



LA MARTINIQUE



DISCOVERY GUIDE



Balata Gardens



## MARTINIQUE, A JEWEL OF THE CARIBBEAN IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

Martinique is one of the most eco-friendly islands in all of the Caribbean. To us and to international experts, *eco-friendly* is more than just a buzzword. The entire island is a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, and it has been recognized by Travel Weekly for its sustainable hotel and dining options and eco-friendly tourism.

The island's 1,000 square kilometres offer idyllic beaches, dense tropical forests, pristine rivers, and the iconic and majestic Mount Pelée volcano. Also known as “the Isle of Flowers,” Martinique abounds in exceptional natural sites that are sure to enchant its visitors. The island's longstanding commitment to pursuing sustainable economic and social development while preserving its cultural wealth can be seen in its award-winning rums, its *La Route des fermes bio* campaign (a showcase of organic farms), its chocolate production, and the recent revival of its coffee tradition through the *Café d'Excellence* initiative.

Martinique also has a very rich history and cultural heritage, which visitors can discover through an impressive network of monuments and museums—from the moving Anse Cafard Slave Memorial to the contemporary art centre at the Habitation Clément, which is both a sugarcane plantation and a working rum distillery. Another contemporary art hotspot is Martinique's former capital, Saint-Pierre, now designated as a City of Art and History (Ville d'art et d'histoire).

Last but not least, visitors can experience the warmth and authenticity of our people through Martinique's many events and traditions, such as the *Bèlè* dance festival, the *Tour des Yoles* boat race around the island, and *zouk*, an exuberant style of music that was born in the French West Indies. Friendliness and genuineness are also reflected in our cuisine and our uniquely festive carnival.

My promise to you is a Martinique full of wonders, generosity, and exceptional quality.

**Bénédicte Di Geronimo**  
Martinique Tourism Commissioner

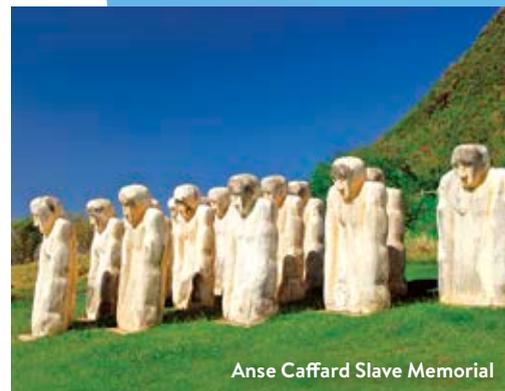
## DISCOVER A RICH HISTORY

Martinique's heritage is as diverse as its landscape and its people. This island of mountains, mangroves, and rainforests was once populated by the Arawaks and the Caribs, peoples indigenous to South America. The French arrived in 1635, establishing sugarcane, pineapple, and banana plantations and importing slaves from Africa and later indentured labourers from India to work on them.

Slavery was abolished in 1848, an event commemorated all over the island on May 22 every year. In southern Martinique, there are two sites—the Anse Caffard Slave Memorial in Le Diamant and the open-air museum La Savane des Esclaves in Les Trois-Îlets—that pay poignant tribute to the victims of the slave trade.

On May 8, 1902, the course of Martinique's history changed abruptly and irrevocably when Mount Pelée, a volcano near the northern tip of the island, erupted and destroyed the then-capital city of Saint-Pierre. Now known as “the Pompeii of the Caribbean,” the reconstructed Saint-Pierre is a picturesque seaside town, filled with ruins that offer a glimpse into its former life as a sophisticated metropolis nicknamed “the little Paris of the West Indies.” To fully grasp the impact of the eruption, a visit to the Frank A. Perret Museum is a must—the space exhibits stories, photographs, and artifacts documenting the disaster.

Officially a region of France since 1946, Martinique today boasts a compelling blend of Caribbean and European culture, with reminders of its fascinating history all over the island.



