

**For Immediate Release**

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**MARTINIQUE'S CULINARY MAGIC:**  
**A Marriage of Two Cuisines, French and Creole**

Many Caribbean islands are synonymous with Magic, but the kind found in Martinique is, quite simply, culinary. It is an art practiced by wizardly chefs who can take something very ordinary, like little spiny sea urchins, do secret things to them, and -- with just a whisper of "open sesame" to the oven door -- bring forth a soufflé that is positively spellbinding. It's what sets Martinique apart from the other Caribbean islands. Here, chefs are seasoned sorcerers; elsewhere, they are apprentices.

Magic aside, Martinique also happens to be French, and shows its Frenchness very noticeably through its love affair with good food. Many shops close from noon to 2:30 for the sacrosanct tradition of a copious and leisurely lunch, and dinner is often a gastronomic adventure lasting all evening.

Since local people dine out as a matter of course, visitors to Martinique have one of the widest choices of restaurants in the Caribbean, more than 150. Hotels and better-known spots have menus in English, but many little places do not, so it's wise to bring along a French phrase book and pocket dictionary.

Many dining rooms offer both French cuisine and Creole, a wondrous mix of African, Indian, European and Caribbean flavors. Others combine the best from both. To classic French dishes, for example, might be added such exotic local fruits and vegetables as guava, soursop, cassava, christophine, breadfruit, okra and pliantain.

**Fish is King**

On every menu, fish is king, with daily specialties varying according to the morning's catch. Typical are red snapper, kingfish, sunfish, soudons (small clams), z'habitants or cribiches (fresh water crayfish), lambi (conch), oursin (sea urchin) and langouste (clawless Caribbean lobster). Sometimes the fish is prepared in traditional Creole fashion using piquant spices and herbs, at other times it is served in the more lightly seasoned French style, and often it is a marriage of the two.

**A Complimentary Gourmet Guide**

Visitors should pick up a complimentary copy of "Ti Gourmet," an illustrated guide in English and French to some 100 restaurants, with details on types of food served, location, telephone, price

ranges, etc. Guests who present the booklet at any of these restaurants are offered special dining bonuses, ranging from a free rum punch to 10% off their check.

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A host of good little restaurants dot the narrow balconied streets of the capital: Long a favorite on rue Ernest Deproge is **Le Crew**, where meals are served family style in rustic dining rooms. On the bill of fare are a few Creole dishes, but the emphasis is on such typically French bistro dishes as fish soup, snails, country pâté, frogs' legs, grilled chicken and steak. Portions are ample, prices are moderate, and **Le Crew** is nicely located two minutes from the Martinique Tourist Office.

**Chez Gaston** on rue Félix Eboué is a delightful "quick service"; the intimate **El Raco** on rue Lazare-Carnot, one of the town's oldest eateries, boasts French cuisine, while **King Kréole** on the Avenue des Caraïbes offers traditional Creole fare. Highly recommended is the calm and placid **La Cave à Vin**, at 118 rue Victor Hugo, whose specialties are Southwestern French: foie gras, Petrossian caviar, duck, truffled chicken, **entrecôte bordelaise**, Daskalidès chocolates flown in from Belgium etc. La Cave à Vin features the finest in *grands vins de Bordeaux* and other famous wines from France.

For a quick bite in a stylish and comfy atmosphere, you could stop by **Lina's Café** conveniently located on Rue Victor Hugo.

Several hotels in Fort-de-France have restaurants worth noting, among them the **Impératrice** on La Savane, whose dining room, **Le Joséphine**, carries a different Creole menu every day. Seafood dishes also vary daily, among them a delicious braised fish with freshwater shrimp and breaded fillets of **balauou**, a local delicacy. On the Boulevard de la Marne in the lively **Squash Hotel** is **Le Jardin des Alizés**, a Paris-type brasserie that's great for a Creole paella or a steak tartare.

### **Foods From Far-Off Places**

Tucked into the back streets and hills of Fort-de-France, or along its riverbanks, are "foreign" restaurants whose names are a clue to the type of food offered: **Le Thé à la Menthe**, at Rond Point du Vietnam, is Maghrebien and Moroccan, and **Le New Pekin**, on the way to Schoelcher, is Chinese. Like many island restaurants, except for those in hotels, they close on Sundays.

