

St John 2021

Reefs / Beaches Visited (in order of our visits):

Turner Bay (outside Coconut Coast Villas): Take the gate by the pool and right there is a good entry. You must wear water shoes and put your fins on after you are in the water. It is very rocky but the rocks are smooth, so easy to walk on (with water shoes). The snorkeling is spectacular, photographing and ID'ing 85 life forms of wildlife (mostly fish) in two days. There were many "Octopuses Gardens" and we saw three octopuses, Chain Moray Eel, Top-hat Drum and so much more.

Honeymoon Beach: You park at Caneel and they have a shuttle to take you to Honeymoon. We snorkeled a little there, seeing a stingray. The sand is very soft and lovely. We snorkeled to the right into Little Caneel reef.

Little Caneel: We snorkeled the length of Little Caneel all the way to the beach and back. The cottages 6 – 13 along Little Caneel were undamaged, protected by the tall hillside and island to the south. We were told that they are used for workmen from after the storm and still today.

Gallows Point (both in bay and to the right): It is very easy to get into the water at Gallows, since they have a sturdy aluminum ladder to get in. The snorkeling in the bay in front of the resort is wonderful with many species there. To the right are deep crevasses full of fish. With the resting platform at the bay, it is easy to snorkel, get out to read a while and then snorkel again.

Ramgoat Kay (the southern portion): This is a very wild little Kay with very healthy coral, both stony and soft varieties. The fish population is amazing. We were on a dingy and being 75, it was VERY hard for us to get back in.

Henley Kay (SE tip to the end of the "beach"): This is a few hundred yards NW of Hawksnest beach and was spectacular both in wildlife and corals. There is a small pebble beach, so getting back into the dingy was easy.

Hawksnest Beach: This beach was undamaged even though the buildings there were destroyed. The beach is different, with Turtle Grass covering much of the bay. Yet, we saw no turtles there. The rocks to the left were wonderful with us seeing two lobsters, an octopus and many fish. It is very healthy.

Scott Beach and then Big Caneel: Again, the beach was undamaged even though the buildings there were destroyed. The rock ledge to the right is nearly filled in with sand with few fish there. We saw one Green turtle there (the only one of the trip)

Storm Damage: The high winds must have come in from the SW since Little Caneel and Hawksnest were undamaged and very healthy. Big Caneel faced right into the wind and was utterly destroyed both in the water and on shore. No soft corals survived and most of the stony corals were dead. There is plentiful re-growth going on though with little patches of brain corals, mustard-hill corals and sponges coming back. It will be 20 to 50 years before that reef is beautiful again.

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Places We Stayed:

Coconut Coast Villas (CCV) (<https://coconutcoast.com>). From the roundabout, take the exit that passes the fire station and stay on that road along the car-ferry harbor. The road is VERY bumpy and you will be sure it is the wrong road. It forces you to make a right turn and shortly after that, it T's. Turn left and the CCV is on your left.

The room is nice with all the amenities one needs: Stove, fridge, toaster, dishes and cutlery. The room was very clean and our room ("Ginger Thomas Suit") faced the water with its mesmerizing lapping waves and only ½ flight up. Heavenly. It is not fancy, but neither was Caneel for that matter. The managers (Julie and David) are very nice and very accommodating. We were quite happy there.

Gallows Point Resort (<https://gallowspointresort.com>). Our room was 9D and was an upper level. The room was spacious and very clean with a great view of the bay and the sunset. Next time we will take a lower level to save on the stairs. Our old joints are getting stiff.

Restaurants Visited (in order of our visiting):

"Extra Virgin Bistro" (<https://www.extravirginbistro.com>) (5*). It was amazingly excellent. We shared everything so we could taste as much as possible.

"Uncle Joe's Barbecue" (5*) Always excellent. Big portions, small price.

"18°64° The Restaurant" (5*) in Mongoose junction (www.1864therestaurant.com). The wait staff and food is fabulous and we sat in the gazebo, which is more inviting than the main dining room. We had an excellent steak.

"The Terrace" (<https://www.theterracestjohn.com>) (2*). We did not enjoy our meal and it was very overpriced.

"Morgan's Mango" (<http://www.morgansmango.com>) (5*) and was excellent. Everything was delicious, served in good time and a good value.

"Banana Deck" (<https://www.thebananadeck.com>) (5*), which was wonderful. The service (Kathryn twice and Katy once) was quick and very helpful and friendly. The meals were perfectly prepared and delicious. We ate there three times.

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Fish identifications are done using three guides by Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach titled “Reef Fish”, “Reef Creatures” and “Reef Coral”. Sometimes confirmation includes searching the hypothesized fish in Google images or writing friends. The fish, algae and land animals are identified with a high degree of confidence but the sponges and corals are to a lesser degree. Often algae imbed themselves in sponges, making them green or purple when the base color is brown, for example. Fish sizes are, of course, estimates.

Identification corrections are welcome!

Some hints about seeing lots of different fish while snorkeling:

- If rocky, wear water shoes and use fins that are open in the back with a strap. That way, you can walk on rough rocks to get in the water, prep your mask and then dive forward, kicking to a few feet of water depth. There, put on your fins. Return the same way by removing the fins in the shallow water.
- Snorkel close to shore where the coral and rocks hold so much sea life. To get good photographs you need to be close anyway. The deeper water has stingrays, eagle rays and garden eels, but so much lives in shallow water including the fun stuff like octopus, squid, eels, parrotfish and hundreds of sponges and corals.
- Swim slowly, often simply floating flat on the surface watching. Movement is more easily spotted when going slow.
- If you are able, dive down to look under ledges and hollows. All sorts of interesting fish hide under there.
- Look for the octopus’s garden. If the shells look to be very fresh, the resident may well be in a hole at the base of the garden looking out at you. This would be the Caribbean Reef Octopus since they sleep by day and hunt at night, bringing their meal home to their garden. The Common Octopus hunts during the day and eats where it catches a meal. Finding them on a walk-about is a marvel to see.
- We photographed and identified 174 fish and wildlife in nine days of snorkeling.

Most pictures are shoved through Photoshop where “Auto Levels” (Shift Command L), which removes constant background colors, is performed. I never use color balance or Hue/Saturation alterations. The pictures were then loaded into iPhoto for rotation and cropping, leveling and sometimes changing saturation (but never color changes). The iPhoto “Export/Web page” function was used to build the index sets for the webpage.