



Welcome to Rott's Manor

Pete & Mary Clukey

Punta Cana, Dominican Republic Trip Report

August 31, 2006 – September 6, 2006

Thursday, 8/31

The flight was delayed due to a mechanical problem... We watched the mechanics working on our plane, looked like a leaky window seal around the co-pilots window. Delta found us another plane, so we had to change gates. We were almost 45 minutes late departing Atlanta.

We arrived in Punta Cana, paid \$10 each for our tourist cards that we needed to get through immigration/customs. Found our checked bags so we were happy that they made the plane change too. Funny, we told ourselves that this would be a light luggage trip, then we decided to bring our dive gear and well, we showed up like we were moving into the country not just visiting for 6 nights.

Right outside of baggage claim, we were assisted with our luggage all of 15 feet to the Coco Tours counter. Mary asked the baggage handler to assist us with the luggage all the way to the van. Since there was no turning down the "help" outside of baggage claim Mary was going to make him work for his \$1 a bag tip. From there we had a bit of a longer walk out across a bumpy parking lot to the transport van but at least we didn't have to fight with the luggage.

The transport from the airport to the resort took about 30 - 45 minutes. We enjoyed talking with a couple from NY that was sharing the ride with us.

We arrived at our resort (RIU Naiboa) around 3pm. Too late for lunch and we were hungry, so we asked where we might find something to eat. But first we had to get to our room and change into shorts. The room was nice enough. Housekeeping had decorated the towels with a few red hibiscus flowers. It was on the third floor and had a balcony overlooking the jungle. One thing we noticed was that the shower massager was missing its attachment "socket" on the wall bar. We decided to talk to the front desk about that right after finding the snack bar.

We ate just enough to hold us over to dinner... at check in we were told that there were two available dinner times 6:30 and 8:30. The earlier seating means that we would have to leave the beach early to shower and dress, so we're thinking we'll take the 8:30 seating.

After our snack, we ask the front desk about the shower massager. Instead of sending up a repairman, they give us a set of keys to another room to check out. This room (#2223) is on the second floor overlooking the pool and has a plate of fresh chilled fruit. Everything seems in working order. We notice a section of the ceiling over the tub where the paint has bubbled, looks like an old leak in ceiling, but there is no water leaking right now and no moldy smell, so we decide the room will work for us – we move all of us stuff into our new room.

It's now well after 4 pm (closer to 5 pm) and we haven't even seen the beach yet. We take a leisurely walk down the resorts "Caribbean Street" on our way to the beach. Caribbean Street is lined with little shops; jewelry, paintings, photo processing, etc. At the beach we are met by an "activities" staff member who wants to help us pick out excursions. We tell him not right now.

We stroll down the gorgeous beach enjoying the powdery white sand lined with tall coconut palm trees with plenty of lounge chairs, and beautiful blue/green water... and the contrasting red rusted shipwreck that is sticking out of the water just off-shore.

Just down the beach from Caribbean Street we find the SCUBA shop. Mary's not sure about diving here, if the dive leader doesn't speak English well enough for us to communicate a possible emergency we won't go diving here. So, we were very pleased to meet Bud who speaks English very well. He spends about 30 minutes talking to us about the available dive packages and the sights that he recommends around the island. He tells us that he will be taking a dive out tomorrow afternoon to the shipwreck just off-shore. We didn't plan on finding the dive shop today, so we didn't bring our dive logs or c-card. "No problem" Bud says, I'll sign you up for tomorrow afternoon's dive just stop by tomorrow morning with your c-card and payment. It's well after 5 pm and the shop is closed but Bud is not rushing us. He's happy to stay around to answer any questions that we have.

We leave Bud, and stroll back up the beach towards Caribbean Street. Everyone on the beach is packing up for the day and heading back towards their room. It's Thursday and all along Caribbean Street local merchants are setting up temporary shops made from palm fronds. We stop and look at some paintings. Mary asked the guy selling the paintings which one he painted; he said he didn't paint any of them. So, we didn't buy any of them.

Back at our hotel we changed into swim suits and took a quick dip in the pool. It's getting dark early here, around 7 pm, so we go back to our room to read a little and watch a little TV before dinner.

It's about this time that Mary discovered a problem with her hair-dyer... The GFI plug will not fit into the round wall socket (you have to see the picture). Pete has no problem with his razor; it doesn't have a big blocky GFI plug. So, Mary goes down to the front desk to borrow a hair-dryer.

