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OFF DUTY



Why Lettie Teague loves buying wine in the Windy City **D10**

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TAKE MONDAY OFF

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



A CREOLE IDYLL Clockwise from top left: The lighthouse at Pointe du Vieux Fort; a rum-punch vendor at the market in Basse-Terre; Longueteau Distillery, founded in 1895, the oldest of Guadeloupe's nine active rum distilleries; a scoop at Désirs du Palais, an ice cream shop and patisserie in Pointe-à-Pitre.

BY SARA CLEMENCE

IF YOUR IDEAL beach vacation depends on private butlers, elaborate spa treatments and a choice of infinity swimming pools—well, you can comfortably skip Guadeloupe. The French archipelago, which lies roughly two-thirds down the arc of Caribbean islands, doesn't (yet) have a single five-star hotel; its beaches are absent of mega-resorts. But if you'd happily eat fried-bread sandwiches from a food truck, hike through a rain forest to swim in a turquoise pool under a waterfall, or sway to live gwoka music on a black sand beach, this might just feel like the best-kept secret in the region. Guadeloupe rewards the intrepid, DIY traveler with remote rum distilleries, postcard-worthy beaches, and food that blends French technique with Caribbean traditions (think conch terrine or mango mille-feuille).

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

DAY ONE // FRIDAY

6:30 p.m. Arrive at Pôle Caraïbes airport in Pointe-à-Pitre and pick up your rental car. Mainland Guadeloupe is butterfly-shaped, two islands cleaved by a narrow channel, the Salée River. You'll start your stay on the flatter, more developed eastern wing, Grande-Terre, then switch hotels and move to the volcanic island of Basse-Terre.

7 p.m. A 30-minute drive brings you to your hotel. If you insist on being on the beach, choose La Toubana Hôtel & Spa, a collection of bungalows and suites spread over a steep hillside on Grande-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 (from about \$270 a night, *toubana.com*). For a tropical garden setting inland, drive a little farther east to Le Relais du Moulin, where the old windmill on its grounds has been turned into a small gallery. You'll find a pleasant, kidney-shaped swimming pool; the beach is a half-mile walk away (from about \$180 a night, *relaisdumoulin.com*).

8 p.m. Regardless of whether you're a guest at Le Relais du Moulin, have dinner at Le Mango, its excellent open-air restaurant. (Reserve in advance.) If you're lucky, you can feast on succulent, tender lamb that the chef has been spit-roasting by the pool, sided with creamy plantains au gratin. Otherwise, consider the lobster ravioli and the coconut blancmangé. A three course-meal costs about \$40.

DAY TWO // SATURDAY

8 a.m. La Toubana's generous buffet includes cakes, pastries and a selection of confitures maison—house-made preserves. Coconut, mango-vanilla or banana-vanilla are likely to be among the options. Or, if you're at Le Relais du Moulin, pop over to Boulangerie Aléonard in Saint-Francois for pain au chocolat or pain au raisins (*Les Galeries de Crystal Beach, aleonard-artisan-boulangier.com*).

9 a.m. Spend a couple of lazy hours enjoying the beach or the multilevel hotel pool.

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

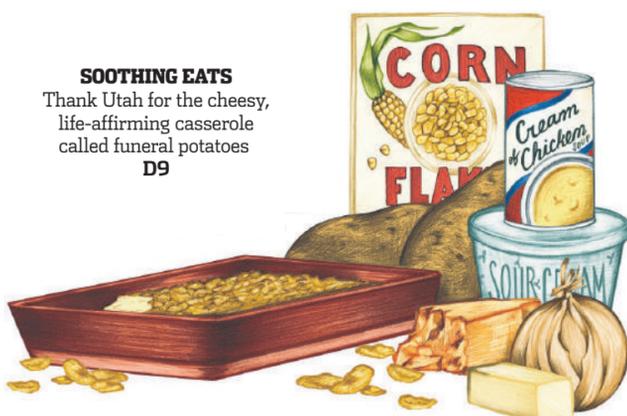
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ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

LAPPING UP GUADELOUPE

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with bags of spices, and hand-labeled bottles of rum punch—many adorned with bright madras fabrics. The Indian plaids made their way to the French Caribbean islands in the 17th century, and became woven into the Creole culture.

Stop for a quick dip at any of the white-sand beaches you'll pass on the way to Pointe des Châteaux, the easternmost point of Grande-Terre. If you're with young kids, try La Plage des Raisins Clairs, in Saint-François. Named for the grape-like fruits that grow there, Raisins Clairs edges a calm lagoon.

Noon On the way to Pointe des Châteaux, pull into the parking lot at Village Artisanal (*Route de la Pointe des Châteaux, village-artisanal.com*). Among the half-dozen shops is L'Épicerie des Antilles, which carries a large selection of local rums.