Anse Caffard Slave Memorial



Aimé Césaire Theatre



Frank A. Perret Museum



TALES  
*of the past*

Town of Saint-Pierre and Mount Pelée

# A THRIVING *arts scene*

## IMMERSE YOURSELF IN CULTURE

Art is everywhere in Martinique, from the murals adorning the streets of Fort-de-France to the rhythms of traditional bèlè dancing to the pottery and textiles sold by craftspeople all over the island.

In the 1970s and '80s, local artists explored their African heritage and developed a uniquely Caribbean aesthetic. A handful of expertly curated galleries now showcase works by Caribbean and international artists. One of these is Fondation Clément, an airy space exhibiting contemporary art on the grounds of a historic plantation and distillery in eastern Martinique.

Major Martinican writers such as Édouard Glissant, Joseph Zobel, and Patrick Chamoiseau have authored influential works about Caribbean history and identity, as did Aimé Césaire, the poet, playwright, and politician who co-founded Negritude, a literary movement that sought to affirm the cultural values of Black Africans. The Aimé Césaire Museum in the heart of Fort-de-France is dedicated to his life and work.

For decades, Martinique-born filmmaker Euzhan Palcy has been shining a spotlight on Black history and social justice issues with films such as *Sugar Cane Alley* (1983) and *A Dry White Season* (1989).

Martinique's history also resonates in the island's mix of European, African, and Caribbean musical genres, including chouval bwa, bèlè, biguine, and zouk.



Habitation Clément - Sculpture garden



Bois lélé by Laurent Valère



Filmmaker Euzhan Palcy

## SAVOUR A FRENCH CARIBBEAN FEAST

Martinique's distinctive cuisine draws on African, Indian, and French influences as well as longstanding fishing and agricultural traditions. Every day, anglers reel in dolphinfish, snapper, and tuna from the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean, while the island's fertile terrain yields an abundance of tropical fruit, including banana, coconut, and pineapple. Local chefs make excellent use of these fresh, homegrown ingredients in Creole dishes such as *blaff de poisson* (poached fish marinated in lime, garlic, and peppers), *crabes farcis* (stuffed crab), and green papaya gratin—not to mention in desserts such as *blanc manger coco* (cold coconut pudding with vanilla, lime zest, and cinnamon) and in fruity artisanal sorbets and ice creams.

Curry-based dishes such as *colombo* nod to the island's South Asian heritage. Chicken, lamb, or pork is cooked in coconut milk, ginger, and Colombo powder, a spice blend that typically includes turmeric, mustard seed, coriander, and cumin.

And of course, France's culinary savoir-faire shows up in the fresh baguette sandwiches, cheeses, and charcuterie, as well as in classic fare like soufflé, bouillabaisse, and filet mignon.

If there's one quintessential Martinican snack, it's a plate of *accras*—crispy, tender codfish fritters sold everywhere from roadside stands to high-end restaurants—paired with a Ti-Punch, a cocktail made with the island's famous *rhum agricole*.



Accras (codfish fritters)



Chicken Colombo



Coconut sorbet



# CREOLE flavours

Grilled crayfish

# LAND of rum

Habitation Clément cellar



Sugarcanes at La Mauny Distillery



Rum tasting



AOC rhum agricole

## TASTE THE WORLD-RENOWNED RHUM AGRICOLE

Martinique is known as the rum capital of the world—and with good reason. The island's eleven distilleries produce the highly sought-after *rum agricole*, which holds the prestigious AOC (*appellation d'origine contrôlée*) designation.

Rhum agricole is distinguished by a unique production technique: freshly pressed juice from locally grown sugarcane is fermented and distilled before being rested or aged in oak barrels. The results range from white rum—excellent in a Ti-Punch cocktail, a national favourite that mixes the spirit with sugarcane syrup and lime juice—to aged dark rum, comparable to a fine cognac and best enjoyed neat. Martinique also produces a variety of rum-based liqueurs made with local ingredients such as coconut and passionfruit.

