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EXPERIENCE MOTHER NATURE'S FULL MAJESTY IN MARTINIQUE

Isle of Flowers' ecotourism wonders worthy of Caribbean World's 'Best Eco Island of the Year 2006' award

NEW YORK, NY – January, 2007 – Though small in size (685 square miles), Martinique boasts a whole world of natural wonders, making it one of the Caribbean's top eco destinations. So bountiful are the island's ecotourism offerings, in fact, that Caribbean World Magazine has named Martinique "Best Eco Island of the Year 2006." Two-thirds of Martinique is designated as protected park land, affording visitors to the island with a wide range of nature-themed vacation adventures from north to south.

The North

Mountainous and lush, with eye-popping vistas in all directions, Martinique's northern region is home to some of the Caribbean's most vibrant rainforests. The island's volcanic origin is most apparent here with Majestic Mount Pelée, Martinique's dormant volcano and tallest peak (4,600 feet), dominating the skyline. The slightly smaller, though equally spectacular Pitons du Carbet (4,000 feet) lay just to the south. This is prime hiking ground with refreshing springs and waterfalls dotting well-marked trails all sheltered by a tangle of ferns, bamboo and other exotic flora and fauna.

Visitors can make the two-hour hike up Mount Pelée for the most awe-inspiring view in the Caribbean, or follow the Route de la Trace, a winding trail through verdant rainforest that ends on the north shore. A third option, the Canal des Esclaves (Canal of the Slaves) offers an especially scenic three-hour journey along a small irrigation canal built in the rainforest by slaves in 1770.

Canyoning adventures also abound in Martinique's lush northern area. Professional guides lead visitors to magnificent rainforest gorges, rivers and waterfalls ideal for the sport. The Gorges de la Falaise offer one of the more popular canyoning attractions. This special area, tucked away in the heart of the northern rainforest near Mount Pelée features a remarkable little canyon with a hiking trail to a stunning waterfall. The hot springs of Prêcheur on the north coast, where water temperatures reach up to 120-degrees, as well as the Alma Spring, Rivière Mitan and Absalon Falls – all located in the Pitons du Carbet – also offer tremendous canyoning.

Soaring mountain peaks, gurgling hot springs, thundering waterfalls and some of most vibrant plant life found anywhere make Martinique's northern region a "must-see" for nature lovers.

The Center

In stark contrast to the northern region, Martinique's central plains is often referred to as Martinique's waistline as it here that the island narrows along a spine of hills that get smaller as one moves from north to south. This region is home to the alluvial plain of Lamentin, an extension of Fort-de-France Bay, and the largest of Martinique's coastal swamps of mangrove trees.

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Martinique's mangrove swamps are an ecotourist's dream. Living among the mangroves' arched roots and the salty, muddy surrounding waters is a vast eco-system comprised of an extensive variety of fish and crustaceans. Bird watching is tremendous here as many different species of birds are prevalent in this area as well. To fully immerse oneself in the beauty and splendor of the mangroves, kayaking or canoeing is the best option. Guided tours are available, though visitors can opt to strike out on independent expeditions as well.

The South

From the mountains in the north to the plains in the central region, Martinique's topography changes again in the south as rocky hills known as morne frame pristine beach coves called anses. Here, leisure visitors delight in a collection of the finest beaches in the Caribbean while more active types enjoy hiking adventures within the area's intricate pattern of valleys and fjord-like coves. Hiking over the morne from one beach to the next provides a fun and exhilarating way to fully enjoy this sun-kissed paradise. Martinique's southern beaches are renowned for their wonderful golden sand, a major departure from the silver-blue sands that comprise the beaches in the northern volcanic region.

A central attraction in southern Martinique is Rocher du Diamant (Diamond Rock). The Caribbean's answer to the Rock of Gibraltar, Rocher du Diamant rises 600 feet from sea and is located just three miles offshore. This massive block of limestone was seized and fortified in 1804 by the British who turned it into a stationary warship, of sorts, which they dubbed the HMS Diamond Rock. The French recaptured Diamond Rock in 1805, whereupon the British sailors fled to Barbados and were court-martialed for abandoning their "ship."

Quad Tours

Whether it's the north, central or southern regions, one of the best ways to experience all the natural wonders that Martinique has to offer is via "quads." A distinctive 4x4 vehicle that's a cross between a motorcycle and a go-cart, a quad is tough and nimble enough to traverse Martinique's thick rainforests, picturesque meadows, historic ruins, back trails and even secluded beaches inaccessible by conventional roads. All quads are air-conditioned and local guides accompany all quad excursions insuring an insider's introduction to all the best that Martinique has to offer.

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