We were told that we had to "dress" for dinner. No shorts, long pants for men, sun dresses for women, etc. Yuck, we're on vacation. But we dress and go down around 8:30; the doors don't open until around 9 pm apparently we're on a "summer" schedule that has later dinner hours.

Dinner is a buffet with lots of variety. We get an assigned table for the week. Our waiter refills our glasses. Mary is in love with their mango juice. Even though this is an all you can drink resort, we refrain from alcohol tonight because we are diving tomorrow. During dinner we notice that there are very few Americans at this resort. We hear French, German, and Spanish, but no English.

After dinner we go back to our room and gather our things for tomorrow.

Friday, 9/1

We're on vacation... we sleep late and miss breakfast while we were getting ready for the day. At 10:30 we go to the snack shack for continental breakfast. Then we were off to the beach.

Our first stop is at the dive shop to pay for our dive package. While standing in line, Bud comes over to talk to us. After we pay, Bud takes us around back to sign the waivers and try on the BCD's that

we will be renting. Before we know it, there is no time for lounging on the beach. We have just enough time to grab a quick light lunch, and then back to the room to get our dive gear. We have to be at the dive shop at 12:45 to suit up.

We assemble our own gear. Mary's 1st tank was too low, only 1000psi. So, she switched tanks. Soon we were suited up and wearing our gear down the beach to the dive boat. We were at the wreck by 2 pm (having to pick up divers at the other RIU properties).

The dive was difficult (for us)... lots of surge that we're not use to. Visibility was 30 feet. The wreck was neat. We both were using up the air in our tank fast. Maneuvering around the wreck with the surge was "fun". The marine life & coral were OK. Bud checked on us often and pointed out fish of interest. We made it around to the prop of the wreck and Mary was getting low on air (still plenty of air for the required safety stop). Getting back into the boat was challenging. And all the way back Mary was dreading the walk back up the beach. Luckily we had a little time to rest on the dive boat as they dropped off the other divers that had joined us. After the "hike" up the beach Mary barely had enough energy to put her gear away. We decided to fill out our log books later. Bud said that he'd be there 'til 6 pm.

Our first stop was the snack shack on the beach for some much needed water to drink. Pete offered to lug the SCUBA gear back to the room while Mary located some beach lounge chairs in the shade. We spent the remaining afternoon hours lounging in the shade reading our books and watching the beach activities. We enjoyed this so, much that we forgot about getting our log books signed off by Bud.

Saturday, 9/2

This is a "relaxing beach" vacation. So, we do not set any alarms and sleep late – missing again the morning breakfast. Once we wake up, we grab our books and head straight for the beach. On the way we stop for continental breakfast.

One of the first things we do is track down Bud to get our SCUBA log books signed off and stamped. Then we settle into comfortable lounge chairs on the beach under the shade of coconut palm trees.

The snack shack by the beach has some pretty decent pizza that Mary really enjoyed for lunch today. Pete really enjoyed their chocolate ice cream with chocolate sprinkles. Today is the first day that we sample the drinking part of our all-inclusive package (since we aren't diving today or tomorrow). Mary gets a "Bahama Mama" very tasty, but if there is any rum in it she can't tell. Pete tries the local beer; it's not dark enough for him.

We decided that the leak in the bathroom ceiling is enough of an annoyance that we want to switch rooms, again. So at 1pm we go to the front desk to see what is available. We must have looked at 5 different rooms, before we settled on room 2234 overlooking the pool... it had a minor leaky bathtub faucet but we can put up with that.

After moving our stuff to our new room, we're off to the beach again. Pete tried to get a catamaran or sailboat this afternoon, but they were all booked up. So, he got a reservation for a catamaran on Sunday.

Then we had enough beach time and went exploring the RIU resort complex. There are six hotels in this complex; RIU Naiboa, RIU Melao, RIU Bambu, RIU Taino, RIU Palace Punta Cana, & RIU Palace Macao. We're allowed to use the facilities at four of them. The more expensive "Palace"

facilities are off limits in the package that we bought, so we are not allowed to visit them. Each hotel has at least one pool and we take time to swim in one of the pools at RIU Bambu.

