



Martinique

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Best Beaches

- » Les Salines (p586)
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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

A slice of Gallic culture in the Caribbean, Martinique is an overseas département of France. While it's noticeably more tropical than the mainland, there's no denying the very French rhythm of life here. This is great for Francophiles, although it can also give rise to Martinique's – at times – distinctly un-Caribbean air.

Volcanic in origin, the island is a mountainous stunner crowned by the still-smoldering Mont Pelée, which wiped out Martinique's former capital of St-Pierre in 1902. Long luscious beaches, great diving and giant mountains covered in tropical forests are the main attractions here.

Far more developed than much of the Caribbean, Martinique suffers from uncontrolled urban sprawl in some places, particularly in and around the busy capital, Fort-de-France. Those wanting to avoid the modern world's encroachment should head to the beautiful beaches of the south or to the mountains of the island's remote north.

When to Go

Martinique enjoys a year-round tropical climate, but it is most popular during the dry season, from December to May. This high season can see the island crowded with French holiday makers, and hotel costs are at a premium. The rainy season begins in June and continues until the end of November, with heavy showers most days. September is the rainiest month and, along with August, is most prone to hurricanes – these are, perhaps, the better times to avoid Martinique.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Euro (€)
- » **Language** French, Creole
- » **Money** ATMs are available everywhere
- » **Visas** Not required for citizens of the EU, the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 1080 sq km
- » **Population** 400,000
- » **Capital** Fort-de-France
- » **Telephone country code** 596
- » **Emergency** Ambulance 15, police 17, fire 18

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** €50
- » **Two-course evening meal** €30
- » **Museum entrance** €5
- » **Bottle of beer** €3
- » **Bus ticket** €4

Resources

- » **Martinique** (www.martinique.org) Official tourism website
- » **Martinique Scoop** (www.martinique.no-scoop.com, in French) Cultural guide to Martinique
- » **France-Antilles** (www.martinique.franceantilles.fr, in French) Main newspaper of Martinique
- » **Fort-de-France** (www.fortdefrance.fr, in French) Website of the capital

Itineraries

THREE DAYS

If it's beaches you like, concentrate on the south for a few days: base yourself somewhere along the coast around Grande Anse or Diamant. Don't miss the beautiful beach at Les Salines, the stunning views of Rocher du Diamant from the coastal road, or the eating and activity options around Trois-Îlets.

ONE WEEK

After enjoying a couple of days on the beach in the south, drive up the east coast of the island and explore the Presqu'île de Caravelle and enjoy the beach at Tartane before continuing to Grand-Rivière for remote hiking and superb scenery. Head back via stunning Mont Pelée and fascinating St-Pierre to the bustling capital, Fort-de-France.

GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

There's a fast ferry service connecting Martinique to St Lucia in the south, and to Dominica and Guadeloupe in the north, that runs most days. See www.express-des-iles.com for more information. There are also flights from Fort-de-France to Pointe-à-Pitre (Guadeloupe), St Lucia, Antigua, Barbados, Havana (Cuba), San Juan (Puerto Rico), St-Martin and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic).

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Acras** A universally popular hors d'oeuvre in Martinique, *acras* are fish, seafood or vegetables tempura. *Acras de morue* (cod) and *crevettes* (shrimp) are the most common and are both delicious.
- » **Ti-punch** Short for *petit punch*; this ubiquitous and strong cocktail is the normal *apéro* (aperitif) in Martinique. It's a mix of rum, lime and cane syrup – but mainly rum.
- » **Crabes farcis** Stuffed crabs are a common local dish. Normally they're stuffed with a spicy mixture of crabmeat, garlic, shallots and parsley, and cooked in their shells.
- » **Blaff** This is the local term for white fish marinated in lime juice, garlic and peppers and then poached. While it's popular across the Caribbean, its true home is Martinique.