

For Immediate Release

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**MARTINIQUE, A CORNER OF FRANCE IN THE CARIBBEAN,
ENJOYING NEW TOURIST VOGUE BOASTS A TOTAL OF 6,000 ROOMS**

(FORT-DE-FRANCE, Martinique) -- Sail into this bustling little Caribbean capital, or jet down at its airport of Lamentin, and you are in la belle France just as surely as if you had arrived somewhere on the French Riviera.

An ocean may separate Martinique from Mother France, but the island is, nonetheless, a full-fledged French département and région -- with deputies in the National Assembly in Paris, senators in the Senate, and here at home, gendarmes directing traffic on streets with names like rue Victor Hugo and rue de la Liberté.

The skin color of the local cop may differ from that of his Paris confrere, and he may wear a smile that is uniquely Martinican, but in manner and mores, there is little difference. He maneuvers the passing Peugeots and Renaults with great flair, and will halt them tout de suite for a pedestrian, especially a pretty one. And since there are so many pretty ones in Martinique, traffic is halted frequently. The loveliness of island women, thanks to their African, European and Hindu heritage, is as much a tourist attraction as are the sun, sand and sea, fine food and accommodations, and the wealth of cultural and historic sites.

Martinique's special flavor is further enriched by visitors from the four corners of the globe who arrive on the sleek yachts, schooners and cruise ships that fill this city's harbor, one of the busiest in the Caribbean.

Accommodations for Many Tastes and Budgets

Visitors of not too long ago will remember Martinique as a place with just a few hotels, an island quietly sleeping in the sun. Today the sleeping beauty is awake and enjoying a tourist vogue she never dreamed of. A brand new airport has opened and there are hotels galore, catering to many tastes and budgets.

For 2000, the number of hotels which en toto offer approximately 6,000 rooms. Many are small family-owned properties called relais créoles, most are moderately priced first-class hostelries, and three are classified 4-star deluxe: **Habitation Lagrange** in the north of the island, and the **Bakoua** and **Meridien** at Pointe du Bout.

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Martinique's very first resort area, Pointe du Bout, is located 20 minutes by ferry from the capital and about the same by taxi from the airport. Its two deluxe hotels, the **Bakoua Sofitel** with 140 rooms and the newly renovated **Meridien** with 300 rooms and a brand new spa, are lovely spots fronting the sea and offering every sort of vacation amenity. Nearby are the 197-room **Carayou-Novotel**, newly renovated, and the nicely landscaped 98-room **Pagerie**, both 3-star hotels. Between them, facing the boat-filled marina, is the 14-room **Davidiana** and, at water's edge, is the 20-room **Karacoli**. The **Meridien**, **Bakoua** and **Carayou** all have beach and pool swimming, tennis, and lots of water sports.

Just around the cove, at Anse Mitan, is the **Bambou**, with 120 rooms on the beach, and the **Impératrice Village**, with 77 hillcocky bungalows leading down to the water. Here, too, are such inexpensive *relais créoles* as **La Bonne Auberge Chez André** (32 rooms), **La Baie** (12 rooms) and **Rivage** (20 rooms). Up the hill, is the newly renovated **Camélia**, a Karibea property, with 49 rooms.

In neighboring Anse-à-l'Ane, the hilltop **Panoramic** is a graciously run spot with 36 rooms, while the **Club Trois Ilets** (ex Frantour), set on its own beach and bay, has 77 rooms, a gorgeous pool, fine restaurant, and a kids' playground with an antique carousel.

Driving the winding scenic coast road farther south, one comes to Anses d'Arlet, a charming little village whose attractions include a white sand beach dotted with brightly painted *gommiers* or fishing boats, a good-size pier from which children swim and oldsters fish, a pretty steeped church and a bandstand for holiday concerts, a smattering of modest little dining spots, and a street named to honor a famous American, the rue du President Kennedy.

The surrounding waters are a scuba playground, rewarding divers with many species of tropical fish and lovely coral formations. Anses d'Arlet has also long been a choice spot for weekend "second homes," some of which can be leased through the Martinique Villa Rental Service, Tel: (596) 63.79.60.