Another restaurant with a foreign flavor is the venerable **La Muraille** on rue Martin Luther King, a short cab ride from downtown. Here the food is Chinese, with touches both of French and Creole.

In the southern city of Marin, restaurant **Le Zanzibar** serves African, Indian and Asian dishes. This cozy restaurant faces the sea. One of their specialties is the delightful lamb *tagine*.

### **Elegant Dining on the Outskirts of Town**

At nearby Patio de Cluny is the elegant, romantically lighted **La Canne à Sucre**, a divine little **maison coloniale** that has created quite a buzz since the day it opened. The reason for its instant success is the reputation of owner/chef, Gérard Virginius, whose original restaurant of the same name in Guadeloupe won plaudits galore from respected local and international food critics. Among his memorable **nouvelle cuisine créole** creations is a **brioché de langouste**, a **cassoulette de chatrou** (octopus), and a fillet of flying fish in a chive cream sauce.

On Route de Didier, Martine Diacono's sophisticated **La Belle Epoque** is a turn-of-the-century house with a very haute cuisine menu. One dines exquisitely and very leisurely on such specialties as puff pastry stuffed with curried shrimp, red snapper flamed in antique rum, roasted stuffed pigeon, and rack of lamb glazed in honey and lemon. Mrs Diacono is well-known as a champion of local cooking, her latest triumph being a prestigious *Trophée International du Tourisme, de l'Hotellerie et de la Gastronomie* awarded late in 2003 in Madrid.

Close by is the charming **Aux 4 Epices** restaurant whose menu combines classic French cuisine and a large variety of kebabs that you may enjoy in the lovely arranged backyard.

The Chef's chocolate cake and profiteroles are also a must.

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### **Dining in and Around Lamentin**

Going to or from Lamentin Airport one finds the sleek and handsome **Hotel Valmenière** on the Avenue des Arawaks. Its large and lovely restaurant, **Le Dôme**, serves remarkable food of high epicurean quality. In the nearby Jambette area, on the Rue Piétonne de Rivière Roche, several lovely new restaurants, each with an outdoor café, have made recent debuts. Among them are **Coeur Créole**, a typically Antillean dwelling with typically Creole cuisine, **L'Ambassade de Bretagne**, whose specialties include Breton crepes, **La Yole**, where pizzas and pastas are the draw, and **Délices d'Asie**, for Chinese dishes.

In the Pays Mélé section of Lamentin is a charming inn, **Martinique Cottages**, whose restaurant, **La Plantation**, has won awards from Gault Millau. Jean-Marc and Peggy Arnaud, a brother-sister team, run the fashionable dining room as a country retreat for knowledgeable gourmands. Their chef, Eric Voiron, who trained with such celebrated masters as Roger Vergé, Lenôtre and the Trois Gros brothers, does up some very innovative dishes combining the best of French and Martinican foods. His own favorite dish is a terrine of boiled calf's head with pressed tomato served in a sauce of virgin olive oil, balsamic vinegar and sweet peppers.

Also in Lamentin is the excellent **Le Verger** at Place d'Armes, with French and Creole dishes augmenting foods from the Périgord region of France. Likewise of note is the **Baghdad Café**, an enterprise of Muriel Palandri, whose name is well-known and respected in local culinary circles. Lastly, the Lamentin international airport boasts a smart and comfortably appointed restaurant that's quickly became popular; **L'Oursin Bleu** features dishes not usually associated with airport dining: fresh salmon mousse with artichokes; duck liver pâté with a vinaigrette of morilles and Alsatian wine; a rich pot au feu with veal, poultry and beef; veal medallions in a roquefort sauce; braised guinea hen stuffed with apples and pineapples; and a panoply of imported cheeses and island desserts.

### **Lots of Good Spots along the Caribbean Coast**

North of Fort-de-France along the Caribbean coast is a plethora of good places to eat. In the town of Schoelcher, a quick five-minute drive from downtown Fort de France, **The Madiana Convention Center complex** features, in addition to its state-of-the-art meeting facilities and high-tech movie theater, two restaurants conveniently located on site:

**Les 3 Brasseurs**, a well-known French brasserie where you may enjoy a beer made directly on site, from their own small brewery.

