

Created by: Debra C. Argen

Martinique - The Caribbean Side

[Martinique's](#) motto is "so much in an island," which I discovered to be true as I explored the exotic beauty of this ***French West Indies Island***.



Edward F. Nesta and I had barely landed at the Lamentin Airport in Martinique in April 2006, and we were off exploring the island in our [Jumbo Car](#) rental car. With directions in hand, we spirited off to our luxury hotel, the [Sofitel Bakoua](#) in Pointe du Pout in Les Trois Ilets, located on the southern Caribbean side of Martinique. The 139-room hotel, was the first luxury hotel in Martinique, and took advantage of the real estate motto, "location, location, and location."

Situated directly on the beach, hotel guests can swim in the sheltered bay or in the infinity pool with its breathtaking views, experience Martinique hospitality and gastronomy, and walk to the conveniently located Le Creole Village for shopping, galleries, restaurants and to the marina. Read about the **Sofitel Bakoua** in the **Hotels and Resorts**, **Restaurants**, and **Chefs' Recipes** sections.

Sofitel Bakoua
Pointe du Bout
97229 Les Trois-Ilets
Telephone: +05 96 66 02 02
Fax: +05 96 66 00 41
Email: H0968@accor-hotels.com
www.sofitel.com

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After checking-in at the Sofitel Bakoua, our first discovery of Martinique took us to [la Savane des Esclaves](#), a replica of a slave village. Mr. Gilbert Larose, the owner, built the village over a 5-year period to honor his grandparents. Using a machete, traditional tools, and skills that he learned from his grandfather, Mr. Larose created la Savane des Esclaves to provide visitors with insight into Martinique's history.

Visitors can experience traditional life in the 1900's, watch the art of making chocolate using a mortar and pestle, try crushing sugar cane, purchase artisan crafts, and take a tour of the buildings and the gardens. Mr. Larose is a wealth of knowledge of history and plants, and enjoys sharing his knowledge of the holistic use of each of the plants with visitors. The gardens are rich with tropical flowers and natural sculptures that Mr. Larose created from tree roots. La Savane des Esclaves is open daily from 10:00 am - 12:00 pm, and from 2:00 pm - 5:30 pm.

la Savane des Esclaves

Quartier La Ferme

97229 Les Trois-Ilets

Contact: Mr. Gilbert Larose

Telephone: +05 96 68 33 91

Mobile: +06 96 22 79 05

Email: lasavanedesesclaves@wanadoo.fr

www.lasavanedesesclaves.fr

We stretched our legs in the evening by walking to have a casual al fresco dinner at **Le Ponton**, where we had grilled shrimp and filet of dorado. The restaurant is elevated over the water, and as we watched the fish swimming below us we felt like we were dining above an aquarium.

Le Ponton

Telephone: +05 96 66 05 45

Email: leponton@wanadoo.fr



The next day, we were feeling adventurous and decided to explore Martinique from the top down, or actually, I should say, looking down from the treetops. We went to [Mangofil Martinique](#), where we learned

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to glide from tree-to-tree via cables suspended between the trees to take a canopy tour. If you enjoy viewing the world from alternate viewpoints, this is the place to come. We marveled at the beauty from our bird's eye aeries as we walked the wires high in the air and glided through the forest. Whizzing by on the cables, we could not help ourselves, and had to yell out, "Wheeeeeee!" If air adventure is not your style, you can also go trekking or rent ATVs (All Terrain Vehicles). Mangofil Martinique is open daily from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, however the last adventure begins at 3:00 pm. Read more about **Mangofil Martinique** in the **Events** section.

Mangofil Martinique
Forêt Rateau
Domaine Château Gaillard
97229 Les Trois Ilets
Telephone: +05 96 68 08 08
Email: Martinique@mangofil.net
www.mangofil.net



After an exciting adventure, it is often necessary to take a break and relax a moment, and a visit to the **Domaine Château Gaillard** and the **Musée du Café et du Cacao (Coffee and Cocoa Museum)** provided the perfect respite. Mr. Marcelino Hayot, the owner of Domaine Château Gaillard created the museum to explain the history of making coffee and cocoa. The museum has an interesting collection of memorabilia, including a sign by Miranda Ingram, "Don't believe that chocolate is a substitute for love...love is a substitute for chocolate."



In addition to the museum, Domaine Château Gaillard, has a small restaurant, a large nursery with exotic plants, and many artisan shops. We watched the pottery artisans at work, and made purchases at the individual shops. Domaine Château Gaillard is open daily from 9:00 am - 6:00 pm.

Domaine Château Gaillard
Musée du Café et du Cacao
Au Domaine Château Gaillard
Route des Trois-Ilets
97229 Les Trois-Ilets
Telephone: +05 96 68 10 57
Email: domainechateaugaillard@wanadoo.fr

In the evening, we took a short walk from the hotel to have an al fresco dinner at **Restaurant "La Marine"** located in the Marina de la Pointe du Bout. We began with shrimp and traditional Martinique crab accras

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(fritters), followed by grilled lobster with saffron rice and fried plantains.