Popular New Concepts in Vacationing

A popular concept in Martinique vacations these days is that of "residence hotels" which offer home-style accommodations at moderate rates. Several such properties have opened in the south, most notably in and around Le Diamant, a rapidly growing resort community reachable either by the coast road from Anses d'Arlet or by super-highway from the airport or Fort-de-France. The first of these "residence hotels" was the **Plein Sud**, a handsome structure across the road from the beach with 54 apartments of varying size. Among its amenities are shops, a market, restaurant, pool and tour desk. Newer properties in the vicinity with similar offerings are the **Calypso**, with 60 suites and one-room apartments, and the **Ultramarine**, with 77 duplexes and apartments.

Focal point of Le Diamant's vacation facilities is the 3-star 181-room **Diamant-Novotel**, an attractive resort with seaside gardens, a pool, coves and beaches, plus tennis, horseback riding and scuba. Nearby, the **Mercure Diamant** has a hillside setting, pretty pool and 149 rooms with kitchenette. Other handsome properties in the area are the **Diamant Bleu**, with 25 studios, **Le Village du Diamant**, with 50 bungalow rooms, and the very welcoming **Relais Caraïbe**, with 15 bungalows, a pool and small dining room where one can dance under the stars. On the beach right in town are the long-established and always-in-demand **Diamant les Bains**, with 27 rooms, a pool and very good restaurant, as well as the **Palm Beach**, a hotel with eight rooms, a pool and solarium, and **Résidence Les Océanides**, a 10-room charming apartment hotel.

Continuing on this southern route to Sainte-Luce, one finds the **Caribia**, with 75 well-sized suites, the nearby and new **Amyris**, with 110 seaside rooms, and **Les Amandiers**, which pioneered this area with its 117 beachfront rooms, bar/restaurant and pool. **Pierre & Vacances**, newest and largest property in Sainte-Luce, has enjoyed instant success since the day it opened during the past holiday season. Housed in half a dozen attractive red-roofed buildings which surround one of the island's largest and loveliest swimming pools, **Le Village Pierre & Vacances** the largest complex on the island boasts 337 living quarters, from studios for two, to apartments for six, plus several bars and restaurants. On the beach below is a well-equipped watersports center, with sea kayaks, windboards and sailfish in good supply. The **Okeanos Club**, a respected name in scuba, is located at the far end of the beach.

Further Southern Comforts

Among other “must see” sites down south is the town of Le Marin, whose Jesuit-style church dates to 1766, but whose marina is as new as yesterday. It accommodates Martinique's largest yacht charter fleet and is home base for the annual “June Regattas.” It also hosts the **Fête du Marin**, a summer cultural extravaganza. For overnighting, the **Albarena** has 30 marina-view studios; otherwise there is the five-room **Auberge du Marin** in town, the **Habitation Lafontaine**, with 10 studios and duplexes in the Mondésir section.

Yet another “must-see” down south is picturesque Vauclin, an Atlantic coast village just waiting to be discovered by Americans. (And it soon may be, given the fact that the beach sequences in the new version of “The Thomas Crown Affair” have just been filmed there.) Vauclin has two spots to stay in, each with 10 rooms: the **Macabou** and **Chez Julot**, a great place for eating and partying.

Also in the south, at Sainte-Anne, but very different in concept, is the 308-room **Buccaneer's Creek**, a lively link in the **Club Med** chain. In Sainte-Anne itself, the tree-lined main square, quaint streets, old church, many dining spots, make it one of Martinique's prettiest places to visit. Here one can get a true taste of small town life by staying at the waterside 18-room **La Dunette**. The town pier is always alive with father-son teams doing a bit of fishing, the sea is perfect for kayaking, and the underwater world is easy to explore in an aquascope.

