

Day 46 – Mardi Gras Carnival in Guadeloupe [Tuesday 08-Mar-2011]

We got up early but hung around the bungalow in the morning. I worked on the diary and did some work related house keeping. I then headed to the bakery.



This is the street we live on in Vernou, Guadeloupe.



The view of a typical side street in downtown Point-a-Pitre, the island's main town

We then headed down to Pointe-a-Pitre just before lunch. We wanted to find a safe parking spot, where we could leave at will, before the wild carnaval trains started roaming town. We parked by the Gare des Routieres, which is on the west side of town, by the port. In years past, we've parked too close to events and have then gotten blocked in by barricades, etc. Although we wanted to double check our parking location, the Tourism Office is not open on this significant day in Guadeloupe. We ate a picnic lunch that Lilli had packed, including two cold beers!

We walked around town, in the general areas around the main square in town. Everything was eerily quiet. Since this is a day off for most people, we suspect people are recovering from last night's parties and then getting ready for the main carnival today.

As a backgrounder, the carnival consists of many elements. One of them is a number of independent trains of people in matching costumes. Each such train is usually preceded by younger males who crack whips to make fire cracker sounds. You then see a large number of dancers followed by a music band that mainly consists of drums and a few people making trumpet sounding noises by blowing into large sea shells.

As the time got closer to the official starting time (5PM) we moved towards an area where the town's judges were looking at each carnival train. There were seats there so that was nice.



The first carnival train arrives by the judges.

The first train arrived just after 5PM. But, after that, things seemed confused. We only saw two more trains go by until we decided to move on at 7PM. At that point it had started to get much darker. We found that a lot of people congregated at the intersection of Boulevard Chanzy and Rue Frebault, since all trains would pass through that point. It did not take long until we saw the first train come by. However, it was rather chaotic, since trains arrive into the intersection from all directions and seemed to have their own will about where to go next.



One train included two young girls who were dancing on stilts. That was quite impressive!



This train lit up a red flame as they walked by

It was rather difficult to take pictures in the evening since there was no enough light. I could not use the flash because it did not reach very far, so I had to resort to using longer exposure.



A train mostly dressed in black, except for the band members near the tail



A train of marauding devils with interesting “hairy” sideways hats.

After walking around for a while we started to get hungry. Much of the town is closed for the parade, although Lilli was able to buy a large beer can for just \$3.50. However, that beer was not going to carry the night. The one restaurant that was open was McDonalds. And this gave us an opportunity to try out yet another localized burger: the McFarmer!



The McFarmer is back. I did not know it was gone! But it tasted good.

The McFarmer burger had more lettuce and tomatoes than the Big Mac. Instead of the magic sauce there was some sort of mayo mix. But it tasted good.

After eating we hung around the main square in Point-a-Piture. It was interesting to note that a lot of the locals seem to dress in a more American way than a French way. Boys seems to have caught the gangsta fad from the states. Most girls had T-shirts with English slogans on them, rather than French.

In the main square they had loud music being served by town DJs while trains encircled side streets. People would follow trains as they walked through. Even though it felt chaotic, people acted in a fairly orderly fashion. We did not feel unsafe.

A bit after 9PM we decided to head home. At that point, many barricades in the periphery of the downtown area had been moved away. Our car was fine and we only got stuck in one place behind another carnival train that seemed to be off route a bit.