**Les Yoles**, a charming outdoor restaurant located on a large terrace in a setting of colorful Creole house facades. Most dishes are served in elegant miniature yoles, a traditional boat made only in Martinique!

Just up the coast is **Le Jardin de Jade**, a grand China palace. One kilometer after nearby Fond-Lahaye one finds **Les Deux Gros**, to feast on fine meats and fresh fish.

Farther along, Joseph Rangon's **Le Maniba** is a simple but good find in the village of Case-Pilote. North of here, at the entrance to Carbet, is an elegant and very gastronomic place, Corinne and Frédéric D'Orazio's **Le Trou Crabe**. The couple, originally from Lyons, successfully blends the haute cuisine française for which their native city is famed, with local delicacies, expertly prepared by their French chef, M. Donzeau. On Thursdays, mussels and oysters arrive fresh from France; on Saturdays, there is dancing; and always there is a sea world to gaze at in **Le Trou Crabe**'s 2,000-gallon aquarium.

To see how Carbet's fishermen live and to taste their catch, try **O-Ra-La-Lanme**, a Creole retreat near where Gauguin lived and painted. Carbet, though tiny, has a dozen eateries, including Joel Griffith's **La Datcha**, where lobster is as appetizing as the beach setting; and **L'Imprévu**, where one can dine to strumming guitar.

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Historic St-Pierre is next on the itinerary and a wonderful choice here is **Le Fromager**, perched on a hillside above the famous town. The domain of the friendly Demant family, it rewards visitors with both delectable meals and a spectacular panorama of the bay. Just beyond is Mt. Pelée, the volcano that erupted some 95 years ago and instantly made a New World Pompeii of St-Pierre.

A 15-minute drive north leads to Prêcheur, one of Martinique's oldest villages, whose nearby **Habitation Céron** is an Eden of flora, fauna and relics of 17th-century sugar-plantation life. The Marraud des Grottes family has lovingly restored **Céron** and offers not only tours but also exquisite lunches of crayfish caught fresh from estate ponds. Farther up, at Anse Coulevre, is another exotic oasis, Jean Louis de Lucy's **Moana**, where the specialties include fresh fish prepared Tahitian style, lobster wrapped in banana leaves, and chicken en brochette cooked in coconut milk. A visit to **Moana** can quite easily become an all-day adventure: scuba dive at the offshore Ilet de la Perle, hike to Grand'Rivière (with a return trip by yawl) or simply enjoy the paradisiacal setting from a hammock.

### **Playing Peekaboo with Pelée**

Other dining spots in the environs of St-Pierre include **Auberge de la Montagne Pelée**, inland near Morne Rouge in a Shangri-la setting at Pelée's base. Here guests, while supping on calalou aux ciriques, a thick soup of dasheen leaves, spices and peppers, served with fresh sea crabs, or fricassée de volaille fonds cacao, cocoa-flavored chicken, can watch the clouds play peek-aboo with the volcano.

At Ajoupa-Bouillon, on the opposite side of the volcano, **L'Abri** is a friendly, flowery stopover whose menu lists fricassée of river shrimp, goat ragout, rabbit with chestnuts, pumpkin flan, and a myriad of other Creole dishes.

Not far away are two of Martinique's most beautiful properties: **Leyritz Plantation** at Basse-Pointe, which dates back to the 1700's and has been restored as an inn, and **Habitation Lagrange**, also an 18th-century Creole mansion, which Jean-Louis de Lucy has turned into a deluxe little hotel. **Lagrange** sits one mile inland from the main road between Marigot and Lorrain on the northeast coast. Dining here is a wondrous, romantic experience -- dishes inspired by the grand tables of France but composed of local products seasoned with cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and other island spices. Like the foods and wines, the table settings are exquisite -- fresh flowers, fine linens, china, crystal and silver.