By travelling *La Route des Grands Rhums* to distilleries all over the island, you'll get a firsthand look at the production process and have opportunities to sample Martinique's most celebrated rums amid stunning natural surroundings.

## 1 ISLAND, 2 PORTS OF CALL, 4 MOORINGS

Fort-de-France is well known for the excellence and safety of its home porting facilities and many calls are scheduled at this vibrant capital city. From there, you can embark on a tour or set off on your own for a taste of the island's culture, natural beauty, food, and rum.

The two terminals, Pointe Simon and Les Tourelles, are minutes away from the city's top attractions. Be sure to check out Le Grand Marché, a bustling market selling local fruit, spices, flowers, and souvenirs. Also worth visiting are two exquisite nineteenth-century buildings: the Schoelcher Library and the Saint-Louis Cathedral. If you're looking to do some last-minute shopping, you'll find locally made crafts, jewellery, and more at cruise villages surrounding both terminals.

On a day-long excursion, there's even time to hop on one of the hourly ferries from Fort-de-France Bay to the nearby coastal town of Les Trois-Îlets for a dip in the sea and lunch at a beachside restaurant.

For boutique ships, there are several idyllic moorings on offer: three along the southern Caribbean coast in the towns of Les Anses-d'Arlet, Le Marin, and Les Trois-Îlets, and one in the north in Saint-Pierre.

Whether you decide to stroll along white-sand beaches, swim with turtles, or explore the historic "Pompeii of the Caribbean," you'll have the time of your life in this hidden gem of a cruise destination.



**CRUISE**  
*into paradise*



Fort-de-France covered market



Cruise passengers



Fort-de-France, Martinique's vibrant capital city

Fort-de-France Bay

# YEAR-ROUND *festivities*



Traditional chouval bwa



Tour des Yoles annual sailing regatta



Red devils



Le Raid des Alizés

Carnival celebrations

## JOIN THE PARTY

Martinique's most famous festival is without a doubt Carnival, the annual pre-Lenten celebration in which the streets come alive with costumes, masks, music, and dancing. The festivities begin in January, with parades taking place every weekend all over the island, and culminate in late February or early March with four days of parades, parties, and concerts: Fat Sunday, Fat Monday, Fat Tuesday, and Ash Wednesday (in Martinique, even Ash Wednesday is a time for play!).

Throughout the month of May, Martinicans commemorate the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée with the Mai de Saint-Pierre, an event series featuring live music, dance, and theatre performances.

The highlight of the summer is certainly the Tour des Yoles, the largest sporting event in Martinique. In this much-anticipated sailing regatta, boats known as *yoles rondes* race around the island as thousands of spectators cheer them on from the shore and from catamarans following in their wake—a thrilling competition that's not to be missed.

The end of the year brings more excitement with the women's adventure race known as Le Raid des Alizés, which sees dozens of teams competing in running, cycling, and rowing challenges that take them through the island's most spectacular natural landscapes.

## SOAK UP THE SUN

Finding a little slice of paradise is easy in Martinique, with the coast accessible all over the island and beaches open to the public year-round. In the south, the Caribbean shores are postcard-perfect, with long stretches of white sand lapped by calm blue waters. The Atlantic side is just as seductive, with many secluded bays ringed by palm trees swaying in the ocean breeze. Meanwhile, the northern coastline has a character all its own, with swaths of black volcanic sand against a backdrop of lush green mountains.

Since Martinique's entire coastline is gloriously undeveloped, its beaches retain their wild beauty, and it's possible to lay down a towel and while away the hours with hardly another soul in sight. Still, many swimming areas are conveniently equipped with some facilities, including casual restaurants and snack bars for lunching on local specialties and sipping cocktails at sunset.

Martinique's beaches have lots to offer beyond swimming and sunbathing, and those looking to get out on the water have a wealth of options: surfing, kitesurfing, windsurfing, and flyboarding are all popular, with lessons and gear rental available around the island. Travellers can also wind their way through the extraordinary mangroves in a kayak or sail the sea with an experienced crew on a *yole*, a type of boat unique to Martinique.