This resort has so much going on all the time. There are games going on in the pools during the day time and at night they have shows. After dinner we watched the pre-show show. Tonight the host is asking for six non-Spanish speaking volunteers to come up on the stage. Once he has his victims, I mean contestants, the host teaches them a skit/tongue twister in Spanish. It was quite funny to sit in the back of the show room watch these poor guys try to learn this. We didn't stay for the show because the theater became quite smoky (if we go to this resort complex again, we will go watch the shows at the open air theater at the RIU Bambu complex).

So, we go back to our room to watch a movie. Since Mary has missed the morning Spanish classes offered here, she uses night time television as her Spanish lessons. Some of the channels have movies in English with Spanish subtitles and other channels are only in Spanish. Pete enjoyed the "home shopping" show in Spanish when they were selling a flexible ladder.

Sunday, 9/3

Sunday Pete got up early to make dinner reservations at the a-la-carte restaurant. Mary slept a little bit longer than when Pete didn't come back for a while she got up and started to get herself ready for the day. Pete decided that while he was down at the restaurant that he would have some breakfast. Well, when he came back, Mary was ready for some breakfast. So, we grabbed our "beach" stuff and went down to the restaurant. Pete enjoyed some juice while Mary ate her breakfast. With full stomachs, we were off to the beach.

Uh oh, yellow flag is flying over the beach which means some beach activities cancelled. The wind is too much for them to let the catamarans and sail boats go out today. So much for this mornings sailing reservation.

Today we brought our snorkel gear with us to the beach. We started at the left side of the swimming area. At first all we saw was a lot of sand, but as we made our way towards the far right side of the swimming area we began to see some fish then some rocks, coral, and a lot more fish. It was definitely worth bringing the gear down. We saw some long skinny fish with blue needle noses. We asked at the dive shop what they were but no one seemed to know.

Late afternoon, we headed back to our room to clean up for tonight's dinner... we actually have to dress up for dinner at the a-la-carte steakhouse restaurant. In our room we found a mess. One of the Pepsi's in our mini-fridge had frozen and exploded. So, Mary went down to the front desk (gee we hope they don't make us change rooms again) to ask them to send some one up to clean up the mess. While we waited for housekeeping, we sat on our balcony drinking a cold beer and watching the pool activities.

We strolled down Caribbean Street to get to the steakhouse, and suddenly the sky just opened up in a tropical downpour. We quickly dove under the protective awning of one of the shops on Caribbean Street to wait it out. We walked into the restaurant just slightly soaked. When we were asked smoking or non-smoking a little alarm went off in Mary's head (in the buffet restaurant there isn't any smoking allowed). This restaurant is small, looks like an old church; there is no way that even if you are in the non-smoking section you won't smell smoke. Well, we're here so we sit in the non-smoking section and hope for the best. Mary was already suspicious of this restaurant given that they online reviews were pretty sad. Right away we were brought a platter of fried vegetables as an appetizer that was followed up with a cup of tomato soup... so far everything is pretty tasty. Mary ordered the

mixed grill (beef, chicken, & pork). It was a huge platter of food. About the time that the main course arrived Pete got a surprised... maybe stunned is a better word... look on his face... and then Mary saw it. A RAT sprinted across the dining room. This was a very fast rat, Speedy Gonzales fast. OK, this is in a jungle setting and the doors are opened for ventilation, but it was a shock to everyone including the wait staff (so this must not be a regular occurrence). Well, we travel so that we may have new experiences and memories that will last a lifetime... this is an event that we will remember for a long time. Up until that point dinner had been really good and plentiful, we were already quite full so we said that we were going to skip desert tonight. We really needed to get back to the room and pack up our dive gear for tomorrow's excursion. We watched a little TV while we packed and then called it an early night... tomorrow will be an early day.

Monday, 9/4

The alarms go off at 5:30 am (what are we doing, we're on vacation). Today is our all day (6:30 am – 6:30 pm) trip to Catalina Island for SCUBA diving. We've been told it is the best diving in Dominican Republic.

We get to the pick up location and Bud our dive leader from the shipwreck dive isn't there. There are two dive leaders there that we haven't yet met. Mary carries on a conversation with them to check their English... it's fine, so all is a go for today's excursion. We find out that there will be 20 divers & 4 dive leaders on today's tour.

We board the bus, it goes to 4 or 5 different stops before were off to Catalina. Somewhere along the way, we both nodded off, Bud got on the bus. Maybe Bud will be our leader again. The ride from our resort to the dive boat takes just over two hours.

