but often the local hotels will feature evening bars with a steelband for your enjoyment. Natives are good at soliciting money from tourists on beaches in return for their homecrafts but beware of inflated price ranges.

There are certain places which are a must to see if you wish to get a wide range of exposure to the people and the island. They include the Pitons, the sulphur springs, the Holiday Inn, Anse Chastenat, the banana plantations, the Green Parrot Restaurant on Morne Mountain and nearby Perfumery, the Craft Village, Bogshaws, the Still Restaurant, Marigot Bay, and the general area around Castries and Cap Estate. This covers alot of ground and includes many things to see. If you wish to have your own lot and 2-bedroom summer house at Cap Estate, the price would only come to \$29,900 U.S. and would put you in the very posh part of the island. A government-organized cooperation service will also rent your house when you don't use it, making for a very attractive economic venture. Tourists on the island generally come primarily from Britain, Sweden, Germany, the United States and Canada.



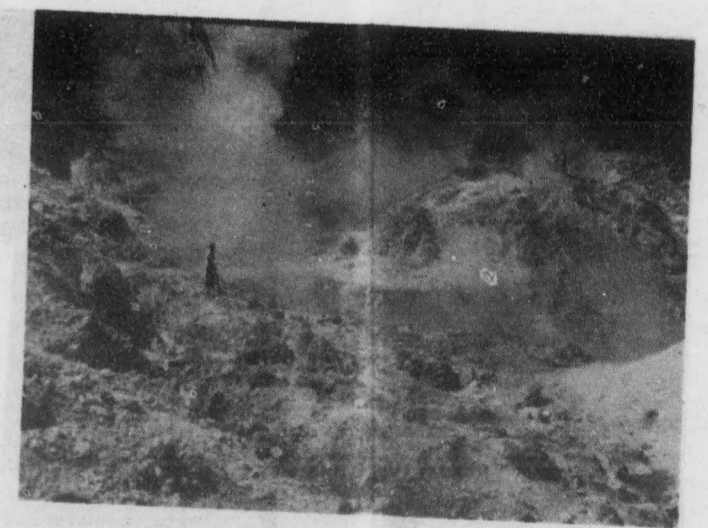
The beach at La Toc, the finest resort on the island, and right next to Castries. The hotel here offers everything included in its price, including snobbery.



The Pitons from our yacht cruising. These twin peaks were navigational.

VI. CONCLUSION:

At any rate, for a holiday on the least spoiled Caribbean island, St. Lucia is a real bargain. The flavor of life in the West Indies is a totally unique style and the climate most favorable. This trip is one never to be forgotten by those who wish to indulge.



This is on the rim of the almost-pure sulfur volcano at Soufriere which steams constantly. Sulfur springs near here were prescribed by Louis XIV for his men with respiratory and other ailments.