

Sint Maarten / St. Martin

St. Maarten was my winter getaway spot for several years.

These photos are drawn from various years, and are organized into sections as follows:

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Introduction St. Ma

St. Maarten sits between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, at the top of a string of islands known as the Lesser Antilles.





Introduction There are no border guards between the French and Dutch parts, just "Welcome" signs.



Introduction Everyone's first St. Maarten story is about the airport. You were flying over the sea and suddenly landed at the beach.



Introduction

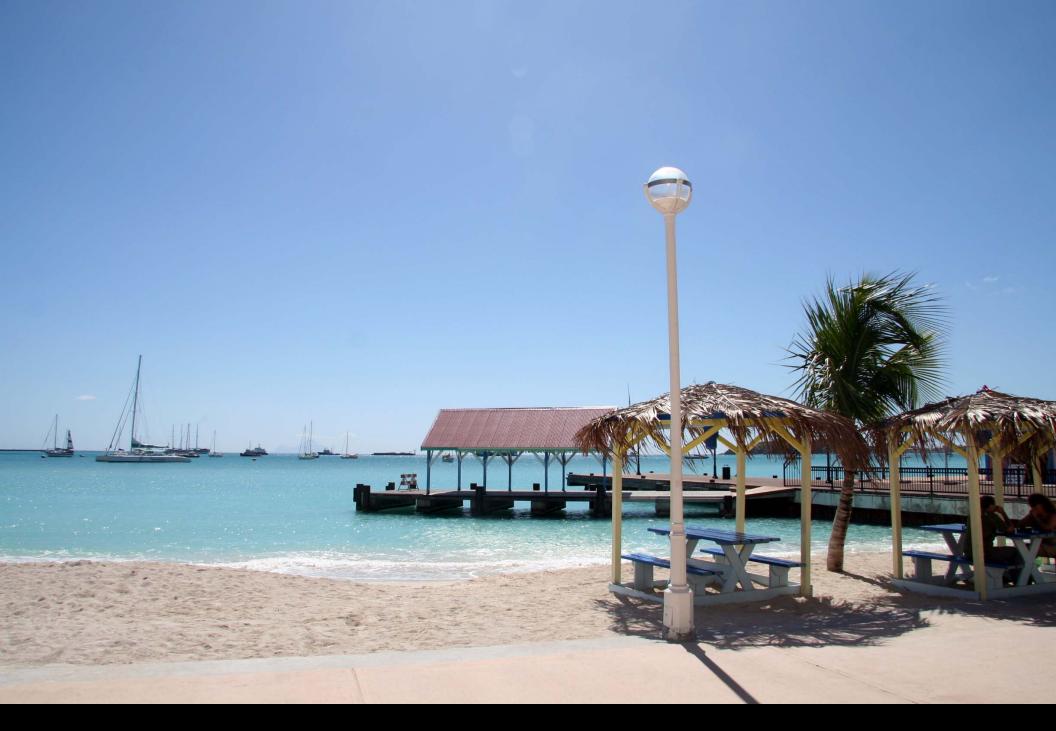
It's even more exciting if you happen to be buzzed by a jumbo jet while sailing past the airport.



Philipsburg – on the island's south-east coast – is the capital of Dutch Sint Maarten, its largest city, and the island's major port.







Philipsburg Great Bay at Philipsburg attracts a wide range of sailing craft.



The Court House was built first in 1792, and rebuilt in 1825 after hurricane damage.



Front Street is a busy shopping zone for cruise ship passengers.



The shops on Front Street specialize in duty-free expensive items.



Philipsburg Fort Amsterdam was built by the Dutch by 1631 to protect Great Bay and Philipsburg.



Philipsburg The Spanish took the island in 1638, but abandoned it. The French and Dutch moved in.



Philipsburg Modern day invaders are delivered by fleets of cruise ships.



New activities have been invented for cruise ship day-trippers.



St. Maarten In A Nutshell: Beach, cruise ships, Heineken (from Holland, of course).



Marigot – on the north coast – is the capital of French Saint Martin. Saint Martin is part of the Guadeloupe overseas region of France.



Marigot Marigot's Marina Fort Louis is the largest on the French side.



Marigot is S

Marigot is Saint Martin's major port and commercial centre.