Restaurant "La Marine"

Marina de la Pointe du Bout

97229 Les Trois-Ilets

Telephone: +05 96 66 02 32

Fax: +05 96 66 06 14

Email: restaurant-la-marine@wanadoo.fr



The next day, we visited [Distillerie Neisson](#), our first rum distillery. Distillerie Neisson, built in 1931, is family-owned and operated, and is the newest of the rum distilleries. We took a tour of the distillery with Mr. Grégory Vernant, the Master Distiller, where we learned about the fascinating process of making A.O.C. Martinique Rhum Agricole, which uses the juice of the sugar cane to produce the rum. Neisson distinguishes itself by using six types of cane to produce their rum: Cristalline, a noble cane, the "Oficinarium," and five hybrid canes, including blue and red cane. Neisson is the only distiller to use Cristalline sugar cane in their product. Afterwards, we enjoyed sampling the exceptional fruits of their labor with Mrs. Claudine Neisson Vernant, Grégory's mother.

Distillerie Neisson is open Monday - Friday from 8:00 am - 4:30 pm, and on Saturday from 8:00 am - 12:00 pm. Check their website for holiday hours. If you are interesting in seeing the distillery in operation, it is important to visit in the morning. The distilleries usually stop production early in the afternoon, although the tasting rooms remain open. Read more about Distillerie Neisson in the **Liquor Cabinet** section: [Neisson Rhum Agricole](#) and about Martinique Rhum Agricole in the article, [Martinique Rhum Agricole - The Art and Science](#).

Distillerie Neisson

Domaines Thieubert E.A.R.L.

Le Coin - 97221 Le Carbet

Telephone: +596-596-78-03-70

Fax: +596-596-78-03-95

Email: info@neisson.com, contact@neisson.com

www.neisson.com



We continued our exploration at **Habitation Céron**, which was a sugar plantation in 1658. Today, visitors can see the remains of the sugar mill, go horseback riding through the tropical forest, feel like a native and take a dip in the enchanting waterfalls, enjoy a guided walk through the forest and the exotic gardens, or rent ATVs (All Terrain Vehicles) to experience the forest by wheel.

We had lunch at the restaurant in the gracious setting of enormous bamboo trees and colorful bromeliads.

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We went horseback riding with the owner, Madame Laurence Marraud-des-Grotts, whose husband's family bought Habitation Céron in 1991, restored the overgrown plantation, and opened it to the public in 1993. Habitation Céron, located in Le Prêcheur, is 25-miles from Fort-de-France, and is in the most northern village on the Caribbean side, and is definitely worth the trip to experience the natural beauty. Open daily from 9:30 am - 5:00 pm. Read more about **Habitation Céron** in the **Events** section.

Habitation Céron

Anse Céron

97250 Le Prêcheur

Telephone: +05 96 52 97 03, +05 96 52 97 03

Fax: +05 96 52 96 02

Email: Habitation.Ceron@wanadoo.fr



Fort-de-France, located in the central part of the island, is the administrative capital of Martinique. We parked our car next to **La Savane Park**, toured the colorful open markets selling madras, spices, produce, and souvenirs, and walked along the water to see **Le Fort Saint-Louis**, a fortification dating to 1640.



If you appreciate architecture, make a stop at **St. Louis Cathedral** built in 1895, and **The Schoelcher Library** designed by the architect, Henry Pick. The library has an interesting history, as each piece was brought from France and was then constructed in Martinique in 1893. The amazing stained glass ceiling alone is worth a trip. Open Mondays 1:00 pm - 5:30 pm, Tuesday - Thursday from 8:30 am - 5:30 pm, Fridays from 8:30 - 5:00 pm, and Saturdays 8:30 am - 12:00 pm.

St. Louis Cathedral

Rue Schoelcher

97200 Fort-de-France

Telephone: +05 96 73 59 78

Schoelcher Library

Rue de la Liberté

97200 Fort-de-France

Telephone: +05 96 70 26 67

Fax: +05 96 72 45 55

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Email: biblio-schoelcher-dep@cg972.fr

We learned about early Martinique at the **Musée Départemental Archéologie Précolombienne Préhistoire** (Pre-Columbian Prehistoric Museum), which has a fascinating collection in excess of 1,000 locally excavated archeological pieces highlighting the history of Martinique from the period 2000 BC to 1660 AD. Open Monday from 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm, Tuesday - Friday from 8:00 am - 5:00 pm, Saturday from 9:00 am - 12:00 pm.

Musée Départemental Archéologie Précolombienne Préhistoire
9, rue de la Liberté
97200 Fort-de-France
Telephone: +05 96 71 57 05
Fax: +05 96 73 03 80
Email: musarc@cg972.fr



We enjoyed upscale shopping along rue Victor Hugo, stopped in Galleries Lafayette, a smaller version of their Paris store, and stopped at the spice market to purchase Martinique spices and vanilla.



