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RUN
FOR FUN

COOL RUNNINGS

A Caribbean cruise is the perfect backdrop to try out a new travel trend: the “runcation.”

by SARAH GREAVES-GABBADON

COLIN ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

HEAT, HILLS, AND HUMIDITY. AS A RUNNER, THAT'S MY KRYPTONITE. Even though I live in Miami, where humidity is high and temps are almost always north of 80 degrees, I run in the pre-dawn hours before the sun has a chance to scorch the earth — and my chances of setting a PR (personal record). And as for hills, well, pancake-flat South Florida doesn't have any. Our version of elevation training takes place on a couple of the area's bridges — both of which I studiously avoid.

Yet, here I am, on a sunny morning in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, bounding over what seems like a gazillion steps leading up a steep hillside. I'm breathing hard as my sneakers hit each tread of the famous 99 Steps staircase, built with bricks brought to the island as ballast in Danish ships centuries ago. The 9 a.m. sun is beating down on my shoulders; sweat trickles down the small of my back; and my burning quads are feeling every inch of the increasing elevation. But there's a smile on my face. I'm actually enjoying this!

"Almost there," says another runner as he bounces happily down the steps toward me, his neon green T-shirt identifying him as a fellow member of our Run For Fun Cruise (RFFC) group, which disembarked *Regal Princess* to run a scenic 5K along the city's narrow streets and curving waterfront.

We're being cheered along by staff from Active Island Tours & Events, a local company that offers running and walking excursions and has partnered with RFFC organizers on our first shoreside run of what will be two (next up, St. Maarten) on the 7-night, three-port cruise. Active has set up water stops along the route; marked the pavement with orange arrows; and even coordinated with local police to have rush-hour traffic yield to our group of about 60 runners of varying abilities.

The fastest among us have set the pace, shooting out from Yacht Haven Grande cruise center, through downtown, along the breezy waterfront, and back to the



IN IT TOGETHER From St. Thomas' 99 Steps staircase to St. Maarten's Great Bay Beach promenade, Run For Fun participants of all levels celebrated each and every accomplishment.

starting point in little more than 20 minutes. I'm with the middle-of-the-pack, running fast enough to get there (eventually), but slow enough to appreciate the sights, and pausing for several selfies along the way. Behind us, walkers are happily ambling along, discussing last night's dinner and today's port plans. They're in no hurry. And they needn't be. Because this "run-



we've bonded over beach games in the Bahamas at Princess Cays, and been rapt as motivational speaker and marathoner Bruce Van Horn — in presentations using marathon training as a metaphor for life — has encouraged us to reach our potential on and off the pavement. Later, much to the bemusement of early-morning onlookers, we'll sweat through a seaside 5K

and 10K along St. Maarten's Great Bay Beach promenade.

On sea days, we'll jog around the ship's deck while having our gait analyzed by Jeff Van Horn, (no relation to Bruce), a former competitive runner who has a degree in sports medicine and now owns a pair of Virginia running stores. After watching me, he reassures me that as long as I'm not feeling any pain, there's nothing wrong with my run style. "There's really no such thing as one perfect running form," he declares to the group. "It's different for everybody." And 60 runners release a sigh of relief.

By the end of the week we've run in three countries and in international waters. We've logged as many as 62 miles (an overachieving couple of Canadian triathletes) and as few as eight (me). And we've still had plenty of time to enjoy each port and enough blissfully idle hours to be coaxed into impromptu afternoon naps by the ship's cradle-like sway. Even better: As *Regal Princess* returns to Port Everglades at the end of the week, none of us is carrying any additional weight. Well, not unless you count the ounces added by our "race bling," the shiny ship-shaped medals that commemorate our Caribbean running adventure. ●

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cation" — a vacation planned around running and/or a destination race — isn't just for the seven-minute milers.

"We cater to walkers and all levels of runners," says Craig Newton, who with his wife, Kim, organizes the twice-annual cruises through their Hamilton, Ontario-based travel agency; there's also an Alaska running cruise each June after the Seattle Rock 'n' Roll Marathon. "Whether you run for 26 minutes or for 26 miles, we're all runners."

Before embarking at Port Everglades, most of us had ran the Publix A1A Fort Lauderdale Half Marathon (a handful braved the marathon distance), so after training for months and logging 13.1 or 26.2 more miles on the course that morning, our cruise to Princess Cays, St. Thomas, and St. Maarten is both a well-earned reward and a way to mitigate the waist-widening effects of the buffet and all those Bahama Mamas.

"I run so I can eat and not

gain weight," says Jennifer Wurth, an Omaha, Nebraska, business analyst who's on her fourth cruising runcation.

"This is such a great way to make connections with other people. I'm a slower runner but I was inspired by the triathletes and Ironmen on a previous running cruise to enter a triathlon. And next I'm heading to Peru to run a race with another runner I met on a cruise."

"You might be traveling alone but you never feel alone," says Sandi Piper from Toronto, Canada, who's completed 20 half marathons. This time she's sailing with her friend, Debbie Frye, who just celebrated her birthday by running her first half at the A1A.

"I was nervous but everyone in the group supported me through it," Debbie gushes as we soak up the sun reclined on chaises at the Retreat pool. "This has been one of my best birthdays ever!"

Over the last few days,

ON YOUR MARK



The next Run For Fun Caribbean runcation is aboard *Norwegian Getaway*, departing Miami on February 14, 2016. RFFC's running package covers all onboard and portside running activities including guided runs on Great Stirrup Cay, Bahamas; Cozumel, Mexico; Georgetown, Grand Cayman; and Ocho Rios, Jamaica, as well as discounted entry to the Publix Fort Lauderdale Half Marathon on February 14, and presentations by running hall of famer Dick Beardsley. runforfuncruise.com