Marigot Fort Louis was built in 1789 to protect from British privateers based on nearby Anguilla.



Marigot Not much remains of Fort Louis other than a few canons ...



Marigot ... but it offers a fine view of Marigot.



Marigot Les Boucainiers restaurant at Sandy Ground is a pleasant spot for lunch.



Simpson Bay Lagoon Simpson Bay Lagoon is a safe haven for sailboats and megayachts.



Simpson Bay Lagoon Development here launched the island's tourism industry.



Simpson Bay Lagoon

The red roofs in the centre are the Port de Plaisance marina, casino, and resort complex.



Port de Plaisance was home base for 2005, 2006, and 2007.





Hotel lobby building. The limos were just for major casino customers.



Residential buildings, wrapped around the South Marina. The whole complex was superbly designed.



When it was built it must have been a 5-star resort, but without maintenance year after year it has been decaying rapidly. What a waste.



All the traditional resort amenities were included in the design.



Port de

Balcony view in 2006, looking south towards the Simpson Bay Yacht Club Marina.



Looking east from balcony, across Port de Plaisance South Marina.



The Port de Plaisance North Marina accommodates the larger sailing yachts ...



... and some of the larger megayachts.



The South Marina accommodates a stately favourite, *Inspiration*.





Dusk at the North Marina





The Simpson Bay Lagoon hosts dozens of multi-million dollar megayachts.



Ocean-going sailboats are dwarfed by modern day megayachts.



Megayachts Megayachts are at the top of the tourism priority tree.



The largest cost well over \$100 million, and there are over 5,000 on the seas.



The largest megayachts now come with major toys, like sailboats to be deployed for day trips ...



... and helicopters for quick runs to the grocery or wine store – or the casino.



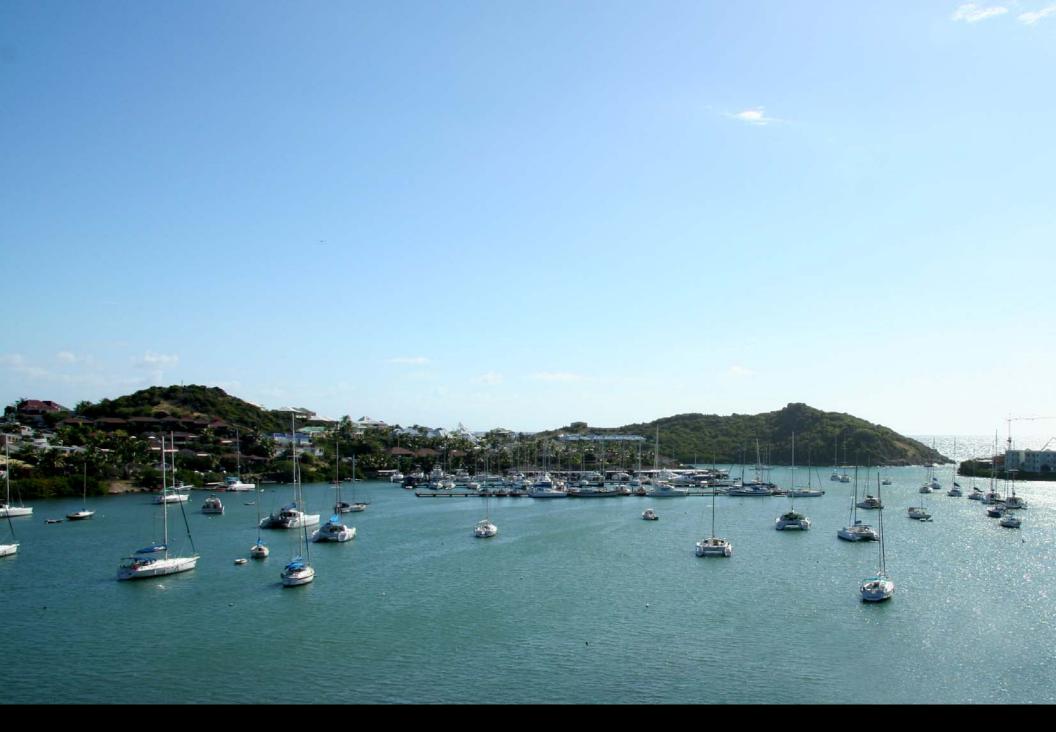
Oyster Pond On the east side of the island – a totally different universe. The community of Oyster Pond straddles the French / Dutch border.



