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MARTINIQUE'S MUSEUMS ARE A LESSON IN ART DE VIVRE **The museums of Martinique offer adults and children a glimpse of the island's culture, heritage and ecology**

NEW YORK, NY - October 3rd, 2007

Travelers who believe Martinique's 426 square miles are comprised of little more than sun, surf and sand should think again. Just as Paris is a mecca for history, the fine arts and culture, so too does Martinique pay homage to its history and rich cultural heritage with an extensive network of museums rivaling that of many European capitals. More than 25 of these cultural venues are scattered throughout the island, each intimate in size and thus ideal for easy visiting for a wide array of age ranges and intellectual interests.

Indiana Jones buffs will enjoy in the Musée Départemental d'Archéologie Précolombienne (the Departmental Museum of Pre-Columbian Archeology) in Fort-de-France. Open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m to 5 p.m and Saturday from 9 a.m to 12 p.m, the museum features more than 2,000 antiquities - including ceramics as well as stone and shell tools - dating from 4,000 BC to the Pre-Columbian period. Admission is €4 for adults and €2 for children under the age of 12.

History aficionado or not, Fort-de-France's Musée Régional d'Histoire et d'Ethnographie (Regional Museum of History and Ethnography) fascinates visitors with its exhibit of furniture and objets d'art typical of a bourgeois home at the end of the 19th century. The walk through times continues throughout the hallways and rooms displays that boast galleries of Creole jewelry and traditional Creole costumes. The museum is open Monday and Wednesday through Friday from 8:30 a.m to 5 p.m, Tuesday from 2 p.m to 5 p.m, and Saturday from 8:30 a.m to 12 p.m. Admission is €4 per adult, and €1 per child.

At the Musée de Poupées Végétales (Doll Museum), located on the grounds of Leyritz Plantation Inn near Basse-Pointe, you'll find a collection of 50 + doll-sized miniatures of such two words celebrated women as Mme. de Pompadour and Josephine Baker. Fashioned by artist Will Fenton from more than 600 types of fronds, leaves and other plant material, the dolls are a uniquely Martinican treasure. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m to 5 p.m. Admission is free for children under 12 and €3.50 for adults, and includes a visit to the gardens of this 17th century sugar estate and historically recreated rooms of the main house.

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Anyone with a sweet tooth will gain a new found appreciation for their favorite dessert after a visit to the Maison de la Canne (Museum of Cane Sugar) in Trois-Ilets. Located in a modern, two-story building on the grounds of the old rum distillery of Vatable, the museum links land, sugar cane and people by tracing its history since the introduction of sugar cane on Martinique in the 17th century. The museum is open from 9 a.m to 5:30 p.m everyday except Monday. Admission is €4 for adults and €1.50 for children.

The Musée de la Banane (Banana Museum), on the working plantation of Habitation Limbé, in the hills above Sainte-Marie, is another sweet treat, as well as one of the newest museums on the island. Visitors to the Banana Museum can view a former master's mansion and the packaging plant where today's crops are prepared for shipping. Also on displays are former Creole shanties, which are now shops selling banana-derived products such as perfume, dolls, soap, jams, cakes and cocktails and a park where more than 60 species of bananas and exotic tropical flowers can be found. The museum is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m to 5 p.m, and Sunday, 9 a.m to 5 p.m in winter and 9 a.m to 1 p.m in summer. Admission is €6.50 for adults and €3.50 for children.

Of course, among Martinique's most renowned museums is the Paul Gauguin Museum at Turin Cove, between La Carbet and St. Pierre. Here, art enthusiasts will learn that, like Tahiti, Martinique was also a major source of inspiration for the post-Impressionist French painter who is said to have completed between 10 and 20 canvasses during his five-month stay on the island in 1887. Although the original paintings are dispersed in museums and collections around the globe, 12 reproductions - including "Two Women of Martinique" - are found in this contemporary structure, situated near the original hut where Gauguin stayed. Standing between the hut and the sea, visitors can view the inspiration for Gauguin's painting "Bord de Mer I." The museum is open daily from 9 a.m to 5:30 p.m. The cost of entrance is €4 for adults and €1.50 for children ages 8 to 10. Admission is free for children under 8.

*Rates are subject to change based on currency fluctuation.

About Martinique (www.martinique.org)

A Little Bit of France in the Caribbean, The Isle of Flowers, The Rum Capital of the World - by any one of its many names Martinique remains one of the most alluring and enchanting destinations in the world. In keeping with its traditional French flair this vibrant island stirs the passions with awe-inspiring natural beauty, a rich cultural history, distinctive culinary delights, warm smiles and so much more. Napoleon's bride, Empress Josephine, was born and raised here. The Pompeii of the Caribbean, St. Pierre, is found here. The finest French products, from Chanel fashions to Limoges porcelain, are readily available here. La Route des Rhums, a tour of the world's finest rum distilleries based on France's famed Route des Vins, is offered here. A special place, to be sure, with so much to offer Martinique *c'est magnifique!*

For more information on Martinique, contact the Martinique Promotion Bureau /CMT USA, 825 Third Avenue, 29th Floor, New York, NY 10022 - Tel: (212) 838 6887 - Fax: (212) 838 7855 - Email: info@martinique.org - Web site: www.martinique.org.

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