

**For Immediate Release**

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**MARTINIQUE CELEBRATES 100 YEARS OF CARNIVAL IN 2006 (1906 – 2006)**

**Unlike Elsewhere, Revelry Will Continue  
Right Through Ash Wednesday, March 1**

Carnival celebrations in such Mardi Gras capitals as Rio, New Orleans and Trinidad are sizzling hot right through Shrove Tuesday, but then fizzle out with the arrival of Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Not so in Martinique! While revelers elsewhere in the world are nursing hangovers and having their aching foreheads dabbed with ashes, the people of Martinique are just beginning the final, most exciting day of their celebration. Here Carnival runs at full tilt an extra 24 hours and, with more than 40 marching bands joining the festivities in 2006, Martinique is planning a party of a lifetime!

Mardi Gras connoisseurs from many lands, including the late Truman Capote, himself a native of New Orleans, have praised the uniqueness of the Martinique event. It's "as spontaneous and vivid as an explosion in a fireworks factory," wrote Capote in "Music for Chameleons," describing his visit to Carnival in Martinique.

**"Rejoice Today, Repent Tomorrow"**

In a good spirit of mischief, and for as long as anyone can remember, the theme for Ash Wednesday in Martinique has been "Rejoice today, repent tomorrow." And to carry the mischief even further, about three weeks into Lent, the island comes up with a dawn-to-dusk reprise of Carnival in miniature, an official holiday known as Mi-Carême (literally "mid-Lent"). Fasting is suspended for 24 hours and the revelry starts all over again.

In 2006, Ash Wednesday is March 1, but Carnival itself begins in January, with parties taking place every weekend. The fete is infused, week after week, with a merry madness in the bigger towns and cities, especially Fort-de-France. In the days just preceding Ash Wednesday it reaches fever pitch.

On Sunday, February 26 (called Dimanche Gras or "Fat Sunday"), the island will be awl with daytime parades, the costumed marchers strumming strings, strutting to a Carnival beat. Puppets, called bwa bwa, done up in fantastic dress, are carried about, while nègres-gros-sirop – revelers whose bodies are covered with coal tar and sugarcane syrup – break through the crowds playfully frightening children. A major Carnival caricature is Marianne La Po Fig, garbed in dry banana leaves. "Fig" is the Creole word for banana, and Marianne represents the fragility of the fruit. At night, one dances the beguine, which was born in Martinique and reveals the island's soul. Its rhythms, and those of the newer zouk, salsa, soca, calypso and reggae, accompany much that goes on over the following days.

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## **“Mock Weddings” on Monday, “Red Devils” on Tuesday**

By Monday, stores and offices are closed. This is the day for Martinican burlesque, for “Mock Weddings,” with men garbed as pregnant brides or blond-wigged floozies, and women done up as reluctant bridegrooms. (“All those men wearing their wives’ white wedding gowns!” exclaimed Capote.) At late-night masked balls, “drag” is the accepted costume de nuit.

Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras, February 28) is “Red Devils Day,” highlighted by glorious parades, with all eyes on armies of tots in brilliant red-devil costumes carrying homemade tridents. A fright mask of animal skin and horns is worn with a red cloth jumpsuit adorned with hundreds of glittering mirrors and small bells that jingle when in motion. The “Red Devils” dance until sundown; then their elders take over in a celebration that may seem like Carnival’s climax but is just a preview of more to come.

For the rest of the Christian world, Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is a time to pray. But in Martinique, it’s a time to play. And play they do. Local rums, reputedly among the world’s best, flow like water. Emotions run high and hot. It is the “Day of the She-Devils” (La Fête des Diablesses), when some 30,000 revelers gather to mourn the end of Carnival and the symbolic death of King Carnival. Only two colors are worn: black and white. “She-Devils,” their faces smeared with pale ash or white flour, traditionally wear embroidered waist petticoats and blouses, a black skirt and headscarf made with a damask white table napkin, mismatched black and white socks, shoes and gloves. For revelers not in mourning attire, any kind of crazy get-up is okay, so long as it’s black-and-white.

### **It’s Fun and It’s Safe**

It’s easy for tourists to take in all the fun of Carnival. They can safely join the parade or watch from bleachers set up on the sidewalks or from balconies overlooking the streets and squares. Truman Capote’s story describes “one marvelous marching group: 50 men carrying black umbrellas and wearing silk top hats, their torsos painted with phosphorescent skeleton bones; old ladies with gold-tinsel wigs and sequins pasted all over their faces.”

Focal point of the final goings-on is King Carnival, a giant colorful effigy known as Vaval, along with his alter ego, Bwa-Bwa, who towers over the floats and dancing procession. By now, humorous death notices of King Carnival have been announced in local media. Festivities continue as his funeral pyre is built. Dusk falls, then flames light up the night sky. As Vaval’s effigy is consigned to the fire, dancing reaches its apogee. Only when the flames die down does a calm settle over the masses. With the burial of Vaval, they chant “Vaval, pas quitte nous”, which translates into “Carnival don’t leave us.”

