

DESTINATIONS

CARIBBEAN | ANTIGUA

POSTCARD

Nelson's Dockyard

Discover seafaring stories and superyacht sailing in Antigua's historic harbour, where the British naval hero once lived, writes **Paul McLaughlin**

A little green oasis in the heart of Antigua's English Harbour, Nelson's Dockyard National Park combines cultural heritage with leafy landscaping and an expansive marina that brims with yachts and small boats. It plays host to Antigua's Sailing Week regatta each year, a highlight on the Caribbean maritime calendar, (April 26-May 2 this year), though the superyacht crowd is yet to arrive when we visit on this Virgin Atlantic agent fam trip.

Despite its present-day pleasantness, our guide Abbie points out with an ironic smile that Admiral Horatio Nelson – who spent three years stationed here between 1783 and 1787 – hated the place, calling it an “infernal hole”.

Things have changed a lot since then. Nelson's Dockyard is the world's only continuously operating Georgian-era dock – restoration work began back in the 1950s, with Royal Navy volunteers assisting in repairing key buildings, including Admiral's House. In 1955, Princess Margaret became a patron of the repair fund and, five years later, spent part of her honeymoon at Clarence House, which sits on the far side of the bay.

The dockyard was reopened as a public attraction in 1961, and went on to be recognised as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2016. The black-stone boathouse pillars are a stark reminder of the area's naval past, but visitors now come for the restored buildings, two hotels, various bars and restaurants, the obligatory gift shop and the intriguing Dockyard Museum.

The museum is housed in the former Naval Officer's House and is one of the site's most charming buildings. Covering two floors, it incorporates an assortment of exhibits relating to the dockyard and life at sea.

Walking between the palm-tree-lined gardens and the period buildings with their colourful wooden shutters, I can't help but feel I'm wandering through a film set. Indeed, Duran Duran liked it so much that they filmed their sun-drenched, nautically inspired music video for *Rio* in English Harbour. These spots combine Caribbean history with a postcard-worthy appeal that will satisfy both history buffs and sail-loving sightseers alike. **TW**



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TOP: View of Nelson's Dockyard National Park
ABOVE: Agents on a Virgin Atlantic and Virgin Limited Edition fam

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