



## The Best of Both Worlds e3 in Mallorca and Antigua

As I write this, it's early December. Last week I was in Mallorca, and this week I am in Antigua for Charter Week. Throughout November, yachts have been leaving Palma in droves for their winter charter and cruising pastures. And here in Antigua they are arriving daily. All the docks are full at the moment for the Show, with the largest collection of yachts seen here for ten years, almost all of which are well over 40m. More than 100 yachts are booked into the Show, and it appears clear that Antigua has successfully claimed the Show back from St Maarten, which only had about 20 yachts in their show this year. By all accounts the contrast is vast, which bodes well for Antigua next year, as this is the final year that MYBA will be involved with St Maarten.

Last night, the Welcome Party for Charter Week was held with the dramatic backdrop of Nelson's Dockyard. E3 was honoured once again to be the main sponsors for this event, and during the evening I had the opportunity to talk with Paul Deeth, Chairman of the Show, and Ann Marie Martin, Director of the National Parks. Both were surprised and delighted by the success of the Show this year, especially considering the problems which occurred in Antigua last winter with the lack of yachts due to the recession, the Stanford fraud and the tragic murder of Drew Gollan. A considerable amount of hard work has been put in over the intervening period to improve security, to improve the immigration process, and to shorten customs clearances on imported goods. Since we re-opened our office here for the season, we have immediately seen the benefits in all these areas.

For a number of years we had been considering the idea of opening an e3 office in the Caribbean or the US. In fact, we came very close to opening in Fort Lauderdale in 2001. However, after 9/11, we put the idea on the back burner for a while, waiting to see what happened with the world. Our focus then moved to St Maarten, but we were not happy with the options there, despite many people telling us that St Maarten was "the place to be" as you could get things done easier and faster. Then, three years ago at the Monaco Show, the then Antiguan Minister for Tourism, the Hon. Harold Lovell, asked to meet me. He got straight to the point and told me that they would like e3 to open an office in Antigua, as they needed our services there to do Sea Tel TVRO conversions and VSAT conversions at the start of the season, and to attract yachts to land in Antigua at the start of their Caribbean season. He also said he had heard we were thinking about opening in St Maarten and he wanted to make it clear that, anything St Maarten had to offer, Antigua would be prepared to match. I was very impressed, both by his offer, and by how well-briefed he was on the yachting scene. At the same time, I also met Ann Marie Martin and Paul Deeth, and we decided to examine this interesting opportunity seriously.

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After various visits and negotiations, we opened for business a year ago in a charming office in the Officers' Quarters in Nelson's Dockyard. I can't say it was easy, and it has cost us money to date. It takes a long time to get things done in Antigua, but absolutely every promise we were made has been fulfilled. Work permits have been made available for all our technicians to work in Antigua throughout the season. (I hasten to add that this service has not been reciprocated for our Antiguan staff to come to work and gain experience in Mallorca). We now have a fast track for shipments arriving through the notorious customs bottleneck, and we can sell duty free. In addition, we have obviously been through everything involved in setting up business here, from banking, accounting and legal services, through to communications technology, supplies, cars, insurance, etc.

Changes have taken place in Antigua. Minister Lovell's party won a second term last year, and he is now deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. Mr Ambrose is the new Comptroller of Customs. An Act went through Cabinet 6 months ago which will turn English and Falmouth Harbours into nautical duty free zones, although I think this will take some time to come to fruition due to the "black hole" left by Stanford.

We at e3 took a calculated risk when we opened up here in Antigua last year, and on a few occasions, I wondered whether we had backed the right horse. These doubts have now been firmly dispelled, as we re-open for business for another year, and hit the ground running. In these times of recession, when no-one can afford to be complacent, it works for us to see our clients leave Palma and other European ports at the end of the Med season, and then be ready to welcome them when they arrive in Antigua for the Caribbean season. And obviously, this works in reverse in the spring. It's the best of both worlds!

If anyone from either island would like any advice in either direction, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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