Then it is over. At least for the time being. The mischief is revived three weeks later – on March 30 in 2000 – with a 24-hour reprise of Carnival called Mi-Carême, or mid-Lent. There is no Vaval, but there are costumes and parades again, endless marching bands, plus much revelry and rum -- all in the spirit of Carnival, Martinican-style. In towns and villages throughout the island, there is dancing and dining galore. The favored food everywhere is “matoutou,” or curried crab, a dish that’s also popular just after Lent at Easter Monday beach picnics.

For more information on Martinique, contact the Martinique Promotion Bureau, 444 Madison Avenue, New York, NY, 10022, Tel: (212) 838 78 00 ext : 228, Fax (212) 838-7855, or on the Internet at <http://www.martinique.org>; e-mail: [info@martinique.org](mailto:info@martinique.org)

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# Carnival's Calendar 2006

## JANUARY 2005

### Sun. 15 "Vidé tout koulè" (Parade of all colors)

Starting at 3:00 pm the parade takes place in Fort de France streets.

### Wed. 18 Creole and Carnival Songs Contest

Location: Grand Carbet du Parc Floral in Fort-de-France

### Sun. 29 Matnik Caribbean Carnival

Carnival parade whose theme is a Village showing the values of Carnival through photo exhibits, costumes or make-up and "Bwa-Bwa" (puppets) sessions. This year, six bands from Guadeloupe, some from Saint-Lucia and Dominica will attend.

## FEBRUARY 2005

### Tues. 21st Children Carnival Parade

All Fort de France's schools will rock the streets in a big parade starting at 4:00pm. You don't want to miss those unique smiling and... crying cute faces.

### Sat. 25 Queens' Parade

Starting at 3:00 pm, all queens from different cities will parade in streets, trying to get some votes for the upcoming general election.

### "Bay Color"

Lights and Sounds show in Lamentin ( Ernest André Street) organized by Nou Pa Sav starting at 8:00 pm

### Sun. 26 Fat Sunday Parade

Introduction of his highness **VAVAL** king of carnival. Each year this *mascot* illustrates a new theme which is kept secret until the very last minute. In an ancestral tradition we parody the most chocking political, economical or social events of the moment. The parade will rule the streets of the capital city, from 3pm on, **under** the TV's eyes. Don't stand on the edge, be part of the game!

Parades in Lamentin from 5:00 to 8:00 pm – Theme: 1906-2006

### Mon. 27 Fat Monday Burlesque Wedding Parade

The children's favorite. The burlesque wedding parade allows every man and woman to wear the opposite sex's clothes and parade in the street!!! Be prepared to see every kind of outrageous and/or funny scenes. They will hit the street at 3:00 pm so be aware.

In Lamentin, the schedule is as follows:

4:00 pm: "Kouss'Roul", parade of dressed up/down cars around the church

5:00 pm – 7 pm: Parade in the streets with "Petrol Band"

7 pm – 9 pm: Big Burlesque wedding parade in the streets

### Tue. 28 Fat Tuesday Red Devil Parade

Scariest day of the year, if you are 5 years old in Martinique! The dress code is red and everyone runs, jumps and makes noise in the streets. You will see all kinds of **Red Devils**. Small, big, huge, with mirrored pitchforks, with 10 to 50 horns... so will you dare to be there at 3:00 pm when they unleash the excitement? In Lamentin, there is a pyjama jump-up in the streets called "Jou ouvé" since it starts at 4:00 am.

At 7:00 am, all revelers meet at Place Mahault for "Tinin Morue", green bananas with codfish. This special occasion is organized by SA KI FET FET.

### Wed., March 1 Ash Wednesday King VAVAL's Funeral Parade

What a happy-sad day. Everything that has a beginning has an end, so does carnival. It's all begins with a hilarious radio, funeral announcement (French mixed with Creole). A crowd goes through the streets, following the dying king through the city, then, at dawn, they will burn his highness **King VAVAL** in a huge Fire. Some will cry or just pretend they do...

The dress code is black and white. Funeral march starts at 3:00 pm

**Sun. 5 Carême**

Lent fasting for 40 days.

For more information on carnival in Fort-de-France, contact the City Hall "mission carnaval hotel de ville" Tel: (0596) 596 59 42 54, on carnival in Lamentin, contact the Lamentin Tourism Office Tel: (0596) 596 42 35 87, Martinique Tourist Office (CMT) tel: 0596 596 61 61 77 or the Martinique Promotion Bureau/ CMT USA 444 Madison Ave, 16th floor, New York NY 10022 Tel: (212) 838.7800 ext 228 - Fax: (212) 838.7855 E-mail: [info@martinique.org](mailto:info@martinique.org)