The hillside environs of Sainte-Anne have several hotels whose amenities lend themselves nicely to family vacations. Among them are the modern-in-design **Domaine de Belfond Anchoage**, with 186 studios and apartments, and the **Anse Caritan**, a longtime favorite recently enlarged to 140 rooms and now boasting three stars. On the outskirts of town, the **Hameau de Beauregard**, yet another “residence hotel,” has 90 apartments surrounding a pool and aquatic garden. Around the bend, the St-Cyr family's beloved 20-room **Manoir de Beauregard**, damaged by fire a few seasons ago, has been refurbished more beautifully than ever. Some of the island's loveliest white sand beaches, including the Plage des Salines, Anse Trabaud, and Cap Chevalier, are just minutes away by car.

Overnighting in the North of Martinique

Pleasant accommodations at modest rates can be found throughout Martinique. Farther north, in the village of Carbet, are the 125-room **Marouba** and the 10-room **Christophe Colomb**, named after the famous explorer who landed here in 1502. Minutes away, in historic Saint-Pierre is the 11-room **Résidence Surcouf**, and just above the bay of historic St-Pierre, with great views, is **Le Fromager**, a Creole restaurant and tiny inn.

Half an hour north of St-Pierre and Mt. Pelée Volcano, just beyond the village of Prêcheur, is **Habitation Céron**, a 17th-century sugar estate which welcomes guests for lunch and offers horticultural tours of the fabulous property.

Across the island on the Atlantic side is another inexpensive find: the 14-room, family-run **Sikri Auberge** outside Le Lorrain. Down the coast near Sainte-Marie, in a secluded cove at Anse Azérot, is the 100-room **Primerêve**. A nice family retreat, this 3-star hotel's rooms and suites are all in sea-view bungalows. Nearby, overlooking Trinité, one discovers **Le Brin d'Amour**, with 14 bungalows, six rooms, and a fine restaurant housed in an old mansion.

At Tartane, on the beachfront of Caravelle Peninsula, is the long-popular **Le Madras**, with 12 rooms and a good-sized seafood restaurant, **Le Manguier**, with 21 rooms, the **Village Tartane**, with 50, and the very modern 145-room **Baie du Galion**, with a huge pool and spacious dining room. Just below the **Baie du Galion**, and connected to it by stairway, is the brand-new **La Goélette**, whose 40 rooms are junior suites, each with two baths and a terrace kitchenette, making it ideal for families.

South of here, tucked into a bay full of little islands is Le Robert, a town with exciting “yoles rondes” boat races and fun trips to such offshore spots as Ilet Chancel. Perched on a “morne,” or small hill, with a views of the bay, is **Beauséjour**, a hotel with eight duplexes, a pool and restaurant.

Some miles down the coast, at Pointe Thalémont outside le François, is the lovely **Plein Soleil** with 12 rooms in three hillside villas that surround an old Creole house. From the verandas, there are breathtaking views of the turquoise bays of Le Robert and Le François. In Le François itself, near the **Club Nautique**, is the seaside **La Riviera**, with 14 rooms and a pretty restaurant. Le François is also home to the old standbys, **Les Brisants** and **Bungalows de la Prairie**, both with kitchenette facilities. Much more upscale is Yveline de Lucy's delightful **Frégate Bleue**, a modern country home whose 10 guest rooms are antique-furnished. New additions at this charming “Relais de Silence” is a pretty pool and poolside breakfast terrace. From the **Frégate Bleue**, one can see **Les Ilets de l'Impératrice**, two little islands, **Ilet Oscar** and **Ilet Thierry**. The former sports a private 19th-century five-bedroom villa that can be rented, and the latter, also with 5 rooms sits just above “La Baignoire de Joséphine,” a wide white sandbank protected by coral reefs. (Boat picnics to these islands are easy to arrange and full of fun.)

Further choices in “period” houses turned into inns are the popular 66-room **Leyritz Plantation** at Basse-Pointe in the north, which dates to the 18th century, and the very luxurious 4-star **Habitation Lagrange** at nearby Marigot, whose 18th-century Creole mansion and cottages house 20 rooms beautifully decorated in antique furnishings. Yet another “period” inn is the **St-Aubin**, a 15-room gingerbread confection near Trinité.