Oyster Pond There are no megayachts here, fewer people (so far), and breathtaking scenery.



Oyster Pond A local riding stable offers trips up the coast.



Oyster Pond The Oyster Pond bay accommodates a marina (centre) and a public dock.



Captain Oliver's is Oyster Pond's marina, restaurant, and resort complex.



Captain Oliver's marina has a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere.



The marina hosts a mixture of sailboats and catamarans.



Many of the resort units have ocean views.



The left side of this duplex was my place in 2008.





The swimming pool boasts an ocean view ...



... and a seaside pool bar.



Captain Oliver's restaurant draws customers from all over the island.



Crab Island Salad makes a great lunch.









Pelicans The pelican becomes a diving missile.









Orient Bay Orient Bay is a park, residential, and beach community north of Oyster Pond.



Orient Bay

The residential community has charm ...



Orient Bay

... but it's the beach that draws the crowds.



Orient Bay The beach at Orient Bay is the busiest on the island.





... and colourful.



But you can do your own thing if you want.



Beach bars rent chairs and umbrellas.



Beach restaurants offer food and atmosphere.



By 2008 many places were offering bargains.



Beach Activities Hobie Cat sailing is the easiest activity to master at Orient Beach.



Parasailing Beach Activities Parasailing looks dramatic, but doesn't require much skill.



Parasailing Beach Activities A boat pulls the parachute sail with enough power and speed to lift the riders to great heights.





Windsurfing Beach Activities Windsurfers attach large plastic sails to modified surfboards to harness the wind's energy.



Windsurfing Beach Activities As with waterskiing, the hardest part is getting up to get started.





KitesurfingBeach Activities

Kitesurfing uses large wind kites and modified wakeboards.



KitesurfingBeach Activities

The large kites are given shape by their inflatable ribs.



KitesurfingBeach Activities

Learning to control kites is not easy ...





Baie d'Embouchure is only one mile south of Orient Beach, but completely different.



The serious water sports enthusiasts are here, but without the commercial development.



Windsurfers find that the wind conditions are more favourable here.



The best kitesurfers are here too.



A local stable offers rides along the largely deserted beach ...



... and the atmosphere is totally laid back.



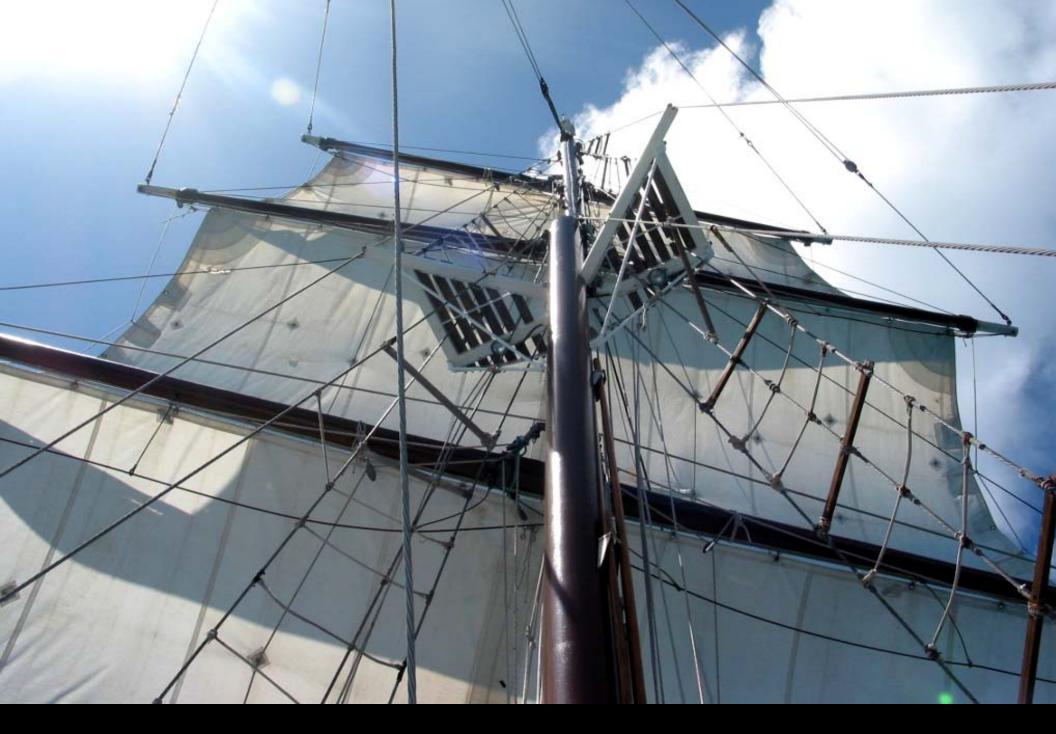
Lord Sheffield (flying the pirate flag) takes visitors for day sails from Philipsburg along the south coast.