To the north is **La Sikri**, a cheery and immaculate hostelry with good food and an ambiance familiale, the family being the Galvas, mother Suzette and daughters Yvette and Marie-Laure. Farther north, outside the village of Grand'Rivière, is **Le Carbet Caraïbes**, two rustic sheds covered with coconut palm leaves, offering wondrous food and views. In the village itself are **Yva Chez Vava**, a modest roadside bistro lauded for the purity of its cuisine -- recipes handed down generation to generation, from fishermen's wives to their daughters, just as the legendary Vava has done with her daughter Yva. Also here is **Tante Arlette**, a Creole spot that has been awarded many prizes for its cuisine and the quality of service, including the French Government's Tourism Medal

### **Lunching in a Private Home**

At nearby Basse-Pointe, lunch is flavored with a souçon spécial at the home of Mally Edjam, whose porch and dining room comprise **Chez Mally**. Off the beaten path, it was discovered by adventurous food writers a dozen years ago and has been welcoming non-French-speaking guests (with the help of a phrase book) ever since. The menu lists lobster vinaigrette, soufflé de papaye, and coconut cake served with highly unusual confitures. While Mally's smile still greets old friends, the new

owner is Martine Hugé, a gracious hostess who does Mally proud. Inland at Morne des Esses, the Palladino family home also serves as a restaurant, **Le Colibri**. Locals rhapsodize over Josy Palladino's delicacies (sea urchin tarts, stuffed pigeons, fresh water crayfish) and how they are served.

In the picturesque city of Marigot, **Le Ghetto** restaurant is a must for local selfish and other seafood specialties, this is a great address for traditional cuisine from the island.

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At Forêt de Philippe near Ste-Marie is Tatie Simone Adeline's **La Découverte**, whose name translates into "the discovery," although it's been around for ages, as Tatie Simone is proud to tell. Its long success is due to modest prices and delicious food, with lobster or shark couscous a specialty.

In Tartane, on the Caravelle peninsula, close to Trinité, is **Le Dubuc**. Traditional tasty Creole dishes are served on a terrace overlooking the Atlantic. Tartane also features **Le Madras** for idyllic beachfront dining, and the newer, more contemporary **Baie du Galion** and **La Goélette** for dining with a panoramic view.

At François on the Atlantic coast, the Cap Est Lagoon Resort and Spa, the first 5-star hotel in Martinique, first Relais et Châteaux in the Caribbean and the most luxurious hotel of the French West Indies, was named one of the best 80 new hotels in the world in the May 2003 issue of *Condé Nast Traveler* and the hotel's **Bélem** restaurant made the magazine's list of 75 new Hot Tables worldwide. "The signature entrees range from conch ravioli with sautéed morels to roasted quail with foie gras and truffles. Popular deserts are the chocolate fondant and the cassava ice cream." *Condé Nast*. The restaurant also features a vintage rum and French wine cellar.

Also in François, the secluded and very charming **Plein Soleil** guest house provides a delightful **table d'hôte** merging refined French cuisine with Creole dishes, from safran prawns served with pumpkin mousse to an innovative banana **tarte tatin**.

François is also home of Marie-Anne and Erick Prian's **La Riviera**, a gem of a hotel serving Antillean and European dishes. From their pier one can look out on the **Club Nautique**, where the noon meal is often preceded by a boat trip to the coral reefs of offshore islets. At the **Club**, lunch begins with a **décollage** (which translates into "take-off", but here means a potent rum drink aged with herbs until it turns green), a **ti'punch**, which also packs quite a wallop, or a less heady **planteur**, made of rum and fruit juices. And for the best in cod fritters, grilled clawless lobsters and scrumptious quail and rice in St-François, modest **Chez Léger** (no menu) is a must. And right in the harbour of François, **Kaï Nono** offers fresh seafood and the catch of the day. Inland, the intimate Plein Soleil Hotel, a 15 mn drive from François, provides meals for guests and others on request only. The menu is fixed daily, based on what is found in the market. The service and atmosphere are very pleasant.

