



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BARBADOS CONCORDE EXPERIENCE

# Concorde exhibit an uplifting experience

Barbados museums cover island's history from the prehistoric to the supersonic

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS—Muhammad Ali, Naomi Campbell, Mick Jagger and Mother Teresa have all sat here — the coveted seat 1A on the Concorde.

Rumour has it that supermodel Naomi Campbell unleashed her famous glare on a poor occupant until he surrendered the seat to her.

"Essentially, the Concorde was a military aircraft designed to move people around," explains guide Kevin Hinds as he climbs the staircase into the 67-metre long supersonic aircraft.

Fifty years, the Saturday morning touchdown of the Concorde was a regular event that drew crowds of onlookers to the airport in Bridgetown. This particular Concorde (aircraft call sign Alpha-Echo), permanently grounded, is now the star exhibit of the Barbados Concorde Experience, a museum devoted to what is a marvel of aerospace design: A passenger aircraft that reached Mach II, twice the speed of sound.

From 1976 to 2003 the fleet of 20 Concorde's flew routes between four regular destinations: London, Paris, New York and Barbados (only 14 were in flight at any one time; the other six were on the ground for five weeks of regular maintenance, scheduled every 19,000 kilometres of flight).

"It cruised at about 60,000 feet; about five miles higher than the average plane," says Hinds. "You



The Concorde, which flew regularly between England and Barbados, now rests in a museum at Grantley Adams airport in Bridgetown, where visitors can examine the supersonic jet's intricate cockpit control panel. The Barbados Museum, right, chronicles the history of Barbados.



JO MATYAS PHOTO

could actually see the curve of the Earth on some flights."

With a menu of five-star food that included appetizers of foie gras and caviar, and tipples from the wine cellar, the Concorde — which sped from London to Bridgetown in four hours — attracted a rather swank clientele. With a stratospheric price tag to match.

Hinds walks down the aisle, stopping to make sure the leather chair backs are all in uniform position.

"There was no first class or sec-

ond class. It was all Concorde class," he says.

When the planes came out of commission in 2003, the one-way fare between England and Barbados was about \$8,000 U.S. Each flight could accommodate 100 passengers, piloted by a flight crew of

four and fanned over by five flight attendants.

But even a glaring Campbell couldn't match the privilege afforded to the beloved Queen Mother. The British monarch celebrated her 85th birthday with a two-hour flight circling over the U.K. And



## JUST THE FACTS

**THE BARBADOS** Concorde Experience is in an airplane hangar next to the Grantley Adams International Airport in Bridgetown. It was opened in April 2007 and is accessible by a walkway from the airport terminal. Allow one hour for the self-guided tour. [www.barbadosconcorde.com](http://www.barbadosconcorde.com)

**FOR INFORMATION** on the Barbados Museum & Historical Society, [www.barbmuse.org.bb](http://www.barbmuse.org.bb)

archway made of rough pink coral. Museum guide Monique Collymore sets the historical tone of the museum when she breaks into a chorus of the Jin-Jin song, explaining how at Emancipation in 1838, the freed slaves sang the Barbados folk song, thanking Queen Victoria (Jin-Jin) for their release.

Spending an afternoon at the Barbados Museum is an excellent introduction to Bajan history, architecture and society.

Local schoolchildren are regular visitors to the galleries and exhibits span the natural environment, the history of the people who inhabited Barbados (from the Amerindians to the colonists), the unfolding and impact of emancipation, and the unique island architecture.

The Harewood Gallery, *Born of the Sea*, tells about the natural history of the island. It's a primer in corals, reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, and land and sea creatures.

"This is the place to find out about Barbados, three distinct ecosystems," Collymore says.

The original mobile home — the compact, colourful Bajan chattel houses that dot the island — are hothouses from plantation days, designed to be taken down and moved to another plot of land as workers were forced to move from plantation to plantation. They're everywhere on the island; impossible for tourists to miss, while most are unaware that they're seeing so much history wrapped up in one small package.

"Think of it as history in a box," Collymore suggests, before softly humming the Jin-Jin chorus one last time.

Josephine Matyas is a Kingston, Ont.-based freelance writer. Her trip was subsidized by the Barbados Tourism Authority.

there are some things that money can't buy, but are paved clear for royalty: she spent the whole flight in the cockpit.

At the opposite end of the glamour scale, a second island museum takes a step back to the pre-supersonic age, but with another link to British royalty.

The old brick buildings housing the Barbados Museum are remnants of the original 19th century British military prison at St. Ann's Garrison, complete with cannons on the front lawn and a large front



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