Captain Rob, the owner (centre), was formerly with New Brunswick Telephone.



First Mate Veronica climbs up to begin unfurling the sails.



Lord Sheffield is a 72 foot brigantine, with 2 masts and 8 sails, including 3 square sails.



The ship was built in Montreal, and remains under Canadian registry.



We drop anchor opposite the La Samanna resort for some snorkeling.



While on *Sheffield* we encounter "12 Metre Challenge", a simulated America's Cup race for tourists.



The races pit yachts from the 1987 Cup competition against each other.



Tourists pay to crew the ships, and are assigned to vessels and duties.



Lord Sheffield roots for Canada II.



Golden Eagle

Eagle Tours offers day trips around the island on its 76-foot *Golden Eagle* catamarans.



These have 80-foot masts, and sail under canvas when the winds are strong enough.



Golden Eagle The crew is international, from the island, South Africa, the U.S., and Hungary.



Golden Eagle The first stop is for a swim at Tintamarre, a nature preserve island off the north-east corner.



While others swim I grab a photo of a majestic sailing ship anchored nearby.





... one of the most popular snorkeling spots on the island.



We put in for lunch at a beach restaurant at Grand Case.



Golden Eagle Fine restaurants line Grand Case's main street, each with a stunning view of the bay.



As we sail on after lunch one of the mates impresses us with his fishing skills.





Lambada Anguilla Pelican Activities offers day sails to the neighbouring island of Anguilla.



Lambada Anguilla The *Lambada* catamaran's destination was Sandy Island, off the north coast of Anguilla.



Lambada Anguilla What more could you ask for?



ATV Experience One of the activities invented for busloads of cruise ship passengers is ATV tours ...



ATV Experience ... along the highways and back roads of the east side of St. Maarten.



Seaworld Explorer These vessels, operating from Grand Case, have underwater viewing decks 5 feet below the surface.



Seaworld Explorer A diver sent down to feed the fish ...



