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## LES BOUTIQUES DE LA MARTINIQUE

*The Isle of Flowers blossoms with exceptional values on the best of Parisian & local treasures for U.S. travelers*

**NEW YORK, NY – March 24, 2008** – For the U.S. shopping cognoscenti, the sun is always shining in Martinique. Not only is the best of Parisian fashion, jewelry, porcelain, perfumes and other goods readily available alongside unique local treasures, but for travelers from the U.S. most of it is available at a 20-percent discount. Select stores across the island offer the discount to visitors who make purchases using major U.S. credit cards or travelers cheques, making Martinique's boutiques an excellent alternative to shopping in Europe where the Euro (also the official currency of Martinique) continues to gain strength versus the U.S. dollar. The discount is available exclusively to Martinique's visitors, but the chance to rest, relax and partake in retail recreation is as available to the island's guests as it is to "martiniquais."

--And to shop like a local ("Martinican" in English), is to visit the "Marché Couvert" or covered market of Fort-de-France. Designed by architect Henri Picq and constructed in 1901 and later restored in 1989, this bustling bazaar is where the locals do their shopping amid rows of fragrant spices, including the local curry powder known as "colombo" as well as medicinal herbs, exotic fruits like chayotes (locally known as "christophines"), and indigenous vegetables such as yams or "ignames" as they're called in Martinique. The colorful displays of edible offerings, combined with the multihued tropical flowers that are also sold at the market make for priceless photos. Yet, visitors who come to the market equipped, not to take pictures, but purchase souvenirs will find a variety of hand-crafted wooden bowls, traditional "bakoua" or straw hats and Creole dolls as well as the many homemade confectionaries that constitute an age-old tradition in Martinique; "filibos" or "pilibos" are colorful candies made from cane sugar. Pistachio nougat is another island specialty as are crystallized fruits.

Full of local flavor, island shopping is also imbued with metropolitan mise-en-scène as locally-crafted artisanal products are complemented by an abundance of French-imported luxury goods. From Limoge china and Lanvin perfumes to Lacoste clothing and L'Occitane toiletries, Martinique is a tropical showroom of France's finest consumer commodities. Plus, shopping for haute de gamme, or high-end, goods is as much an experience in Martinique as it is on the fashionable thoroughfares of New York City's Fifth Avenue or Beverly Hills' Rodeo Drive; the chic street of Martinique is Rue Victor Hugo in the capital of Fort-de-France. Here, shops showcase the latest trends from Paris and the French Riviera and others, like Roger Albert, purveying classic French brands. Roger Albert is a long-established emporium of luxury items like Baccarat and Lalique crystal, Cartier perfumes and Lancôme cosmetics, which tout the "Made in France" mark. Also on Rue Victor Hugo is La Cave à Vin, one of the city's best restaurants and a prime spot for purchasing the finest French vintages. A variety of France's wines can also be sampled at the many restaurants and cafes with al fresco seating mixed in among the modish street's many boutiques.

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Beyond Rue Victor Hugo, downtown Fort-de-France is teeming with shops selling haute couture and stylish resort wear, which can be found on side streets such as Rue Moreau de Jones, Rue Antoine Siger and Rue Lamartine. French department store Galeries Lafayette on rue Schoelcher is to Fort-de-France (and Paris, for that matter), what Bloomingdale's is to New York City. On Rue Perrinon is fashion boutique Mounia, the eponymous owner of which was a former Yves St. Laurent model who has returned to her native Martinique to sell the designs of Christian Lacroix and, of course, Yves St. Laurent among other top French brands.

Two of the top spots for unique jewelry finds to accompany the finest fashions are Thomas de Rogatis and Albert Venutolo. Here visitors will find authentic *bijoux creole* jewelry – 18-karat gold baubles like the beaded “collier chou” or “darling’s necklace, popularized after the abolition of slavery and seen in many museums.

The “Made in Martinique” label is as sought after on the island as the “Made in France” label. Thus, a trip to the Centre des Métiers d’Art, or Center of Trade Arts, on Rue Ernest Deproge is as rewarding as any shopping adventure in Martinique. This artisanal market, like the craft market at La Savane, is full of local artwork, coral jewelry, wooden sculptures and handmade wicker and pottery. Another locally-produced product that’s well worth taking home as a souvenir is the Madras fabric long used for customary folk costumes and still used today in modern attire. Madras can be purchased for approximately US \$15 to US \$20 per meter at shops throughout the island.

Also a centuries’ old tradition in Martinique and still popular today is the island’s rum. Whether white and light or amber and aromatic, Martinique’s rum makes for a palatable memento of Martinique. Priced at about US \$8 per liter for light rum and US \$10 per liter for dark (with aged rums being considerably higher), rum can be had at specialty shops like La Case à Rhum on Rue de la Liberté or in supermarkets like Cora, Match, or HyperU.

Aside from being awarded the French label “appellation d’origine contrôlée,” previously reserved only for French cheeses and wines, Martinique’s rums have also been hailed by an American of note: in the book *A Moveable Feast*, Ernest Hemingway lauded Martinique’s rum as “the perfect antidote to a rainy day.”

Most stores are open 8:30am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and on Saturday mornings. Some close for the traditional two- to three-hour lunch break beginning at noon or 1pm.

**About Martinique ([www.martinique.org](http://www.martinique.org))**

*The Caribbean island with French flair, 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; as unforgettable as a summer romance or a first kiss. Martinique is an overseas region of France, and in keeping with its traditions, 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, 29<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10022 – Tel: 212 838 6887 - Fax: 212 838 7855 – Email: [info@martinique.org](mailto:info@martinique.org) – Web site: [www.martinique.org](http://www.martinique.org).

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