

Work Leading Teens on Adventure Tours in the Caribbean

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Passing the Torch

Article and photos by Andy Schell

I find myself on an airplane, flying to the Caribbean island of [St. Martin / Sint Maarten](#) to captain a sailboat. When I arrive, Lauren from **Broadreach / Academic Treks** picks me up at the airport and we go on a wild ride around the island to our small base hidden in the mangroves. Chickens and cows block the roads, tropical fruit trees shade the sidewalks and people of every color wail by on mopeds.

We arrive at Broadreach's base on the northern end of St. Martin, the French side of the smallest divided island in the world. The staff consists of 40 or so twenty-somethings, split evenly between SCUBA instructors and sailboat captains. Down the rabbit hole I descend, into a solo travelers' utopia. I mingle with a unique and diverse group of people—a far-ranging mix from around the world: South Africans, Kiwis, Swedes, Brits, Scots, Aussies, Canadians. The mosquito-bitten nights are long, and the days laboring at the base in the hot sun feel longer. But what an experience it was.



Leading the Tour

I am the leader of an adventure travel operation. On the eve of our first expedition, I am paired with my co-lead Shanon (a SCUBA instructor from Texas) and we are briefed on our 13 students. Our itinerary will see us away from St. Martin, unsupported, for three weeks, stopping at several of the neighboring islands and sailing, hiking, diving, exploring, culturally interacting, and generally altering our perspectives on life.

We ferry 13 teenagers and their gear out to the anchored boat. We meet 13 wide-eyed, homesick, eager kids. I see myself four years ago when experiencing a new country, a new culture, and a new way of life for the first time. It is time to pass the torch and become a huge part of these kids' first experiences abroad—experiences which I hope they will take along with them long after our expedition.

Shanon and I instantly become more than just sailing and SCUBA instructors. We become adventure guides, psychologists, doctors, and mentors. The kids will emulate everything we do

for the next three weeks, and we will have as much to do with their enjoyment of the trip as the weather, the scenery or the locals.

I took this responsibility extremely seriously. Drinking on program was strictly prohibited, and for the next three weeks—we would have to abstain. But it didn't matter, and I didn't miss it. Instead, we would sit around the cockpit after dinner and share "glums & glows," our daily ritual of rehashing the days' activities.

We are anchored in a small cove at [Ile Fourche](#), a neighboring island to the north of French / Swedish St. Barth's. Ile Fourche is uninhabited, has no vegetation (thanks to a hundred years of roaming goats), and scoured peaks which remind us of the Galapagos. On the east side of the cliffs along the desolate coast—uninterrupted all the way from Africa—the ocean relentlessly crashes.

After dinner I propose to my group an adventure before dawn, trekking to the tops of the cliffs for the sunrise. I had never been up there, and according to the charts there was no trail, only rocky outcroppings to scramble up, punctuated by the occasional cactus. The kids agree to go.

Sharing an Adventure

We dinghy ashore under the cover of darkness and a blanket of stars, and are marching up the first rise just as the twilight of dawn casts it's first orange glow over the eastern horizon. The way is steep, but not overly difficult, and we make it to the summit in time. Each of us finds a comfortable ledge from which to dangle our feet—a quiet place all to ourselves. We are careful not to get too close to the edge, for it is 1,500 feet straight down to the ocean. The only noise we hear is that of the waves crashing on the shoreline below. Then the sun rises.

But that morning I was not really interested in the sunrise. Though I had a camera, there was no urge to take pictures. Though I had my journal, there was no urge to write. Instead, I sat on that rocky perch of the beautiful island and just watched the kids. The expressions on their faces were gradually illuminated by the orange glow of the dawn. No one spoke that morning; they soaked it all in. I watched, and in the faces of each kid on that ledge, I saw myself just four years ago.



For More Information

Work and Tours at Broadreach / Academic Treks

I worked for Broadreach this summer, but had I been 8 years younger, I would have been a student. Broadreach offers trips the world over, including trekking in Australia, diving in the South Pacific and Caribbean, surfing in Baja, and swimming with whale sharks in Mexico. For employment opportunities click [here](#) for more information.

Visit **Broadreach** / Academic Treks at www.gobroadreach.com.

Andy Schell is a professional captain and freelance writer who lives aboard his sailboat Arcturus in Annapolis, MD and travels extensively. He runs sail training programs in Annapolis with his father, also a captain. Register for their upcoming Celestial Nav. Workshop at www.fathersonsailing.com.