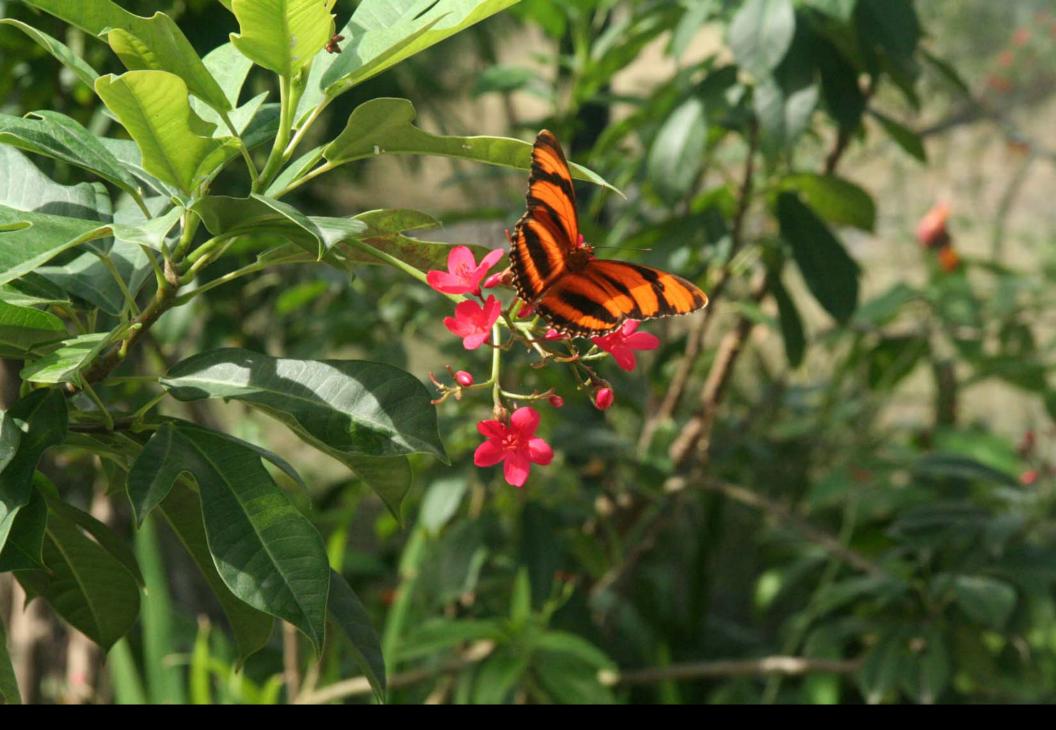
Seaworld Explorer



Near Baie d'Embouchure



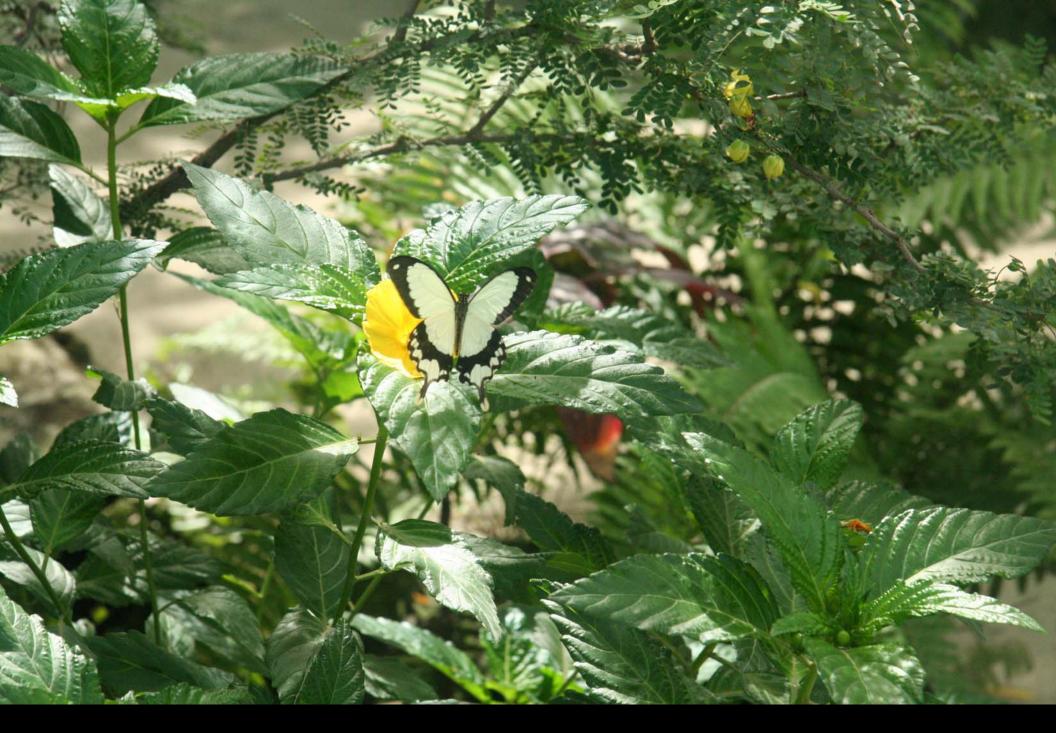
The butterfly "farm" is a huge netted cage.



St. Maarten's climate is ideal for breeding butterflies.



A wide variety of vegetation is required ...



... because each species has its own food requirements and preferences.



This Owl Butterfly is camouflaged in dull colours while at rest ...



but displays brilliant blue wings on top when in flight.

