



WHY HAWKSBILL KEEPS REPEATING ON YOU! By Karen Stone

People often ask me why do you keep returning to the same place time after time when there is the whole world to discover and explore?

This is a question which is impossible to answer or quantify, because, quite simply put, Hawksbill is not just a place, a series of buildings it is also a feeling; it rejuvenates and renews the soul and quite simply brings back what I call 'The Joy' in your life!

I have just returned from another visit in February 2009 with my Mum, Wendy Lloyd from Hawksbill and quite frankly I am pretty cross and unsettled!

Why am I cross and unsettled?

Because the Hawksbill 'Magic' has gripped me again and I need to go back immediately.

The Staff at Hawksbill make you so genuinely welcome, with their smiles hugs and dedication to us 'their family' that it makes this Hotel the best place to stay in Antigua! Oh there are other numerous Hotels that are maybe more luxurious with all the trappings of hedonism that holidaymakers seem to enjoy but with their highly polished floors, stiff formality you could be in any Hotel with a nice beach on any Island.

I first came to Hawksbill in Xmas 1998 with my husband Mike, son Tom and Parents Wendy and Richard Lloyd.

Mum and Dad had been coming since 1987 at different times of the year. They would come to rest, soak up the sun and rum, make friends, join friends and sometimes take in the odd Test Match as both had/have the love of cricket in their bones. They threw themselves into the daily routine of the hotel, with my Dad wandering into the kitchen to chat with the 'ladies' and to be inveigled by Skep and Nando into any sports activities going.

That Xmas of 1998 was fantastic! My son was about 10. The Hotel had laid on an impressive array of Christmas fun; there were loads of kids there. The main problem on Xmas morning was that they had no Father Christmas; so my abiding memory of that day was Nando asking Mike my husband to dress up as Santa and give all the kids their presents.

Mike threw himself into the role and in 90 degrees of heat put on the heavy red costume of Santa, was taken into a speed boat out of sight round the bay to be driven in by Skep and Jimmy with his bag of goodies. A gaggle of kids waited anxiously on the shore.

Hilariously as the boat pulled in Skep said to Mike 'we've got to turn round we've left the presents behind...so to the refrain of kids saying 'Santa Santa come back' the boat pulled out to sea and disappeared behind the headland! Happily a short while later 'Santa' reappeared 'Ho- Ho- Hoing!' with presents to be hugged and squeezed by all the kids in relief!

There is still a montage of pictures put together by my Mum Wendy Lloyd in the Sea Grape Bar where you can see loads of happy repeater guests and one of my hubby Santa walking on to the beach!

That Xmas Mike and I renewed our wedding vows with the superb help of Nando and so were married again with Mum Dad and Son Tom present presided over by Romeo Challenger, Cake, a Bouquet and small Steel Band.

Mum and Dad kept returning and we duly came back with them at the Millennium which again was a superb time. When my Mum was poorly with Pneumonia and had to be admitted to hospital the Staff were superb as usual and visited her regularly in the hospital until she was able to return to the Hotel in time for the New Year celebrations.

My Dad sadly developed Alzheimer's shortly after this time but Mum returned when she could with other Repeaters, Colin and Rose, Viv and others; still loving it; still finding it a haven.

I have now been 4 times as I say the last was just last month and I cannot begin to express how much I still love the place.

The Hotel is, for us jaded, grey, and worn out travellers, quite simply a Sanctuary. What is lovely is the rooms are fitted out in a Caribbean style with open shutters and a ceiling fan which wafts air round the room; thankfully there is no air conditioning, no telephone, no TV. Now to some this would be a hardship but for those who truly want to escape and there are thousands of us I can tell you, this is part of the joy of the hotel.

The rooms are kept beautifully clean and if there are any problems they are very quickly sorted. The food is excellent and the wine keeps flowing; strangely you never seem to get hung over! Must be that beautiful velvety air!!!!!! There is the warm sea to swim and snorkel in, watersports abound and watching people return after a boat trip plied with rum all day and trying to get off the boat is a stage show in itself!!! There are four beaches, you never feel crowded and if so inclined there is one where you can be 'as nature intended!' with Oliver the Security Guy keeping a watchful eye out for intruders!

A few of the old faces have moved on sadly ; Chris Lea, Nando, Skep, Mrs Samuels and we sure do miss Jimmy's cheeky face walking along the path in the morning waving frantically.

But there is still the joy of seeing Sandy (who left but hooray! has returned), Sylvie who envelops you in hugs and smiles and her walks round the Hotel in the morning to explain the flora and fauna are a must. David utterly genuinely charming, always smiling and kind and so generous with the rose bottle(!), Christabelle working like crazy to deliver her superb cocktails, Milly one of life's philosophers, Adrian with his sweet smile. Little Ariel with her gorgeous cheeky chatter and Miss Everlie Simon, a truly gracious charming lady. Oh and mustn't forget Lionel, lovely Lionel waving and chatting from across the garden!!!!!! I am sorry I haven't mentioned you all but you are all superb!

Richard Michelin the Manager is ever present, ever solicitous and pro-active and his Managers Monday Meet and Drinks party is beautifully done as he introduces us to all his Staff, History of the Island and things to do whilst staying in Antigua.

Then on Thursdays for the Repeaters or Recidivists as I like to call them in jest, there is a reunion drinks (Ambassadors Party – sorry Richard!) get together in the Mango Pavilion.

These start as a typically proper (on the English part) drinks and nibbles affair with guests reacquainting themselves with each other and the staff, all very quietly and politely “Hello How are you?” “How was your journey?” “Did you come via the M25?”(bit of poetic licence!)

Then gradually the evening builds to a dull roar as the rum punch or liquid sunshine kicks in; inhibitions are lost and everyone ‘loves’ everyone else!!!!!!

As we then stagger up to dinner if there is music and the Campbell’s are in town prepare for a superb floor show – could there be a pair of more inventive dancers than Hugh and Jane Campbell!!!!!!!!!!!!

Sitting at dinner which is set mainly outside you are enveloped by warm velvety air, plied with good food and wine and music. What more in life could someone want?

There is also that first sight of Hawksbill as you return again and crest the Hill past Five Islands; You are just blown away by the sheer beauty of the place. I can still remember the first time. Literally having to mentally pinch myself as I took in the turquoise and cerulean sea, deep pile pale umber sand and the varying shades of viridian hues of plants and palms. There are no words.

Whilst I am writing from a Repeaters point of view, it is important to stress that new guests are just as well looked after and cared for. You see them when they first arrive, grey and tired from all the stresses of home, a bit frazzled and wound up but by the end of the holiday have truly adapted to the Caribbean pace and languid walk!!!! So don’t assume it’s just us Repeaters that get all the fun its all for one and one for all!!!!!!!!!!

It would be a travesty if Hawksbill disappeared from our lives; as a Repeater I would be bereft I cannot think of anywhere else that I fit in to so well, feel so safe and welcome to the extent that I would have no qualms or worries if I came by myself. Somehow we must keep our Sanctuary; it is truly needed in this mad mad world we live in.

Karen Stone

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