# HEAVENLY *beaches*

# SAILING *bliss*

## HOP ABOARD

Exploring Martinique by boat offers spectacular views and unparalleled access to the island's varied coastline—you can moor at the foot of towering Mount Pelée one day, and drop anchor in the sun-baked islets off the east coast the next. In fact, Martinique has the most moorings of any island in the Lesser Antilles, along with top-notch services and infrastructure for boaters, with dedicated landing stages providing refueling stations, Wi-Fi, restrooms, shops, restaurants, and more. The largest port complex is the Marin marina, in one of the most beautiful protected bays in the Caribbean.

Catamaran, sailboat, and motorboat rentals are available, as are crewed sightseeing excursions with food and drink provided. You can also charter a yacht, with or without a skipper, and sail in luxury for days or weeks at a time.

Afternoon in Les Anse-d'Arlet

## EXPLORE UNDER THE SEA

Martinique boasts hundreds of fabulous, well-protected diving spots for divers of all experience levels. No two sites are alike, but what they do have in common is excellent visibility, water temperatures of 26 to 30 degrees Celsius, and remarkably diverse marine life, with hawksbill sea turtles, eagle rays, barracudas, and shoals of tropical fish swimming among pristine coral reefs, gigantic sea sponges, and graceful gorgonians.

Among Martinique's many world-class sites are the awe-inspiring shipwrecks of Saint-Pierre in the north, a result of Mount Pelée's eruption in 1902. Also not to be missed is diving the monolithic Diamond Rock, a massive basalt island across from the town of Le Diamant in the south.

The island counts over 20 accredited diving centres, most of them PADI- and/or CMAS-certified. It's also an ideal destination for family and accessible diving, with plenty of sites that are safe for beginners and activities available for children eight and up.

# AN ISLAND *to dive for*

The ideal diving destination

# SWEET *dreams*

## UNWIND IN STYLE

When it comes to accommodation in Martinique, there's truly something for every type of traveller. Wherever you decide to base yourself—in Fort-de-France, on the Caribbean or Atlantic coast, or in the mountainous north—you'll find a variety of places to sleep, from the ritzy to the rustic.

There are dozens of charming boutique hotels and a handful of luxury resorts to choose from, some offering all-inclusive packages and many offering first-rate amenities such as private terraces and swimming pools.

Vacation rentals are another popular option, with properties ranging from Creole-style villas to well-appointed apartments to no-frills bungalows. Some properties specialize in unconventional sleeping quarters such as caravans, treehouses, and transparent dome-shaped tents, allowing guests to get close to nature without giving up the comfort of a real bed.

Wake up to a lovingly prepared breakfast at an upscale hotel, mountain views from your villa, or the sound of the waves from your beachside bungalow—the choice is yours.

## A GEOLOGICAL PHENOMENON

When the tide goes out along Martinique's Atlantic coast, you might spot a long sandbar connecting the mainland to a neighbouring islet. This is a **tombolo**, a rare type of landform that reveals itself between November and April every year as a result of changing winds and ocean currents. The most spectacular tombolo is in Sainte-Marie, where the sandbar stretches more than 200 metres to link Petite-Anse beach with the islet of Sainte-Marie.



## A FABLED COFFEE TREE

Although coffee is no longer a major export in Martinique, the island may have played a pivotal role in the beverage's worldwide popularity today. Legend has it that in the eighteenth century, a French naval officer brought a coffee seedling all the way across the Atlantic and planted it in Martinique, where it spread across the Caribbean and South America. Some speculate that much of the coffee we drink today can be traced to this one seedling!