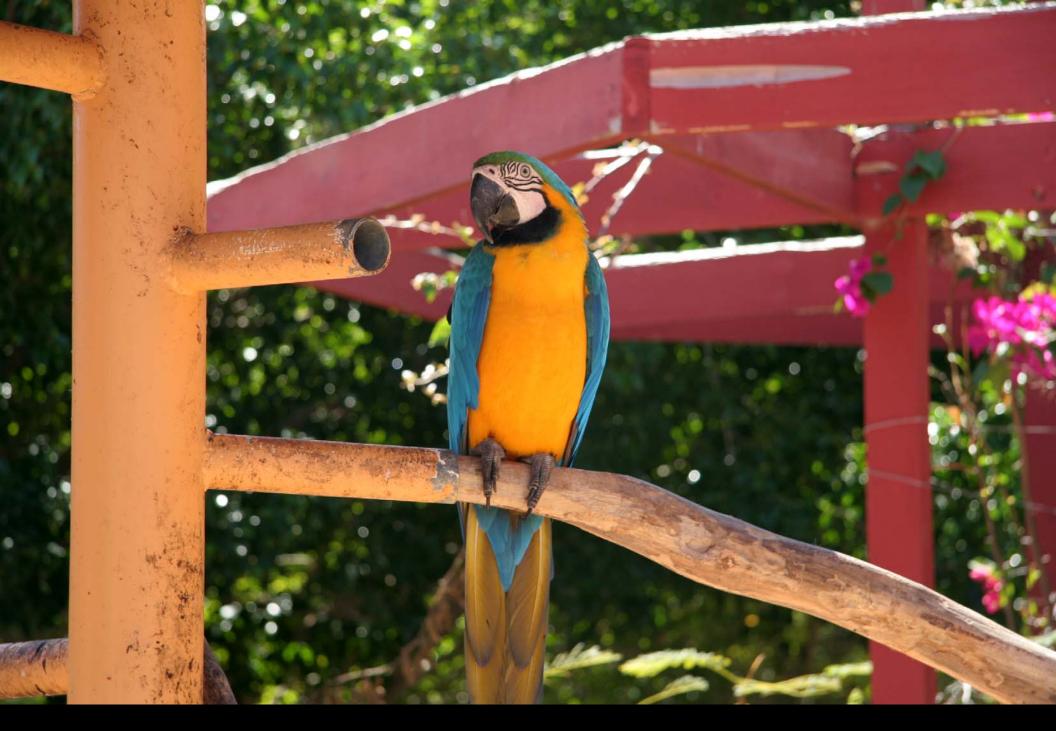


St. Maarten Park St. Maarten Park is a modest little mini-zoo on the outskirts of Philipsburg.



St. Maarten Park

St. Maarten Park specializes in tropical birds.



St. Maarten Park Macaws are the largest members of the parrot family ...



St. Maarten Park

... but there are other parrots here too.



Mont Vernon

Plantation Mont displays aspects of St. Maarten's early days.



Mont Vernon The Manor House was at the heart of a sugar plantation.







Mont Vernon Cotton plantations developed in areas too dry for sugar cane.



Mont Vernon

Indigo dye was extracted from plants grown on plantations.



Mont Vernon

At sugar mills the slaves passed the cane through rollers to extract the juice.



Mont Vernon Molasses recovered from the sugar mills was fermented to produce rum.



Today there is no agriculture in St. Maarten.



The land is hilly and supports only scrub brush and cactuses. There is no manufacturing industry either.



Casinos are St. Maarten's main industry.









Tourist industry development was well advanced on my first visit in 2005, as here at Maho Beach.



New high-rise condo projects underway then ...



...were completed by 2008, as were their Phase 2 extensions, and the Phase 3 projects were underway.



The new St. Maarten Airport terminal can handle over twice as many tourists per year.



The Westin at Dawn Beach is an illustrative case study.



In February 2006 construction of the new Westin resort was underway.