A Boomlet in the Capital

Here in Fort-de-France there are signs everywhere of the tourist boom taking place. Most recent is the construction of pedestrian-only streets around the Cathedral, and a docking facility for cruise ships, which allows passengers direct access to the heart of town. Nearby is the handy **Office du Tourisme** and, just around the corner, **La Savane**, the famous public park which is continually being landscaped with flower-lined walks, playgrounds and open markets.

Five minutes from downtown on the way to Schoelcher there are beachside accommodations at the 197-room **Framissima Batelière**, which caters only to a middle-income French clientele. Definitely not middle-income is the new restaurant, **La Canne à Sucre**, located at the nearby suburban Patio de Cluny, where one can savor a culinary experience “par excellence.”

Even closer to town is the **Squash Hotel**, with 110 rooms and a trio of squash courts, as befits its name. In the opposite direction, heading toward Lamentin Airport, is the ultramodern 3-star **La Valmenière**, with 120 rooms and a host of amenities. **La Galleria Hotel** with 24 rooms is conveniently located in the mall of the same name. Also very near Lamentin is a charming little hotel, **Martinique Cottages**, with eight rooms and a truly superb restaurant, **La Plantation**.

In downtown Fort-de-France, balconied town houses are huddled together along narrow streets. Inside are wonderful restaurants, boutiques and shops, stocked with handicrafts, famed island rums, fashions, Creole jewelry, crystal, china, and, of course, French perfume. Shelves brim with every perfume scent imaginable that sell at prices considered to be among the lowest in the world. Hotels include the **Impératrice** as well as the inexpensive but comfortable **Lafayette**.

The Rewards of Sightseeing

For the sightseer, there are fishing villages that resemble a St-Tropez of 30 years ago; **La Pagerie**, birthplace of Napoleon's Empress Josephine, now a charming small museum; **Diamond Rock**, a pinnacle in the sea used by the British as a sloop of war, and **Carbet**, where Columbus landed and where Gauguin once lived and painted. Martinique's version of Pompeii took place nearby in 1902 when **St-Pierre**, then the major city, was wiped out in three horrifying minutes by the eruption of **Mt. Pelée**. It's a fascinating town, and a museum on the spot tells the tale.

Discovering Martinique's flora is likewise rewarding. **Les Ombrages** is a nature trail up north, where the air is cool and where green comes in a hundred different shades; **MacIntosh**, with a new Amerindian museum, is a plantation cultivating flowers for export; **Balata** is a botanical garden whose every path is a veritable path of Eden, and the **Vallée des Papillons** near Carbet offers a dazzling display of 1,500 butterflies. And to find out everything you've ever wanted to know about bananas, of which there are 300 varieties world-wide, the **Musée de la Banane** at Ste-Marie is well worth a visit.

Sports Galore

For golfers, there's a fine 18-hole Robert Trent Jones Sr. course; for tennis buffs, some two dozen hotel courts; for equestrians, five ranches and stables, and for hikers, one of the best organized systems in the Caribbean. Water sports are also plentiful: snorkeling, scuba, waterskiing, fishing, windsurfing, canyoning and kayaking. Yacht charters and boat rentals, crewed or bareboat, are easy to arrange at Pointe du Bout, Le Marin, Ste-Luce, Ste-Anne, Le François and Le Robert.

Two of Martinique's most popular spectator sports are the **Tour des Yoles Rondes**, races that spotlight the beautiful and unique-to-Martinique sailboats used by fishermen, and **Le Tour de la Martinique**, a summer bike race that's a mini-version of the **Tour de France**.

For night owls, there is casino gambling at the **Meridien** and the **Casino de la Batelière Plaza**, performances at larger hotels by the talented and brightly costumed **Les Balisiers**, **Tche Kreyol**, **Les Grands Ballets de la Martinique** and similar dance troupes, piano and jazz bars, as well as **boîtes** and discos that go until dawn. There's an emphasis on the **beguine**, immortalized by Cole Porter but actually born here, and on reggae, hip-hop and **zouk**, Martinique's current hot sounds

For further information, contact the Martinique Promotion Bureau, 444 Madison Ave., New York, NY, 10022, Tel: (800) 391-4909, Fax: (212) 838-7855. On the Internet: <http://www.martinique.org>. By e-mail: info@martinique.org