

K0KON DX-pedition to SABA, 1983



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- In the late 1970s I was Marketing Manager for export sales for Sears.



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- At that time, my territory was the Caribbean and South America. Small territory!
- But not bad duty when I HAD to make a sales trip in the middle of winter from Chicago!
- I had traveled to the Caribbean on vacations before, so I was familiar with the area.



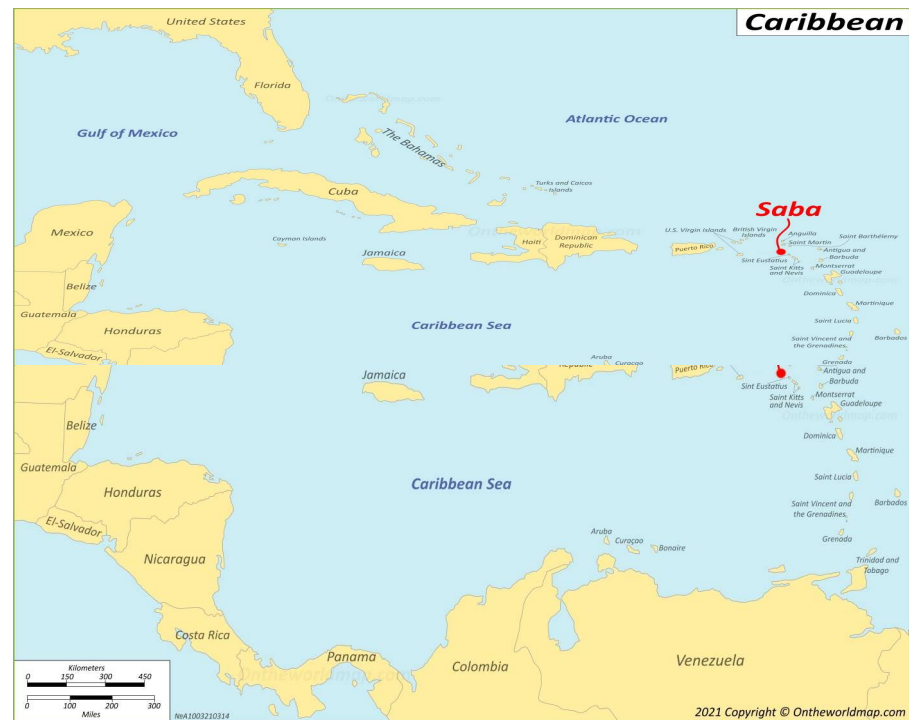
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- After I left Sears and it was vacation time in winter of 1983, I decided it was time to return to the Caribbean.
- I had upgraded my ham license to General Class not too much before this, so out of the blue I thought “Do a suitcase DX-pedition”!
- The Caribbean would not be too far for a one-week vacation - and would not be too expensive in terms of excess baggage for the equipment.



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- But where to go?
- As I searched the map; I ran across Saba.



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- Saba is a small, Caribbean island with a land area of 5 sq. mi - basically the peak of an active volcano, 2,910 feet above sea level.
- Saba is a “municipality” within the country of the Netherlands.
- Other Dutch islands, Saint Maarten and Aruba for example, are countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.



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- The island lies in the northern Leeward Islands portion of the West Indies and is the highest point of the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands.
- It is the smallest territory by permanent population in the Americas. I remember someone telling me that there were 2,000 people and 5,000 goats on the island!



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- Getting to the island is not particularly easy. The choice is by small plane (12 minutes) or ferry (90 minutes) from the island of Saint Maarten.
- The airport built in 1963, and a larger pier geared for tourist boats in 1972 has resulted in increased tourism.



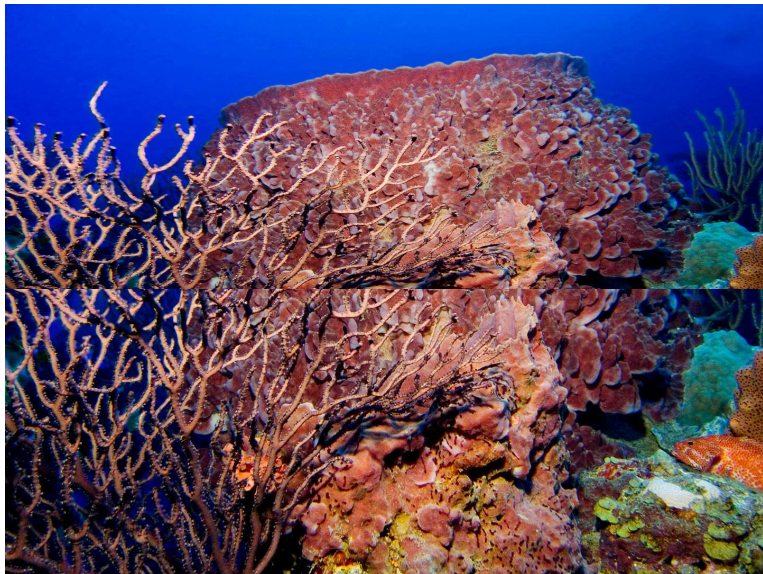
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- And, as you can see, the Approach is not the easiest in the world...