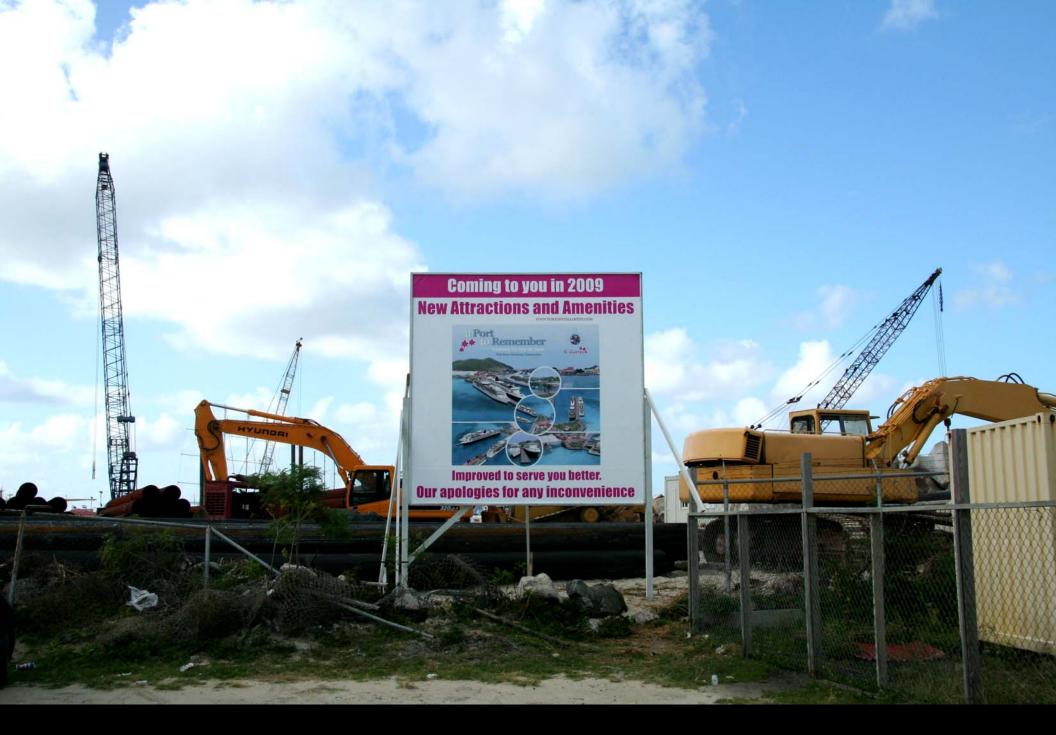
... and it's so big you can barely see the beach any more.



The Westin has 308 guest rooms and banquet facilities for up to 1,000 people.



In 2008 a new condo project was starting up across the road from the Westin.



And in Philipsburg cruise ship capacity was being increased with the addition of a second pier.



Third World?

Despite all the development for tourists, most of St. Maarten lives in relative poverty.

The wild mountain goats seem cute, but they hint at a serious story.



Third World? The wild donkeys are at home in town because in some ways this is still part of the third world.



Third World? Modest native businesses like this pet shop are common.



Third World? Johnny B operates this open-air "restaurant" in his front yard.



Third World? The Baptist Church doesn't have money for fancy signs.



Third World? This "Tire Service" centre also offers Castrol oil changes and car washes.



Third World? This road house isn't a construction site any more. Things just got left this way.



Third World? Abandoned construction projects are common.



Third World? Development and the third world are beginning to clash, and the explosion in the number of automobiles is causing the most obvious early problems.



Third World? Driving here has become uncomfortable. Everyone follows too close, but there's also just too much traffic for the roads, and no infrastructure development.



Third World? This lift bridge is on the two-lane highway that runs around the island and leads to the airport.



Third World? This bridge opens six times a day, every day ...



Third World? ... to let sailboats and yachts in and out of the Simpson Bay Lagoon.



Third World? The result is inevitable, but there are no plans for changes. Traffic jam at Simpson Bay.



Third World? Traffic jam on the only road through Marigot, capital of French Saint Martin.



Third World? Traffic jam on the only road from Marigot to Grand Case. I'm glad I was able to enjoy St. Maarten before runaway development completely destroys its original charm.



Sunsets

An evening sail aboard *Lord Sheffield*. Sailing along the south shore gives the best views of sunsets.













Sunsets

Sunset over the Port de Plaisance marina.



Sunsets Despite its problems, for me this remains the best of the Caribbean.



< End >

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St. Maarten's Island Neighbours are in a separate file.