12:30 p.m. Arrive at the rocky, wind-battered Pointe des Châteaux. Look for a tiny shack where an artisan makes and sells coconut-leaf hats and bowls. The beaches here are too dangerous for swimming, but they're good for walking. A 15-minute hike down a sandy path and up some stone steps leads you to La Pointe des Colibris, the tip of a peninsula marked with a 9-ton cross. From here you can see all the other islands of Guadeloupe: La Désirade, Marie-Galante, Les Saintes and Basse-Terre. From January through April, you might even glimpse migrating humpback whales.

1 p.m. Time for some shade. Hit Soif les Bronzés, a food truck covered in brightly painted signs, with a thatch-roofed seating area nearby. Highlights include bokit, a fried-bread sandwich that can be stuffed with cheese, meat, eggs, or vegetables; crispy, fluffy seafood or vegetable fritters known as accras; and the homemade sorbet. Wash it down with a punch coco (coconut rum punch).

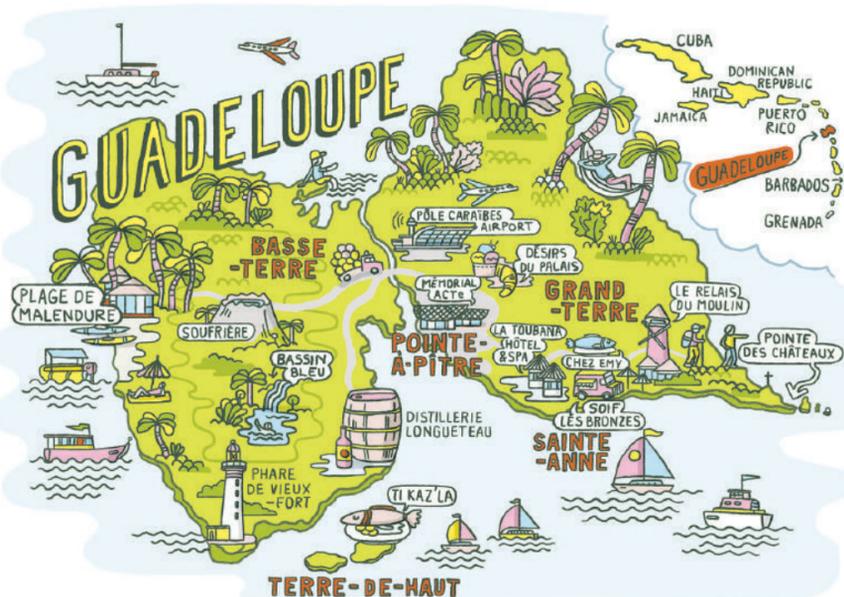
2 p.m. Drive an hour west to Mémoires ACTe, a museum and cultural center dedicated to the history of the Caribbean slave trade, Pointe-à-Pitre. Opened in 2015, the waterfront building has a facade that appears to be wrapped in silvery roots. Spend a couple hours exploring the interactive exhibits, which offer a local and international perspective on slavery (*Rue Raspail, memorial-acte.fr*). Afterward, take in the view of the port.

4:30 p.m. Drive 10 minutes to Désirs du Palais, Fabienne Youyouette's patisserie and ice-cream shop. Don't be put off by the gritty street—inside you'll find acorn-size financier cakes in flavors like chocolate and pistachio, and everyone from gendarmes to elegant older women in fancy hats dithering over the ice-cream flavors (*53 Chemin des Petites Abymes, 590-590-88-54-40*).

5 p.m. Head back to the hotel for a well-earned rest.

7:30 p.m. Pull a plastic chair up to an oilcloth-covered table at Chez Emy, a makeshift restaurant on the porch of a house in Sainte-Anne. There's no menu to decipher—guests eat whatever the ebullient Emy has decided to cook that night, whether it's fish, conch or a chicken-leg stew. The rum on each table is self-serve; mix your own Ti' punch with a squeeze of lime and a dose of sugar-cane syrup. Dessert might be homemade mango ice cream served in a tiny plastic cup. The menu complet costs about \$19; be sure to make a reservation (*Route de Burat, 590-690-46-43-01*).

If you couldn't get a table at Chez Emy, head down to the cluster of food trucks on the waterfront in Sainte-Anne. Marius et Sylvie is considered to be one of the best



TO EACH HIS OWN BEACH From top: Raisins Clairs beach on the eastern shore of Grande-Terre; pastries at Désirs du Palais.

the baskets, produce and spices at the market in town of Basse-Terre, about 20 minutes away. Or, stay at the hotel for an early breakfast before heading to Les Saintes, a charming nine-island mini-archipelago off Basse-Terre's southern shore. Drive to the docks in Trois-Rivières a few minutes away, and take CTM Deher's 9 a.m. ferry to Terre-de-Haut (*about \$27 for an adult round-trip, ctmdeher.com*). The ride is only 15 minutes long, but so rough it feels longer.