We had an elegant and relaxing lunch at **La Belle Époque**, owned by Madame Martine Diacono, who purchased the charming 100-year Colonial house in 1983. Chef François Xavier Gayalin is responsible for the sophisticated menu. After lunch, we lingered over a vintage 1929 Saint James rum that was the perfect finale. Read about **La Belle Époque** in the **Restaurants** section and in the **Chefs' Recipes** section where Chef François Xavier Gayalin shares enticing recipes in **English** and **French**.

La Belle Époque
97, Route de Didier
97200 Fort de France
Telephone: +05 96 64 41 19
Fax: +05 96 64 32 61
Email: martine_diacono@yahoo.fr

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After lunch, we drove along Route de Didier to admire the Creole and Colonial architecture, and then continued our afternoon of leisure by visiting [Le Jardin de Balata](#). Mr. Jean-Phillippe Thoze created Le Jardin de Balata in 1982, and opened the gardens to the public in 1986. The diversity of the flora at Le Jardin de Balata highlight why Martinique is called the "island of flowers." Open daily from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, except during the month of September when the garden is closed for renovation. Read more about **Le Jardin de Balata** in the **Events** section.

Le Jardin de Balata

10 km, route de Balata

97200 Fort de France

Telephone: +05-96-64-48-73

Fax: +05-96-64-73-40

Email: jardin-balata@wanadoo.fr

www.jardindebalata.com

We continued our island exploration by touring some of the villages in the south of Martinique, including **Saint-Anne** where the breathtaking beaches literally had us pulling over to the side of the road to soak up the ambience and photograph the beauty, and **LeMarin**, where we made a stop at the church, built in 1766.



On our last evening at the Sofitel Bakoua, Chef Francis Dulucq gave us a memorable "Taste of Martinique" at [Restaurant Le Chateaubriand](#). A few items on our tasting menu included Cream of Lobster with Medallions and Local Chives, and Filet of Emperor with Butter and Lemon, Ginger Sauce, Green Papaya with Juniper and Roasted Tomatoes. Read about **Restaurant Le Chateaubriand** in the **Restaurants** section and in the **Chefs' Recipes** section where Chef de Cuisine of the hotel and Master Chef of France Francis Dulucq shares a few of his secret recipes in **English** and **French**.

Restaurant Le Chateaubriand

Sofitel Bakoua

Pointe du Bout

97229 Les Trois-Ilets

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Martinique really does offer "so much in an island." So much in fact, that I needed to write two Destinations articles on Martinique to attempt to capture the highlights of this captivating island.

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In addition to the **Destination: Martinique - The Caribbean Side** article, you might also enjoy reading [Destination: Martinique - The Atlantic Side](#) to really give you the complete experience of all that Martinique has to offer from beautiful beaches, exotic gardens, water sports, land adventure activities, and visits to rum distilleries. Even after driving 440-miles on an island that is only 685-square miles, we still have more to discover, which leaves us something for the next time.

The Martinicans are very friendly and helpful, however it is always useful to learn some basic vocabulary when traveling.

Basic French Vocabulary

Do you speak English?

Parlez-vous anglais?

Excuse me

Excusez-moi

Good Morning, Good Evening
Good Night

Bonjour, Bonsoir
Bon nuit

Good bye

Au revoir

Please

S'il vous plait

Thank you

Merci

You're welcome

De rien

Yes, No, Maybe

Oui, Non, Peut-être

Open, closed

Ouvert, Fermé

Where is?

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Où est le (or la)...?

Food

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Petit dejeuner, Dejeuner, Diner

Bread

Pain

Butter

Beurre

Beef, Veal (Rare, Medium,
Well-done)

Boeuf, Veau (Saignant, A point,
Cuit)

Cheese

Fromage

Chicken

Poulet

Fish

Poisson

Meat

Viande

Pork

Porc

Salad

Salade

Shellfish: (Lobster, Mussel, Oyster, Shrimp)

(Homard, Moule, Huitre,
Crevette)

Vegetables

Legumes

Beverages

Beer

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Biere

Coffee, Tea

Café, The

Ice

Glace

Juice

Jus

Milk

Lait

Water

Eau

Wine

Vin

Cheers

Sante!

Health

Doctor

Docteur

Dentist

Dentiste

Help!

Au secours!

Hospital

Hôpital

I am sick

Je suis malade.

Pharmacy

Pharmacie

Read other articles on **Martinique** in [Destination: Martinique - The Atlantic Side](#), [Hotels and Resorts](#), [Restaurants](#), [Spas](#), [Chefs' Recipes](#), [Fashion](#), [Gastronomy](#), [Events](#) and [Liquor Cabinet](#) sections.

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For more information on **Martinique**, please contact the **[Martinique Promotion Bureau](#)** at **www.martinique.org**.

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