Just about a ½ an hour before we get to the dive boat, the dive leaders go to each of the divers to give a briefing and we hear Bud tell the snorkelers that he will be leading them... bummer. Emiliano will be our dive leader. He gives us a slip of paper telling us where to sit when we get on the catamaran. We're sitting right up front... no briefing, other than "assemble your gear as soon as we get on board, it's about a 20 minute boat ride to the first dive site".

The bus arrives and everyone grabs their gear and hauls it down quite a few steps to the waiting catamaran. Pete is already dreading the return up the stairs with heavy the heavy gear bag that will be mach heavier with wet wetsuits.

Once on board, Emiliano gives us more of a briefing... we will be the only divers that he will be guiding – yeah, we're getting a private tour! During our briefing Marco, the video photographer, records us.

Shortly the boat arrives and anchors at the first site. We thought that since we were up front that we would be the last in the water since usually divers enter the water from the rear of the boat... not so; this boat was set up so that divers could enter from both sides, front, and rear. The first in the water was Marco, then Emiliano, and then with a giant stride we entered the water. It was nice to have it all to ourselves for a few minutes. Marco filmed our descent... we saw a lot of Marco during these dives.

The first dive was a wall dive, it's deep but our dive plan has us at the 50' level. The light is good and visibility couldn't be better. There were lots of sea fans, coral, sponges, and a variety of fish. Emiliano checked on us often. He pointed out lots of stuff. On the way back to the boat, he showed Mary a flounder that was hiding in the sand, all she could see was his two eyes sticking up. During our safety stop, Emiliano made rings of bubbles in the water. Pete tried to copy him. Back on the

boat, we filled out our dive logs, got our briefing for the next dive at the aquarium, and enjoyed some refreshments served by the crew.

The aquarium is a beautiful reef, lots of sea fans, coral, sponges, and a variety of fish. We followed Emiliano as he pointed out more stuff. Then from the back of the pack we heard a diver signaling, so we all turned around to see what was going on. They had found a sea horse. Everyone got a good look at the sea horse. And then we were off again looking for more stuff. Emiliano tried to coax a little moray eel out of his hiding spot, but the eel had enough of the noisy divers and stayed hidden. Soon Emiliano had us back under the boat. He checked our air levels, we had plenty of air. So, Emiliano found a sea urchin for us to hold or rather he set it in our hands and the little creature sucked onto us. During the safety stop Emiliano made bubble rings again. He signaled Mary to try it... are you kidding Mary doesn't waste air like that yet... maybe next time. Pete tries again but can't quite get them to form perfect circles. Back on the boat and we're off to Catalina Island for lunch.

It took just a few minutes to get from the last dive site to the island for lunch. But first we have to get from the pier to where the lunch has been set up past the vendors. The vendors lined up at the dock. One gave Mary a shell necklace and Pete a carved sea turtle necklace. The vendor gave us a flyer for his shop. Lunch was BBQ chicken and some pasta salads. It was a good lunch... the vendors waited just outside the food tent to whisk the divers/snorkelers away to their shops just as soon as they were done eating... we took our time... and the vendors waited. Soon we were done and the vendor came over to us, Mary was tired and told him perhaps after her nap she would look at his shop. Marco came over to show us the video. We were amazed with the clarity and he really did get some neat shots of us. So, we bought the DVD. After lunch, we barely had enough time to run around and take a few pictures before it was time to get back on the boat for the return trip.

On the way back, the boat crew entertained us with their dancing. It should have taken only 30 – 45 minutes to get back to the boat dock, but there was a big ship coming out of the channel that we had to wait for. While we were packing up our gear, Mary suggested paying one of the crew to haul the heavy bag up the stairs. When we got docked, Emiliano tapped one of the crew on the shoulder and pointed to our bag. Without hesitation this guy grabbed our big heavy clumsy bag and carried it up the staircase... well worth a \$5 tip, so that Pete didn't have a pulled back muscle.

Soon we were back on the bus for the 2 hour journey to the resorts. Ah, but we hadn't had a shopping stop yet. So, like clockwork the bus pulled into a souvenir shop for a 10 minute bathroom break. That's not so bad, in Mexico the bathroom break was almost an hour.

Back at our resort we had just enough time to rinse out the gear, put the wetsuits on the balcony to dry, and get ready for dinner. Mary thought dinner was particularly good this evening.