### **Seafood Down South**

Fresh seafood is the ubiquitous item on nearly every menu in Ste-Anne, a fishing village down south that's considered one of Martinique's prettiest towns. Among its worthy stops: **Poï et Virginie**, an inviting aerie on the sea reachable by car or boat; the St-Cyr family's beloved antique-laden **Manoir de Beauregard**, restored to perfection after a serious fire; and **La Dunette**, a cozy water's-edge inn whose owner is the masterful **chef de cuisine** Gérard Kambona. A two-minute drive from the village center is **Anse Caritan**, transformed recently from a "just folks" type of hotel to 3-star status. With the upgrading, a second restaurant was added, this one overlooking the bay. And in a handsome hillside colonial villa overlooking the opposite side of Ste-Anne Bay, about a five-minute drive from the center of town, is **Frédéric**, the area's **ne plus ultra** in elegant, relaxed, refined dining. Ste-Anne is blessed with a glorious beach that features some mighty special dining spots. While waiting for your lobster, you can enjoy a swim, savor a rum drink, and luxuriate in incredible euphoria. This mix of swim-and-dine is very enticing throughout Martinique and places like **Anse Noire** at Anse Noire or **Ti'Sable** at

Grande Anse even offer shower facilities to guests. Also in Sainte-Anne, but 15 mn drive from the village itself, is **Chez Gracieuse**, which offers a view of the simple harbor of Cap Chevalier. Very informal, Chez Gracieuse has a comprehensive menu.

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At Le Marin, the boating life adds to the appeal of lunching at the neighboring little restaurants such as **L'Indigo**. To enjoy a dinner with live entertainment in Marin, stop at **Calebasse Café**, a very vogue, cozy and renown art performance center that features music from Cuban to Jazz to chanson française from art exhibits to special theme nights.

Not far away, Ste-Luce has several hotels that offer good dining, notably the **Amyris** and the **Village Pierre & Vacances**. In the town itself, **Kai Armande** has long been a charmer, as is Armande herself. Her love of art is reflected in the local paintings she exhibits. On a hillside above town is Serge Kilo's **La Corniche**, a quiet spot that becomes quite animated on weekends when local musicians play. Worth a detour from here are **Chez Julot** in Vauclin, **Chez Mireille** on the road to the lovely Cap Chevalier sands, and **Chez Gracieuse** at Cap Chevalier itself.

An ever-growing resort down south is Le Diamant, bursting with places to eat. Some, such as **La Marine**, are sizeable hotels; others like **Le Relais Caraïbes** and **Diamant-les-Bains**, for example, are small family-run inns with surprisingly fine kitchens. One thing they all have in common is a great view of the historic offshore wonder, HMS Diamond Rock. Of note in the hills above Le Diamant is **La Quenette**, a simple abode that seldom sees foreign tourists.

### **Larger Hotels Take Pride in Their Cuisine**

Martinique's larger hotels, including the **Bakoua**, **Kalenda** and **Carayou** at Pointe du Bout, a bustling resort area across the bay from the capital, offer informal beachfront terrace cafés, “dressier” indoor restaurants, and, one night a week, opulent buffets topped off with sell-out performances by such dance troupes as Les Grands Ballets and Les Balisiers. Pointe du Bout's marina has the look of the Côte d'Azur, with yachtsmen swapping sea stories over their chopsticks at **La Marine**, or the seafood at **Le Davidiana**. Around the cove at Anse Mitan, busy day and night, favorites include the lovely Guy Bruère-Dawson's **La Villa Créole** (great for classic guitar and late night dinner-dancing), and the **Manureva** restaurant which welcomes you in a boat-like atmosphere including an impressive boat-shaped bar. The cuisine is gastronomic French with hints of Creole influences.

In Pointe du Bout, nestled in the resort area, the Village Creole complex features, besides its 35 all-equipped tourist apartments, a total of 26 shops and 7 restaurants featuring Creole, Cuban, Italian and French cuisines and much more. **Havana Café** and **La Grange** are among them.

Close by, located in Anses d'Arlet, the upscale and innovative **Quai Sud** restaurant faces the Caribbean Sea. The menu is based on Latin and Caribbean cuisines. One may have lunch directly on the restaurant deck. Reservations are requested for dinner.

Serving all these resorts is the **Golf de l'Impératrice**, which welcomes golfers and non-golfers alike to its dining oasis, **Le Country**. Its chef tees up both international and local island fare. Here, as everywhere on Martinique, reservations are suggested. Dining on this island is serious business.

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