## MERMAIDS IN SAINT-PIERRE

Shipwrecks aren't the only underwater wonders you'll see in the bay of Saint-Pierre. Artist Laurent Valère—the man who created the statues of the Anse Caffard Slave Memorial in the south—has installed two massive sculptures on the sea floor about 50 metres from the coast. Known as Manman Dlo and Yemaya, the sculptures represent mermaids partially submerged in the sand, intended as an homage to the sea and a call to protect marine life.



# DID YOU *know?*

## EXPERIENCE BREATHTAKING NATURAL BEAUTY

Martinique's sheer variety of natural landscapes has to be seen to be believed. Hiking is one of the best ways to experience the island's sublime beauty in all its forms—there are more than 250 kilometres of trails linking rugged coastline, tropical forests, and misty mountains. And with two-thirds of the island covered in protected parkland, the terrain is marvellously unspoiled.

Other ways to enjoy the great outdoors include horseback riding, cycling, and canyoning. No matter which activity you choose, you're bound to encounter some of the island's colourful wildlife: anole lizards, iguanas, mongooses, and exotic birds such as the blue-headed hummingbird, grey trembler, and the endemic Martinique oriole.

The Caribs who settled in Martinique called it the "isle of flowers," and it's easy to see why: blazing-red bougainvilleas, fragrant white frangipani, and about a hundred species of orchids thrive in the warm, humid climate. Two sprawling nature parks—the Jardin de Balata near Fort-de-France and the Domaine d'Émeraude near the northern town of Le Morne-Rouge—have gorgeous landscaped gardens and forests where you can admire countless species of indigenous plants and trees.



Hummingbird



Amazing variety of natural landscapes



La Caravelle nature reserve

# OUTDOOR *escapes*



## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

**Size:** 1,128 square kilometres (80 km long and 35 km across at the island's widest point)

**Population:** 372,594

**Capital city:** Fort-de-France

**Currency:** Euro

**Languages:** French and Creole; English and Spanish are spoken in resort areas.

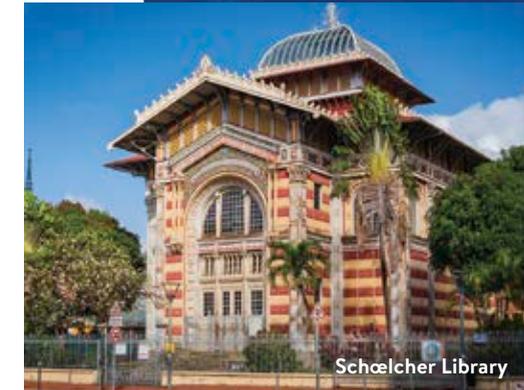
**Electricity:** Voltage is 220 AC. Visitors travelling with hair dryers, electric razors, and other appliances made for use in North America will require power adapters.

**Climate:** Warm weather year-round, with an average temperature of 26°C. Trade winds (*alizés*) help keep the island cool.

**Location:** Nestled in the heart of the Lesser Antilles between Dominica and St. Lucia, Martinique is a five-hour flight from Montreal or New York and an eight-hour flight from Paris.

**Tippling:** Restaurant prices include a 15% service charge.

**Getting around:** Local and international car rental companies (Avis, Budget, Europcar, Hertz, Alwegó) operate in Martinique, as do taxis and car services. In Fort-de-France, taxi stands near tourist attractions make it easy to find an empty cab.



Schœlcher Library



Grand Rivière bridge



Hotel Bakoua

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Published by the Comité Martiniquais du Tourisme under the presidency of Bénédicte di Geronimo.  
Editorial direction: Muriel Wiltord, Géraldine Rome, Monique Macaire Sprott.  
Design and production: Agence espresso communication & design inc.  
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Photos: Alamy Images, Jean-Baptiste Barret, Club Med, CMT, David Giral, Richard Haughton, Moune Jamet, Micha, L. Olivier, A. Omere, R. Pakiel, A. Petton, Henri Salomon, F. Smith, Katsuyoshi Tanaka, Ti Fox, and TropiXPhoto.

Cover: Town of Les Anses-d'Arlet