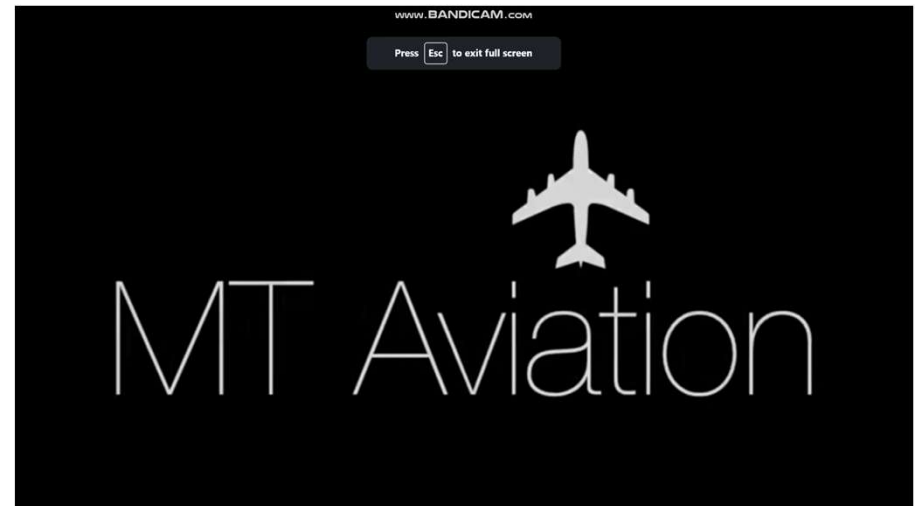
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- Diving off Saba is a major tourist attraction. I've never been a diver, but the pictures and videos online are beautiful.



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- But first you gotta get to Saint Maarten!



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- Next stop: Saba!
- The landing strip on Saba is the shortest of any commercial strip in the world: about 1300 feet long - slightly shorter than an aircraft carrier.



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- Only special short takeoff and landing (STOL) airplanes are permitted to use the air strip. The plane seated 19 passengers as I recall. The pilots are mostly former Dutch air force pilots who are especially trained to fly these planes and land on such a short runway.



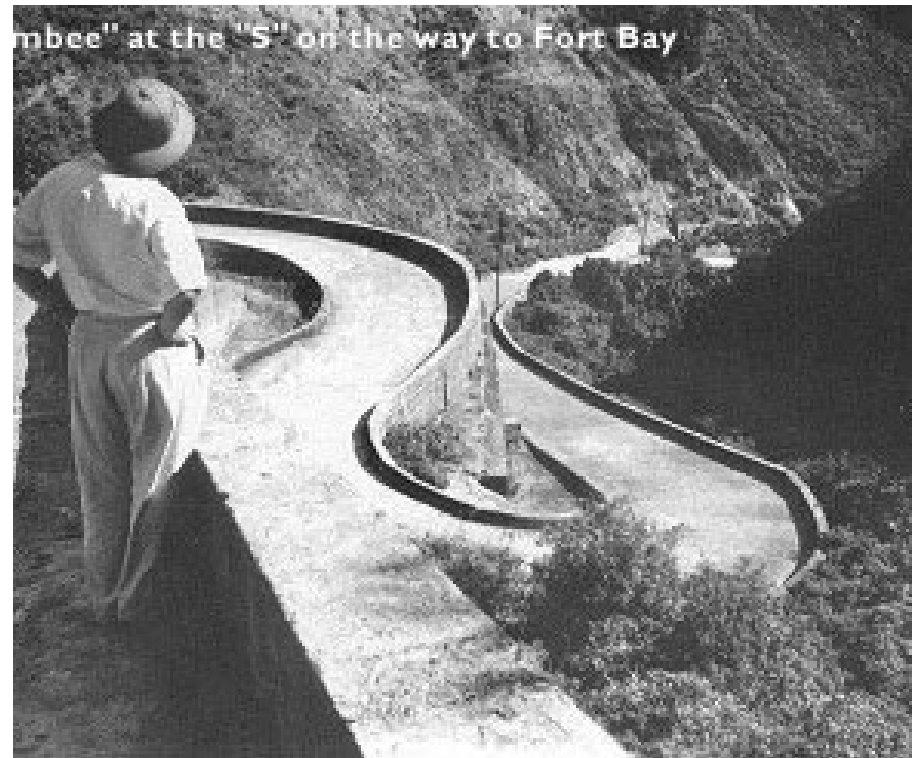
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- There is a story that an American pilot flying his own, small, private plane tried to land there and was told that it was not allowed.
- He mumbled something about having been a pilot for X-number of years and went ahead and landed.
- The authorities confiscated the plane and forced the pilot to pay to have himself and the plane taken off the island!



