



For immediate release

Press contact: Muriel Wiltord

Tel. (212) 838 6887

Fax. (212) 838 7855

Email: muriel.wiltord@franceguide.com

LES OMBRAGES, a beautiful park in the Northern part of Martinique!

In a little-known corner in northern Martinique, there's a gem waiting to be discovered: Les Ombrages.

This seven-acre park is a combination hiking area, nature preserve, botanical garden, and environmental laboratory. It's a place where you can follow a two-mile trail deep into the forest and deep into history.

Discover Nature

Les Ombrages straddles the Rosalie River, which runs at the bottom of one of the many ravines dissecting the pumice slopes of Mount Pelée. The Rosalie's banks are generally covered with cocoa, banana, and pineapple plantations, but at Les Ombrages nature comes into its own.

Follow the Ombrages trail along the river, and you'll see wild flowers, giant bamboos, canna plants, tree ferns, and delicate carpets of moss thriving under a forest canopy. At certain points along the trail you'll find landscaped zones: the Creole Garden, Caribbean Garden, Heliconia Garden, and Calabash Garden with flowers, trees, and ornamental plants that are all carefully selected, with an emphasis on indigenous species. All along the trail, there are signs explaining what you are seeing, so you can fully appreciate the floral beauty of Martinique.

You'll also hear Les Ombrages' own sort of music. The sounds heard on the trail are many and varied, sweet and piercing, wild and tame: the sweet song of the flowing river, the persistent dripping of water from the cliffs, the gurgling of the rivulets, the shrill notes of the wind from the mountains, the peaceful cooing of partridges, the metallic sounds of the wings of hummingbirds, the rustle of the wind among the bamboo, and sometimes the noisy breakage of bamboo trunks. All of these tones come together in a natural harmony.

Discover History

The plants at Les Ombrages are not just there to delight the eye. They have a story to tell. And nowhere are they more eloquent than in the Creole Garden. All the areas of Les Ombrages show the history of nature on the island, but the Creole Garden also speaks of the history of man. It's entirely devoted to plants used by slaves during the earliest days of colonization, generally for food, medicine, early industry, or for magical or religious ceremonies. They are testimony to the slaves' determination; one could say defiance, in the face of hunger, disease, destitution, and psychological and spiritual despair.

Reflecting the diverse origins of these early slaves, these plants originally came from the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Asia (particularly India). In fact, they were brought to Martinique from conquered territories all over the world during the "Age of Discovery," when the migration of men was literally accompanied by the migration of plants. Today these plants constitute two-thirds of the "domestic flora" of Martinique, including breadfruit trees, coconut palms, and various fruits and spices.

For another foray into history at Les Ombrages, try the old site of the Vivès-Hayot sugarcane distillery, on the Rosalie River. Martinique's once thriving sugarcane industry went into decline as a result of World War Two. After the war, many smaller factories and distilleries were abandoned, eventually taken over by plantation or forest. The grounds of the Vivès-Hayot distillery are now cleared of overgrowth, the building ruins partially restored.

Discover the Region

Northern Martinique has long been off the beaten track for tourists, but governmental and private organizations are working to develop this region and reveal its treasures to the world.

At Les Ombrages itself, there are art and educational exhibits that will enrich your understanding of forests, horticulture, Creole gardening, rivers and streams, and how man and nature have co-existed in the region. Tours are given by guides trained in botany and nature conservation. And there are shops where you can buy traditional products that reveal something of the regional culture.

But Les Ombrages is only part of a broader development scheme encompassing the local town, Ajoupa-Bouillon, and the rest of the Mount Pelée federated territory. Exciting changes are in the offing:

- * More historic and natural sites are planned for renovation and development.
- * More programs are in the works for environmental education, both for tourists and local residents.
- * The hiking trails will be expanded to link local towns.

- * Area restaurants will pool their knowledge of regional cuisine.
- * There will be greater support for cultural activities, including an arts festival that will celebrate the heritage of the region.
- * There will be more accommodations in the area, with already existing rural property rentals complemented by charming bed & breakfasts.

Northern Martinique has a lot to offer. It has its tales of man and nature, and it has beauty. Les Ombrages is already there to charm and fascinate you, delighting your senses while stimulating your mind. And it augurs well for the future of this very special region of Martinique, a region just waiting to be discovered.

For more information on Martinique, contact the Martinique Promotion Bureau /CMT USA, 444 Madison Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10022 – Tel: 212 838 7800 ext. 228 Fax: 212 838 7855 – Email: info@martinique.org – Website: www.martinique.org