

Caribbean Adventure

Brothers explore island life as “Gap Year” sailors



Above: Daniel & Nik get the Neurath ready to sail, on top of the world, taking her out to sea

Sailing over 850 nautical miles and covering 6 degrees of latitude, SGS alumni Nik ‘13 and Daniel Ostersmith ‘15 visited 19 islands and 13 countries in their 29 weeks of living on a sailboat. They journeyed from St. Maartin to Grenada along the islands that form the eastern edge of the Caribbean Sea. Nik offered a little background on how this adventure began:

“The initial seed for this trip was planted when I found out that living on a sailboat is something people actually do. This happened while browsing the internet one night in upper school, trying to put off a homework assignment I am sure I had due the next morning. Over time the idea grew in my mind, and eventually I shared it with Daniel. I built two wooden sailboats for May Term my senior year as a somewhat related test run. Our interest started to really take shape in 2014, when we realized it could happen after Daniel’s graduation and my second year at college.

“What eventually made it happen was that our parents agreed it sounded like a good idea, and we both filled out the paperwork for our schools. Once Daniel had deferred his enrollment for a year and I had taken a leave for the 2015-2016 academic year, we were committed.”

November 13th, 2015: St. Maartin – Things run on their own schedule here. Whereas the boat was supposed to have all the hull work done and painted and launched by the time we got here, the reality is that they just started yesterday.

November 17th: While working on the boat one of the mechanics asked Nik what his dad does and Nik said he works in the investment industry. The guy asked Nik if he was a Bernie Madoff-type guy and Nik replied, “Do you think my brother and I would have bought THIS boat if my dad was running a Ponzi scheme?”

November 24th: The lift showed up about 2:00 and slings were installed under the boat and up she went. Like the space shuttle making the long, slow trip to the launch pad, our boat made the way to the pier as we all walked behind. Soon, she was in the water for the first time in three years...she floats!

December 5th: Daniel woke me up pretty early because he was excited to go to the market. We jumped in our little dinghy and went to Marigot, the main town on the French side... We walked the mile or so back to Maho Beach. You can watch jumbo jets land just feet above your head as you stand on this beach. YouTube it!

December 16th: The two of us sailed over to Anguilla. First time sailing this boat as just the two of us. Daniel caught his first fish!

December 31st: Back on St. Maartin, spent the day snorkeling through reefs. Midnight came as we welcomed in 2016 to the sights and sounds of fireworks, flare guns and emergency horns. You don’t want to be a sailor in trouble at midnight on 12/31 because no one will take you seriously!

January 6th, 2016: Today we left St. Maarten, for real this time. It was a 30 mile sail to Statia... For the first time on this trip, we were boarded by the Coast Guard. It was nice that we had all equipment that is required of us, and that we have nothing to hide.

January 8th: Today we motored to St. Kitts... We agreed to set up the satellite tracking device dad bought before the trip. Took a local bus to Brimstone Hill fort which was fantastic.

January 14th: This morning we attempted to get a better anchor location. After several failed efforts, we both said, “The heck with this, let’s go to Antigua!” So that’s what we did. Happy to be in Jolly Harbor, Antigua after our biggest sailing day yet.

January 25th: Raising the dinghy and securing everything last night for our sail to Guadeloupe this morning. It was about a 45

mile sail, our longest yet.

January 30th: We dinghied over to a small island neighboring Dominica, the island the “Pirates of the Carriibbean: Dead Man’s Chest” was mostly shot on. Explored some old forts. Snorkeling and spearfishing.

February 2nd: On a tour of the island, we saw many villages tucked into what seemed like completely inaccessible areas. Roads on ridges with 100 foot drops on either side, and beautiful jungle valleys where you couldn’t see the forest floor because of the miles of dense canopy.

February 4th: Early in the sail off the coast of Dominica, Daniel saw what he thought were driftwood logs about 200 yard from the boat. He quickly realized, however, it was two whales when he saw the spray from their spouts. He grabbed his binoculars (not a fishing line!) to get a closer look. We soon spotted three other whales on the other side.

February 5th: Daniel quickly snagged a barracuda. While using his pliers for leverage to remove the hook, a razor sharp tooth found its way into his ring finger. As we approached the coast of Martinique, the winds really picked up. They were about 20mph and coming from the exact direction we were heading. We felt like we were on the set of one of those cheap movies where they throw buckets of water on the actors in front of a green screen. We were soaked and cold for one of the first times on this trip.

February 9th: We took a ferry across the bay to Fort de France. Today was Carnival. It is tradition to wear red, which we didn’t know. Oh well, it’s not like we didn’t stand out anyways. There were loud drums, dancing, whistles, elaborate dresses and ghoulish costumes. We feel like we truly experienced Carnival in the Caribbean. What a gift!

February 14th: Arrived on St. Vincent. We were now loaded with fig bananas, limes, nutmeg, coconuts, passion fruit, oranges, papaya, christophine and tomatoes. What a haul. Any worry about scurvy was put to rest. Daniel expressed an interest in learning about the local fishing. He took a flashlight

and shone it on the water, causing hundreds of ballyhoo to jump out of the water.

February 29th: We named the boat for the philosopher Otto Neurath’s famous “Neurath’s Boat” which says:

“We are like sailors who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction.”

We made it to Saint George’s, Grenada by early afternoon.

March 5th: When we arrived at Dragon Bay, we realized we were right next to the underwater sculpture garden. We took this opportunity to snorkel, and weren’t disappointed by what we saw.

March 17th: Our first overnight sail to St. Lucia. It was the first time on this trip we haven’t been able to see land in any direction, or even another boat. The water here is 9,800 feet deep, adding to the sense of vastness. So dark we couldn’t see anything except for a million stars from horizon to horizon. We were aware of the luminescent creatures all around us as our boat churned through the waves.

April 14th: We asked our waitress about life on the Grenadines. She talked about how the Coast Guard often seizes drugs, then reports a lesser amount and sells the “missing” loot. Clearly a pirate culture persists here...

May 14th: Someone asked our parents if we have picked up any language skills since we’ve been on these islands. Unfortunately, the only languages we’ve become proficient at are “Sailor” and “Mechanic” \$#@!@&!

June 2nd: Woke at 4:00am and said goodbye to the Neurath. Sad, but we both agreed this adventure was so much better than we ever could have imagined. Headed to the airport for our flight to Miami.

[This fall, Nik returns for his junior year at Stanford University, while Daniel will be a freshman at Lewis and Clark College.]

Below: Man vs Mahi Mahi, St. George’s harbor, sailing away



On the Web

See more photos of the Ostersmiths’ adventure and read additional journal entries at www.sgs.org/magazine