Tuesday, 9/5

Today is our last full day here. Today we have to check with Coco Tours, the tour company that provides the transport to the airport, to get our departure time. So, we got up early enough to eat breakfast in the dining room. After breakfast we went to the tour desk, but no one was there. We checked at the front lobby and they said that someone will be at the desk between 4 and 6 pm.

We grabbed our books and our dive logs (we still needed to get our pages from yesterday's dives stamped), and headed off to the beach. First order of business, we went to make a reservation for a Hobie cat (catamaran). Pete secured an 11 am reservation. That gave us just enough time to lounge back in a beach chair and do a little reading.

At 11:00 we went down to get our Hobie cat, it was broken. We were told that they will have it fixed soon. We rebooked the Hobie cat for 1 pm. With that done, we went to the dive shop to get our dive log pages stamped then we were off to get a snack.

We still had some time to kill, so we went off exploring the resorts. At one of the pools in the Bambu complex Emiliano was helping with a dive class and Marco was there filming them. We were hot, so we jumped into the pool for a refreshing swim.

At one o'clock we finally got to take out a Hobie cat. Pete takes us out for a close look at the wreck of the Astron. On the way back from the shipwreck, a resort employee in a motor boat comes up to us to tell us that we're not suppose to be out as far as we are... we should stay in front of the resort closer to shore. What fun is that!?!?! During this "discussion" Pete narrowly missed and exposed coral head. We stayed out on the Hobie cat for the full hour. Pete had it surfing a few times... that was a lot of fun.

After returning the Hobie cat, we went back to our room to drop off our dive log books and to pick up our snorkel gear. We ate a late lunch in the main restaurant before heading back to the beach.

We finished off the afternoon with a snorkel from the beach right in front of the resort complex. We swam out to the rocky area of the swimming zone all the while Mary is looking for those long nosed skinny fish. We did see a lot of fish but not one long nosed skinny fish. On the way back in Mary made a comment to Pete that she hadn't seen any of those fish, and just as she finished her statement, a school of them swam by... one of these days we'll get an identification book with all the Caribbean fish in it and we will know what these fish are.

Soon the day was almost over and we headed back to our room to drop off the gear, before hunting down the Coco Tours operator to find out our departure time tomorrow. With gear stowed we headed down to the lobby. We found the tour operator but their main office was closed, and they have the information that we need. So, we will have to check with them again in the morning. We spent about an hour talking with him about life in the Dominican Republic and in the USA. We found most of the people that we met from the D.R. to be very friendly and welcoming. It was a real treat to spend time with them.

It was time to get cleaned up for dinner. Dinner tonight was pretty good. We thought about going over to Bambu to watch the nightly show, but after packing we were pretty tired. So, we called it a night.

Wednesday, 9/6

The alarms go off and we got up and started to get ready to go down for breakfast. While Pete was in the shower, Mary got a call from Coco Tours telling us the departure time... 11:30 AM. We have just enough time for breakfast and maybe a little time for the beach. It was raining on and off this morning but we still managed to get two hours of beach time in without a drop of rain. It was quiet on the beach this morning, just the morning crew raking the seaweed up off the beach. They groom the beach daily.

The time goes by quickly and soon we had to go back to our room. We were all packed up, checked out and in the lobby ready to catch our airport shuttle at 11:30 AM. The driver arrived around 11:45. We were at the airport with plenty of time or so we thought. The line was long and Delta's check-in counter appeared to be exceptionally slow. Just as we made it to the front of the line, their computer system goes down! It took about 20 minutes before it was back up, we got checked in and then were

directed to the security screening area... another long line. Finally, through security and were in the gate area. For such a small airport they do have a nice facility. They even have food vendors. Mary is one who does not pass up an opportunity to grab a snack (you never know what flight delays or other adventures that you'll run into). So, Mary enjoyed one more piece of D.R. pizza. Pete suggested that Mary toss a piece of her pizza crust down for a little bird. She does and kills time trying to get a picture of it... all the pictures come out blurry.

Pretty soon boarding for our flight was called. We were lined up and walked out onto the tarmac, no gangway here. We expected to have to pay departure tax of \$20 each, but it was never collected. The flight back was uneventful. Pete had a great time taking pictures. He got a great picture of the Punta Cana resort area and several of Turks & Caicos as we flew over. He even managed to get a picture of a full circle rainbow. We landed in Atlanta just slightly late, cleared customs, picked up our checked luggage, and thus ended another great vacation.