

← Seat By Matthew Dorrell Sale →

Kick-Boxing in Antigua — Part I



St. John, patron saint of bad towns with boring names (or is it boring towns with bad names?), is as inexplicably popular in Antigua as he is in the Maritimes. Thankfully, St. John's, the capital of Antigua, bears no resemblance to any other similarly named city I've been to.

Antigua has more beaches than I've seen anywhere. Popular beach activities include scuba diving, sunburning one's cleavage and slipping ever further into alcoholism. If you like the idea of scuba diving in waters that might also contain sharks, barracuda, manta rays, moray eels, etc., I wish you the best of luck. Not that you'd need it — an average of only three people a year are killed scuba diving. Nonetheless, I decided to stick to the land.

St. John's, because it is almost exclusively a tourist trap, and because the entire island was for the longest time a British colony (used for growing sugar cane), there isn't much in the way of authentic local colour — the whole town suffers somewhat from

Disneyfication. So it is that there are restaurants/bars named The Admiral's Inn, Chez Pascal, Chutney's, the Crazy Horse Saloon, O'Grady's Pub and Kentucky Fried Chicken (two locations!). Strangely, there is also a Bank of Nova Scotia, a Royal Bank of Canada and a Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC). Encouraging to see that Canadians can launder drug money with the best of them.

Having been in St. John's for two days, I decided to spend the morning before the kick-boxing tournament interviewing locals and tourists to see exactly how popular the tournament was. By noon, I was beginning to wonder whether there really was any such tournament — no one knew anything about it. Few people in Antigua (much like the rest of the world) know much about kick-boxing. Being a former British colony, they do know cricket. Prospects of a successful kick-boxing tournament seemed slim, as it would be competing with a veteran's cricket match (think old-timers hockey game). What made this cricket match special was that Viv Richards, Antigua's most famous sports hero, also known as the "Master Blaster" (honestly, I wouldn't make that up), would be playing.

Later in the day I managed to find a group of kick-boxing enthusiasts loitering at a local gym. Some of them had traveled from Antigua's sister island, Barbuda, to watch home-town favourite, Ama Omowale, compete. From them I learned that the men's portion of the tournament was to be canceled due to a death resulting from a bout in the last tournament held on the Caribbean tour. Apparently, one of the boxers from the ever-powerful Thailand contingent had — in violation of the international kick-boxing rules — kned his opponent in

the head and killed him. Though it wasn't clear how much of the story and its details were exaggeration or pure fantasy — was he killed instantly, or did he die in hospital some hours later? — all present were certain of the cancellation of the men's section of the tournament. The women's tournament, however, was to continue.

The hotel I was staying at experienced a drought of sorts that evening, not an uncommon circumstance apparently. Fresh water is not particularly abundant to begin with — a problem which is furthered by the clear cutting of trees for farming which causes rainwater to be lost to runoff and occasionally also leads to mudslides, albeit minor ones as the landscape is relatively flat.

This was of little concern to me. The pool was full of water, as I was of liquor, and beyond this little troubled me. After all, tomorrow I would be ringside for an all-female

kick-boxing tournament.

Next Issue: Much about kick-boxing, and women who kick people upside the head. A camera is stolen and a travel columnist discovers that being splattered with blood is not cool, no matter how attractive the combatants who produced the blood might be.



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