



■ Blue seas beat on the palm-fringed sands of Martinique—one of the islands awaiting Reina del Mar. Picture: Air France.

islands then became Trinidad, Antigua, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Barbados in that order.

There is a romantic appeal about the very idea of the Caribbean and the magical islands that make up the West Indies. The names conjure up mental pictures of blue seas and a burning sky, of surf breaking on palm-fringed beaches, of colourful scenes and colourful people; of calypsos and steel bands and exciting rhythms. The islands' past also catches the imagination; most of us have a sort of folk-memory evoking pictures of the Spanish Main; of laden galleons and pirates careening their craft at some island lair:

*"Spanish waters, Spanish waters, you are ringing in my ears,*

*Like a slow sweet piece of music from the grey forgotten years."*

Less romantic but with more relevance to the present day is the development of the islands through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the establishment of sugar plantations, bringing with it the introduction of the negro slaves whose descendants make up the majority of the present population; and their part in the power struggle between England and France, resulting in some islands changing hands several times.

The remarkable thing is that so much of what we imagine about the Caribbean area really does seem to be true. In spite of the luxury hotels, swim pools and other evidences of tourism that have invaded the

islands in varying degrees, the essential beauties of scene and atmosphere remain to a large extent untouched. The islands the *Reina Del Mar* will visit all have certain things in common—sunshine and beaches and exuberant tropical colour—and each has its own particular appeal.

In Trinidad, the southernmost of the islands, where we make our first landfall at Port of Spain with its population of a dozen different racial origins, there are trips to the famous pitch lake, source of the world's supply of natural asphalt, and to the Caroni reserve, home of vast flocks of scarlet ibis.

Antigua, we are told, has 365 beaches, some of which will undoubtedly be visited by *Reina Del Mar* passengers. Apart from its beaches, Antigua has a major attraction in Nelson's Dockyard at English Harbour, where more than anywhere else in the West Indies the spirit of Britain's imperial past lingers pervasively. Here the tall wooden ships of George III's navy came in to victual and refit, and the physical setting of the harbour has changed little since then.

Guadeloupe and Martinique, our next two islands, are both French and share the same Gallic charms in their way of life, including, it need hardly be said, superb Creole dishes and French cuisine. In both the traditional music is that of the haunting beguine, rather than the more exuberant rhythms of the other islands. Scenically they differ considerably. Guadeloupe is in

fact two islands, linked by a narrow neck of land. One, Grand Terre (in which is situated the principal town, Pointe-à-Pitre, where *Reina Del Mar* will dock) is an undulating area of sugar plantations and beaches, including the beach of St. Anne, one of the finest in the Caribbean. The other, Basse Terre, is more mountainous, with spectacular scenery, including the dormant volcano of La Soufriere.

Spectacular mountain scenery and luxuriant vegetation are typical of Martinique, which possesses, too, its own volcanoes. One of them, now fortunately dormant, as recently as 1902 destroyed the entire town of St. Pierre. Like its neighbours, Martinique played its part in the bloody confrontations of the eighteenth century. One of its contributions to history was in bringing into the world the beautiful Creole girl who married Napoleon Bonaparte and became the Empress Josephine; her birthplace at Trois Îlets, across the bay from Fort de France, where *Reina Del Mar* will anchor, can be visited by cruise passengers. As it happened, Napoleon was not the only martial character to find a wife in this part of the world; it was in the West Indies that Nelson met and married the unfortunate lady whom he was later to forsake for the more flamboyant charms of Emma Hamilton.

Finally, we come to Barbados, famous for

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