

**For Immediate Release**

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**WALKING, HIKING, CYCLING AND NATURE VISITS HIGHLIGHT  
ECOTOURISM IN MARTINIQUE**

Tourism and leisure activities on the French West Indies' island of Martinique are undergoing a period of diversification. Although the beaches still remain the most popular attraction, more and more visitors are coming to this little bit of France in the Caribbean because of the ever-growing opportunity to enjoy such ecotouristic activities as nature visits, walking, cycling and hiking.

With its remarkable variety of landscapes, Martinique lends itself well to ecotourism. It is blessed with soaring mountains and dramatic volcanoes, cascading waterfalls and lush tropical rain forests, a wealth of flora and fauna, rolling farmlands and fields of sugarcane, plus dramatic coastlines of cliffs, ravines, and knolls. Connecting all these natural wonders are impressive networks of fine, well-marked roads. For beachcombing or a refreshing dip, there are beaches everywhere, some of them unexplored.

**“Randonnées” - Hiking and Walking**

Inexpensive guided tours, in which visitors can participate, are organized by the **Association Martiniquaise des Accompagnateurs en Montagne**. For a listing of these guides, you may contact the **Parc Naturel Régional de la Martinique**, Tel: (011 596) 596.64.42.59. There are weekend excursions allowing hikers and walkers to explore a variety of locales.

Serious hiking tours include a two-hour climb, with or without a guide, up **Mont Pelée**, a dormant volcano, through thick foliage and overgrown trails. Though the panorama at the top is spectacular, clouds sometimes prevent a view. Less difficult, but still requiring skill, is the trek through a dense coastal rain forest between **Grand'Rivière** and **Le Prêcheur**. Off **La Trace**, the serpentine route through the central rain forest in the north, are two excellent trails: the **Canal des Esclaves**, a scenic 3-hour hike, and **La Trace des Jésuites**, for more modest hiking. There are signs for both on **La Trace** near **Deux-Choux**. Fairly easy are the trails along the little canyons and falls of the **Gorges de la Falaise**. Very easy is the nature trail, **Les Ombrages**, in **Ajoupa-Bouillon**, which received *Island Magazine's* “Ecotourism Award” in 1992.

Martinique also offers hiking on a well-protected peninsula jutting six miles into the Atlantic, the **Presqu'île de la Caravelle**. Here, hikers find well-marked trails leading through tropical wetlands to the ruins of historic **Château Dubuc**.

There are small entry fees for sights like the museum at the **Château Dubuc**, but parks in Martinique have no gates, no opening or closing hours, no admission fees, and are open to all. The guidebook **Les Plus Belles Balades** (in French) costs 27.90 Euros (about \$ 36.14).

### **“Le Cyclisme” - Bicycle Touring**

In cooperation with local bicycle organizations, the **Parc Naturel Régional de la Martinique** has designed biking itineraries “off the beaten track.” Cyclists can rent bikes in Fort-de-France or Pointe du Bout. For really serious biking there is the annual “Tour de la Martinique,” a thrilling weeklong race in mid-July, with international teams competing in this mini-version of the famous “Tour de France.”

Since “le cyclisme” is considered the unofficial national sport of the French West Indies, bikers will find great enthusiasm here, as well as fine facilities.

### **Habitation Céron**

Originally the manor house of a 17th-century sugar plantation, **Habitation Céron**, situated at the extreme north of the Caribbean coast, still boasts the remains of the old mill and is surrounded by fields where coffee, cocoa, tapioca, and bananas once flourished, and where avocados are now a principal crop. A highlight here is an immense park, traversed by a river that flows into two large basins.

**Céron** is historically important because of its connection with Françoise d’Aubigné, the celebrated Madame de Maintenon who secretly wed France’s King Louis XIV.

Individuals are welcomed and day trips for small groups can be organized by bus or boat from Fort-de-France and Pointe du Bout. The outing, from 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. includes a Créole luncheon, a swim at “La Perle” beach, and guided tour of the estate. English-speaking Madame Laurence des Grottes is in charge and her address is Anse Céron, 97250 Le Prêcheur, Tel: (011 596) 596.52.94.53.

### **Balata Gardens**

Surely one of Martinique’s stellar botanical attractions, and an absolute “must” for the nature lover, the **Jardin de Balata** was created some 20 years ago by Jean-Philippe Thoze who began by landscaping the grounds of his grandmother’s home and just kept right on going. Today his paradise is a showcase of nearly 200 species of plants, trees and flowers. Located within a half-hour’s drive north of Fort-de-France, Balata Gardens are open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Admission: 6.50 Euros (about \$8.40 with the fluctuation of the money) for adults, 3.50 Euros (\$4.53) for children. Tel: (011 596) 596.64.48.73.

### Fontaine Didier, Etc.

Just outside of Fort-de-France on a road that winds up along lush vegetation beyond Martinique's choice residential area, lies the thermal spring called the **Fontaine Didier**, which is the source of the very well-known local mineral water of the same name. Carbonated "Didier" water is the "Perrier" of Martinique and in the mid-19th-century was used to treat both liver disorders and rheumatism. Today, it provides a "refreshing pause." The bottling plant can be visited. Tel: (011 596) 596.64.07.88.

Another, pure local Martinique water that has made it to "the big time" is **Chanflor**, now imported into the U.S. under the name of **Martinique Natural Spring Water** and distributed by Florida-based Island Importers, Inc.

### Canyoning

Although Martinique lays no claim to such grandiose sites as the "Grand Canyon of the Colorado" nor such experiences as "The River Wild," it does indeed offer delightful gorges for exploring. Tucked away in the heart of the northern tropical rain forest are the **Gorges de la Falaise**, a most remarkable "little canyon" with hiking trails leading to a beautiful waterfall. Also worth trying for "not-to-difficult" climbing, leaping into waterfalls, and more are such places as Absalon, Alma and the hot springs of Prêcheur.

### The Ecomusée

No roundup of ecotourism in Martinique would be complete without a low bow to the charming **Ecomusée** at Anse Figuier, on the gorgeous beach just outside Rivière Pilote, in the south.

Housed in a former distillery, the handsome two-floor museum covers the island's history from pre-Columbian Arawak and Carib Indian times through the colonial period and plantation economy. Its exhibits, fascinating and instructive, recount the manner in which the island has developed agriculturally and socially. Admission: adults 3 Euros (about \$3.89), children 0.75 Euros (about \$0.97) (free for children less than 5 years). Group rate (10 adults minimum): 2 Euros (about \$2.59). Open Tuesday-Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm and week-end, 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. and 2:00-5:00 p.m. Closed on Mondays. Tel: (011 596) 596.62.79.14.

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For further information on ecotourism in Martinique, contact the Martinique Promotion Bureau, 444 Madison Ave., NY, NY, 10022, Tel: (212) 838 6887, Fax: (212) 838-7855. On the Internet: <http://www.martinique.org>. By e-mail: [info@martinique.org](mailto:info@martinique.org)

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