



# ANTIGUA SAILING WEEK

Opening party with local rising star Asher Otto

by Eric Vohr  
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If you love sailing, sailboats and racing, there are few regattas that can match Antigua Sailing Week. This year marked the 50<sup>th</sup> edition of the event, which attracted some of the world's most impressive racing yachts, all vying for the coveted Lord Nelson Trophy.

I participated in a number of races, and I have to say, watching a Farr 115, Swan 82, Grand Mistral 80, Open 60, Whitbread 60 and two Volvo 60s duke it out for position at the start of the CSA Ocean Class was awe-inspiring. But it's not just the mega-yachts that make this event so fantastic, it's the sheer variety and levels of boats participating. Sure you've got your well-heeled yacht owners with professional crews, but you also have an equal share of scrappy sailors on Melges 24s, J 105s and other smaller boats. In fact, this year it was the Melges 32 *Lazy Dog* that captured the Lord Nelson Trophy.

Sailing Week even has a bareboat

class, where companies like Sunsail and Dream Yacht Charter rent out race-equipped boats for those who don't own a boat but still want to play. You can also put your name on the Sailing Week crew web page that lists boats that are short-handed.

I raced on two boats owned by very nice folks I had never met before. One of those boat owners even asked me if I wanted to race with him to Bermuda for the America's Cup after Sailing Week was over. That was hard to pass up, but I had other obligations.



Skipper/owner Jim Hightower checks out the competition on *Hot Ticket*

There are plenty of ways to get in on Sailing Week, even if you don't feel like competing. Many watch the race from the bar and restaurant Shirley Heights, a restored former naval lookout and gun battery that sits on a mountain high above English Harbour.

While up there, be sure to take a walk down through the vast ruins of the naval complex that once commanded the entire ridge between the Shirley Heights lookout and Dow's Hill Interpretation Center.

You can also partake in the endless stream of beach parties, concerts, award ceremonies and lay-day events going on all week long in and around Nelson's Dockyard. One of the best of these is the Opening Party. This year they featured a mouth-watering seafood barbeque, delicious local rum tastings and entertainment by rising local star and singer Asher Otto.

If you need a break from the crowds around the race, Antigua has endless



Betty's Hope

beautiful beaches and other attractions. I explored the island with a local tour guide named Cleo Henry. Her family has operated island tours for generations, and she knows every inch of Antigua and its history.

One of my excursions with Cleo took me to the far eastern point of the island to a natural limestone formation called Devil's Bridge that was carved out by the rough Atlantic Sea. While I was out there, we were treated

to a wonderful and colorful local kite contest that attracted a huge crowd of all ages.

On our drives around the island, we passed a number of old stone towers that Cleo told me were windmills for the many sugarcane plantation that once dominated the landscape. One of the best preserved and restored of these is at Betty's Hope Sugarcane Plantation, also worth a visit.

There is no shortage of nice resorts



Liquid beating it in 16 knots of breeze on the upwind leg



Diving off of Antigua's Atlantic coast; view of the entrance of English Harbour from the restaurant at The Inn at English Harbour



on the island. One of my favorite spots close to Nelson's Dockyard is the elegant and peaceful Inn at English Harbour, which caters to more of an adult crowd. For a more family-centered experience, nearby Carlisle Bay has a wide selection of watersports and a little more action.

On the Caribbean side, I liked Cocos Hotel and Hermitage Bay, both are small and intimate, but come in at different price points. On the Atlantic side, Nonsuch Bay Resort offers a big fleet of sailboats of all sizes for guests to enjoy, which makes it perfect for sailors. Nonsuch also has a top-notch kite surfing school called 40 Knots.

If you like to dive, St. James's Club and Villas has one of the best dive operations on the island, Mamora Bay Divers. There's also a good dive company on Jolly Beach near Coco's called Jolly Dive.

Before you hop on that plane head-



Sunset at St. James's Club; boat off the Caribbean coast seen from Cocos Hotel

ing home, you should also check out neighboring Barbuda. There is a boutique eco-resort called Barbuda Belle that is as close to heaven as you'll find anywhere. The resort sits on a remote stretch of pink and white sand beaches miles from civilization, surrounded by cerulean seas and endless mangroves that are home to a huge frigate bird colony.

There are a lot of regattas around world, but with Antigua's rich naval history and amazing natural beauty, it's one of the best. Sailing Week wrapped up the sailing season here, next up is Antigua's Super Yacht Challenge in February 2018. See you there? **BWS**

*Eric Vohr and Michaela Urban have a travel website at [www.travelintense.com](http://www.travelintense.com)*

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