9:15 a.m. Terre-de-Haut is pretty petite at just five square miles, but navigating the whole island on foot would be exhausting. Fortunately, you planned ahead and reserved a motor scooter or electric cart at Archipel Location Scooters (*archipel-location.fr*). Spend the morning exploring the island's panoramic views and eight postcard-pretty beaches. Plage de Pompierre is studded with shaded picnic tables; to reach it, you walk through a grove of towering coconut palms. (Just keep your food under wraps, as chickens and small goats roam the sands.) Or, intrepid visitors can walk 40 minutes along a rocky path to Pain de Sucre, a dreamy cove backed by striated limestone cliffs.

12:30 p.m. Putter back to the picturesque main town of Bourg des Saintes. If you're feeling spendy, have lunch at the seafood-focused Ti Kaz' La, which looks out on the harbor. Gaze at the sailboats, cool off on the narrow strip of beach right out back, and be sure to cap off the meal with a mango soufflé (*10 rue Benoit Cassin, ti-kaz-la-restaurant-les-saintes.com*). Or, opt for crepes and ice cream at L'ilet Douceur (*28 rue Jean Calot le Bourg, 590-590-80-71-91*).

2 p.m. Turn in your wheels and wander around the town. Le Compotoir du Nouveau Monde stocks artisanal Caribbean products like guava jelly and ginger syrup (*3 rue Jean Calot, 590-690-26-19-50*).

3:45 p.m. Board the ferry back to the mainland. If you have an evening flight, head to Pointe-à-Pitre. If you depart in the morning, head back to your hotel for some pooltime, then around 6 p.m. drive 15 minutes to St. Charles and have your final dinner at La Table Créole on the marina. The fish is so fresh you may see a tuna coming right off a boat. If you don't, it's OK—next time (*D6, St Charles, 590-590-81-38-52*).

bokit trucks. You may be waiting 20 minutes for a sandwich that seems like it should take three—that's because the dough is being rolled out and fried to order, so be patient. Early to bed tonight since you'll be waking up before sunrise to pay a visit to the island's volcano.

DAY THREE // SUNDAY

7 a.m. The route up Soufrière, the active volcano on Basse-Terre, is well-marked but challenging. If you're up for an outdoor adventure check out of the hotel early and drive about 75 minutes to the office of hiking outfitter Vert Intense in Saint-Claude on Basse-Terre. Guides lead a trek to and from the peak; the five-hour expedition ends with a swim in hot pools at the base of the volcano (*\$41 a person, vert-intense.com*).

9 a.m. If you've skipped the god-awful-early hike, sleep in a bit, check out of the hotel, keep your swimsuit handy and drive west to Basse-Terre—you'll notice a definite shift in the landscape, passing banana and sugar-cane fields and catching glimpses of Soufrière.

10:15 a.m. Nine rum distilleries operate on Guadeloupe; Distillerie Longueteau, founded in 1895, is the oldest. Tours of the distillery (offered on Sundays only between Dec. 15 and April 30), set among sugar-cane fields in southeast Basse-



TAKING ROOT The Memorial ACTe, Guadeloupe's two-year-old museum and cultural center dedicated to the history of the Caribbean slave trade.

Terre, take visitors through the cutting, milling, distilling, fermenting and bottling process for its rum agricole (made from cane juice, not molasses like other rums). Not only will you be warmly welcomed, the spirits are cheaper in the small shop than in duty-free (*Capesterre Belle Eau, rhumlongueteau.fr*).

Noon Ten minutes away, the open-air Naturel Bambou feels a bit touristy, but serves decent food, including river crayfish in Creole sauce, and boudin noir (*Route de l'Habitée, restaurant-naturel-bambou.fr*).

1:30 p.m. Drive to the town of Gourbeyre, then follow the signs up Route de Palmiste to Bassin Bleu. It's an easy 15-minute hike from the road to the waterfall, which spills down a small cliff into a dammed-up swimming hole shaded by rain forest. Hop in.

4 p.m. Check into Le Jardin Malanga, a hilltop hotel in Trois-Rivières, on Basse-Terre. The rooms are rustic, with no TVs, phones or Wi-Fi. But the pool offers views over the palms all the way to the nearby islets of Les Saintes, and the hosts, Laurent Barré and Claire Galand, are generous with dining and activity recommendations (*from about \$325 a night, jardinmalanga.com*).

4:30 p.m. If you're up for a drive, visit Malendure beach, an hour up



LOW-TECH DECK The rooms at Jardin Malanga hotel, in Trois-Rivières, lack Wi-Fi and TVs but the views merit rave reviews.