

# Sint Maarten vs Bermuda

(written Jan 2008, edited Jan 2009)

These islands make an interesting contrast.

## **Bermuda**

Bermuda is lovely. The white roofs and general prevalence of a common architecture give it a visual unity and rhythm. The many upscale homes have invested in extensive landscaping but the natural vegetation (or introduced vegetation) is also pleasing (if formidable) to look at.

Even a hillside of modest homes is attractive:



There are many many scenic views; the most spectacular have been captured on postcards. Here is a modest one not yet on postcards—it is a new wing on an existing 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist church.



Bermuda has a cultural life—the art museum in City Hall had a first rate exhibit-- and a great sense of tradition and pride in its history, apparent to even the casual visitor. As a World Heritage Site, the town of St. Georges does an excellent job of preserving original architecture. The Christmas tour of lived-in homes in buildings dating to early 1700's was really interesting.



### St. Maarten

In contrast, there is Simpson Bay, the boating center of Sint Maarten (Dutch side of St. Martin). Anchorage for boats whose combined net worth is in the hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars, it is scruffy and raw. There are no sidewalks or streetlights – you pick your way over puddles and litter, inches from gridlocked traffic. Here are two scenes taken within a block of the Lagoon that capture the general feeling, if not the gridlock.

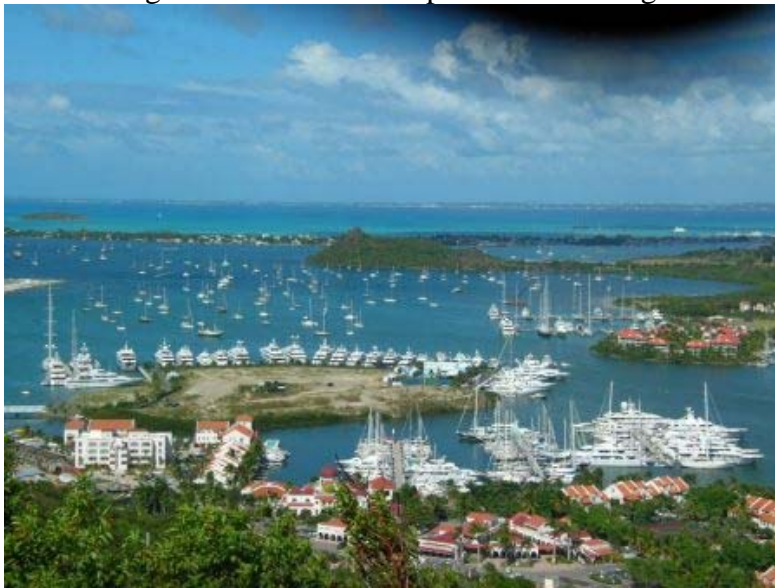


There is a frenzy of building going on in Simpson Bay with little evidence of planning or requirements. Below left is a whole new section of beach hotel going up on the bay. Note behind it (upper right) the arched windows of a previously built “beach front” development. Now for most of the previous buyers, their ocean view consists of the back of the new hotel (right). The moral in this, I suppose, is to be *very* careful when buying time shares in St. Martin.





Even more disturbing is the sense that the place is becoming irretrievably polluted. Here is the



lagoon:

Now think about this: there is NO pump-out facility in the entire lagoon for all these boats and no sewage system for the town of Simpson Bay (see top picture again). Obviously one does not swim in Simpson Lagoon. Fortunately it does not smell. . . yet. Flow-through in the lagoon is provided only by two relatively small openings.

Worse, in environmental terms, there does not appear to be a facility for disposal of all the discarded engine oil that these hundreds of boats generate. You simply fling plastic containers filled with used oil into ordinary garbage bins. Late correction: apparently Budget Marine does have a bin for waste oil and the mega-yacht facilities also handle boat waste responsibly. So the situation is not completely out of control. A government committee has been organized to “study the situation.”

**However** the funny thing is this: Bermuda is staid, smug, and self-absorbed. Simpson Bay is dynamic and alive. It may illustrate third-world capitalism at its worst, be crass and have no sense of history or culture, but it has lively radio stations, a really good newspaper and lively music in the beach bars. In Bermuda, you almost never find news of the outer world in the paper or on radio (I can't speak about TV, having had no access to it except in bars) but the St. Maarten paper has good coverage of regional and international news. In its entrepreneurial free-for-all, it is easy to find almost any item or service a boater or visitor would need.

Bermuda does one thing that I wish all these islands did: it strictly limits the number and size of cars on the island. Every household is allowed one car and that car must meet size requirements. American cars need not apply. In contrast, St. Maarten (and the Virgin Islands) are cursed with large American cars, trucks and god help us, SUVs. And at rush hour, surprise!! they experience grid-lock.