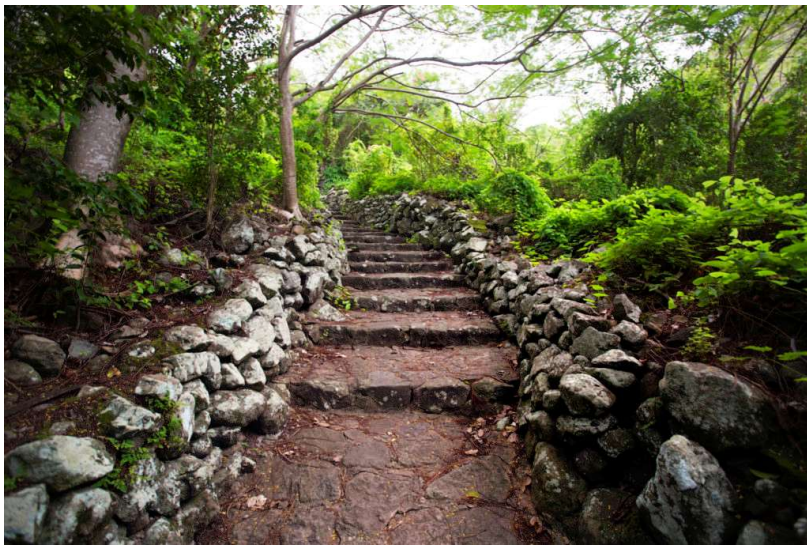
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- There is one main road, cleverly known as 'The Road'.
- Driving "The Road" is considered to be a daunting task; the curves are extremely difficult to negotiate.
- Driving is on the right-hand side. The speed limit in town is 12 miles per hour, and outside of town is 25 mph.
- Construction on the road began in 1938 and wasn't finished until 1958.



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- A popular tourist activity is to climb what is known as "The Ladder", 800 steps carved from stone which reach from Ladder Bay...



...to the settlement known as 'The Bottom' (The island's capital).

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- Until the late 20th century, everything that was brought to the island in boats and ships was carried up by hand using these steps - even an organ! I climbed the steps - I was much younger then...



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- At the time of my trip, there was only one ham on Saba and he was not very active. The thought of pileups filled my dreams!
- So here was the plan: I booked a charter flight (something “...International Airlines” a fly-by-night airline) from Chicago to Saint Maarten.
- My rig was a Kenwood TS-820. I considered antennas and decided on a KLM V10-40, a relatively compact 10, 15, 20, 40 Vertical. Headphones, mic, Bencher keyer, pre-cut radials, etc.



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- I had the original carton for the radio, and I built a plywood crate 7-ft x 8" x 8" for the semi-assembled antenna and accessories.
- I applied for a reciprocal license and got it - KA9FRX/PJ6 - no problem.

The document is a formal license for radio amateurs, titled "RADIOAMATEUR MACHTINGING" and issued by "DE GOUVERNEUR VAN DE NEDERLANDSE ANTILLEN". It features a royal crest at the top. The document is filled out with the following details:

- Gelezen:** het verzoekschrift dd. 19 januari 1983
- van:** Roger Dean Matice
- geboren de:** 17 november 1941 **te:** Rockwell City Iowa U.S.A.
- Gelet op:** het Radioamateurbesluit (P.R. 1972 no. 93) and de Beschikking voorwaarden radioamateurs (P.B. 1972 no. 120)
- Verleent aan de verzoeker:** voornoemd, behoudens rechten van derden, machtiging voor de aanleg en het gebruik van een amateurstation, onder toekenning van de roepnaam KA9FRX/PJ6
- Deze machtiging is geldig tot:** A
- Machtiging:** A
- Willemstad, - 7 MAART 1983**
- De Gouverneur:** (Signature)
- De Minister van Verkeer en Vervoer:** (Signature)
- No. 757**

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- I searched for a guest house and found one called 'Capitan' something or other - now called Queen's Hotel. I sent a letter asking permission to put up a temporary antenna and radio station promising to give the guest house plenty of publicity! Got it - no problem.
- Everything was falling place.



