A CREOLE CULINARY Clockwise from top left: The Sighthouse at Pointe du Vieux Fort; a rum-punch vendor at the market in Basseterre; Longeonard Distillery, founded in 1835, the oldest of Guadeloupe’s nine active rum distilleries; a scoop at Délices du Piton, an ice cream shop and patisserie in Pointe-à-Pitre.

BY SARAH CLEEMAN

IF YOUR REAL Beach vacation depends on private hot-tubs, elaborate spa treatments and a choice of infinity swimming pools—well, you can comfortably ship Guadeloupe. The French archipelago, which lies roughly two hours down the arc of Caribbean islands, doesn’t yet have a single five-star hotel, but its beaches are almost of mega-resort. But if you’d happily eat fried-bread sandwiches from a food truck, bike through a rain forest to swim in a turquoise pool under a waterfall, or enjoy to live gospel music on a black sand beach, this might just feel like the kind of secret in the region. Guadeloupe rewards the intrepid, DIY travelers: with no resort roads, no palm trees and no fancy rum distilleries, postcard-worthy beaches, and food that blends French technique with Caribbean traditions (think conch terrine or mango mousse).

From winter, when the mercury dips below 70 degrees, to summer American tourists are still a rarity in these islands. But the recent expansion of seasonal direct flights from the U.S.—now making the roughly four-hour trip from Providence, R.I. and New York, as well as the three-hour flight from Fort Lauderdale—make it as easy escape. Though Guadeloupe was hit by Hurricane Maria, the main islands and nearly at the center of the storm made a fast recovery. But off your French and hop on a flight before Guadeloupe doesn’t feel like a discovery anymore.

OFF DUTY

A Caribbean French Twist

The jet set hasn’t descended on Guadeloupe just yet, which makes it ideal for a laid-back, sun-soaked long winter weekend.

DAY ONE / FRIDAY

6:50 p.m. Arrive at Pointe-a-Pitre airport in Pointe-a-Pitre and pick up your rental car. Muséum Guadeloupe is butterfly-shaped, two islands closed by a narrow channel, the Saline River. You’ll start your stay on the Salte, near the famous contemporary restaurant, Grand Terre, then switch hotels and move to the volcanic island of Basse-Terre.

7 p.m. A 10-minute drive brings you to your hotel. If you insist on being on the beach, choose La Terrasse Hotel & Spa, a collection of bungalows and suites spread over a steep hillside on Grand-Terre’s southern shore (currently closed for renovation, but slated to reopen Dec. 23). The bungalows feature private patios, and in some cases, views of the ocean; the hotel’s stretch of sand is small but extremely well-kept (there about $279 a night; base rate). For a tropical garden setting, stick to the Le Domaine du Moulin, where the old island on its grounds has been turned into a small gallery. You’ll find a place—art, bird-watching experience, the beach is a stroll walk away (from about $199 a night, room/room/room/night).

8 p.m. Regardless of whether you’re a guest at Le Domaine du Moulin, have dinner at La Mangi, its excellent open-air restaurant. Showers in advance. If you’re lucky, you can feast on excellent, local dishes that the chef has just prepped-right here (the peel, sliced with curry, planted in gratin). Otherwise, consider the island conch and the coconut banana. A three-course main costs about $40.

DAY TWO / SATURDAY

8 a.m. La Terrasse’s generous buffet includes salads, pastries and a selection of fruit preserves—made with passion. Coconut, mango or banana nectar are likely to be among the options. Or, if you’re at Le Domaine du Moulin, pay your respects to Bougainvillier Alain, in Pointe-a-Pitre for your own cheese or jam at the nearby market.

9 a.m. Spend a couple of lazy hours exploring the culture of the colorful market pool.

11 a.m. Stop in the car—be sure to bring your car—rental drive east along the coast. Stop at the market in nearby Sainte Anne to browse the stalls filled

[ INSIDE ]

INSIDING EATS

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LAPPING UP GUADALOUPE

TAKING RDT! The Memorial A.C.T., Guadeloupe’s two-year-old museum and cultural center dedicated to the history of the Caribbean sugar trade, takes visitors through the cutting, milling, distilling, fermenting and bottling process for its claim-grand marie: (sugar cane juice) not made in other ways. Not only will you be warmly welcomed, the spirits are cheaper in the small distillers than in duty-free (Capiturerie) 600 cl, 1 liter 600 cl. Open Ten minutes away, the open Nature Bambou Hike is a bit touristy, but very decent food, including rice, chicken, soupe a la moutarde in Croize's cave, and fresh bread (Boue d'Habitation) - restaurant-naturel-bambou.fr. 130 p.m. Drive to the town of Grand-Terre, then follow the signs to La Rêve de Palette to Basuck Bénit. It’s an easy 15-minute hike from the road to the waterfall, which spills down a small cliff into a diamond-shaped pool hidden by shade rock. Hike up.


TO EACH HIS OWN: Beach lovers can check out the eastern shore of Guadeloupe; paradise beaches, red sand and magnificent views. To nourish the baskets, pickle and spices at the market in town of Basse-Terre, also known as the foodie capital of the island at its early morning breakfast bowls of群岛, homemade jam and the warm, charming, nose-land micro-artisanal café-restaurant. Drive to the docks in Trinité, in a few minutes away, and take CTMB Bus’s ferry to Terre-de-Haut (about $2/ per adult round trip, children free). The ride is only 35 minutes long, but so rough it feels longer.

9.15 a.m. Terre-de-Haut is pretty private at just over 5 square miles, but navigating the island isn’t so bad. First, you’ll need an ‘itinerary, and a bit of patience. You’ll need a bit of patience and a lot of energy to see the island fully. The island is full of small, narrow streets, and there’s not much parking for vehicles. If you’re looking to take a guided tour, be sure to book in advance.

12.30 p.m. Pilot back to the picturesque town main of Bourg des Saints. If you’re feeling hungry, you’ll find good food in the main town, or you can head toward the market. It’s a great place to pick up some fresh produce and drinks. Don’t forget to try the local rum, which is a local specialty.