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- OK, all set!
- Day of departure. Got to O'Hare - plenty of time. Checked in.
- "Excuse me, sir. What is that carton?"
- "Oh, that's my radio", I said.
- "It's too large to fit under the seat".
- "No, I measured it"
- "No, it's too big. But we have a special compartment, and it will be safe."
- BIG PROBLEM!



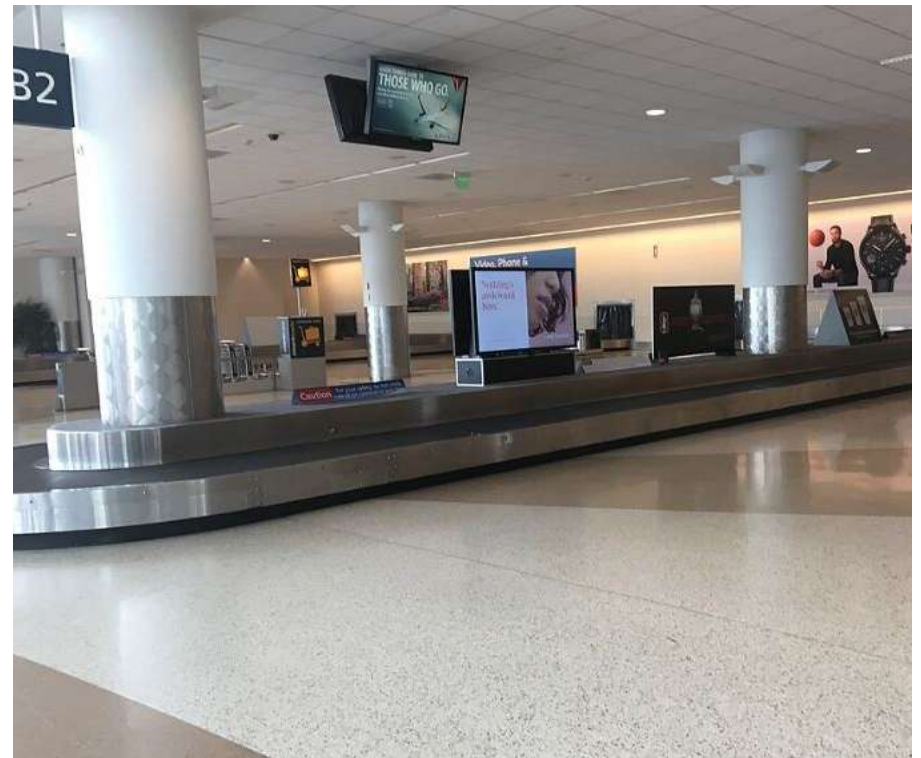
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- The flight is delayed - 5 HOURS! No explanation. Big problem.
- So here's the new routing: Chicago, Miami, Saint Maarten.
- Oh yeah, there's another BIG problem. We're so late leaving Chicago that the airport in Saint Maarten will be closed...
- ... We will have to divert to San Juan, Puerto Rico and stay overnight.



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- We deplane in San Juan and go to baggage claim. The antenna crate shows up. I wait for the radio. I wait. And I wait. No radio. REALLY, REALLY BIG PROBLEM!
- It's been stolen off the plane in Miami or, more likely, San Juan. All those Kenwood markings on the carton look too tempting in Latin America!
- I finally get to the guest house on Saba and start trying to find the radio. Phone calls, teletypes, faxes. "Fly by Night International Airlines" knows nothing. Nothing they can do. NOTHING!



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- So for a week I sit around with 5000 goats...



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Fortunately, the island is beautiful and the people charming.



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- My homeowner's insurance covered most of the cost of replacing the radio, so I upgraded to a TS-940. The antenna sat in the original crate until I got back on the air when I moved to Houston.
- It was an experience...a truly unique experience!



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Thank You!



Questions?