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La Creole Beach Pool

You're Welcome, The Guadeloupe Islands

By *Katrice L. Mines*

The rainy season was just winding down when I visited the Guadeloupe Islands in November. A couple I met while walking along La Creole Beach Resort and Spa's beach - a retired French teacher and marine biologist - had been there for a month. They hunt, the wife said, for destinations that allow them both to do what they love; her to keep her French sharp and him to explore marine organisms in the ocean. Guadeloupe is at the top of their list. "This was our 20th vacation here," she explained. They endured two weeks of rain in the beginning but were pleasantly surprised to find themselves right in the middle

of the Route Du Rhum - a transatlantic single-handed yacht race, which takes place every four years in November between Saint Malo, Brittany, France and Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe. This is a destination that specializes in being the right place at the right time.

Located in the Lesser Antilles between Dominica and Antigua the French archipelago of Guadeloupe is a collection of five islands, Basse-Terre, Grande-Terre, Marie-Galante, Les Saintes, and La Desirade, closely strung together by beautiful waters and an efficient ferry network. Fourteen nonstop flights arrive to the destination - dubbed the "Pearl of the French-Caribbean" - each week out of North America. From alluring beaches to volcanic mountains and rainforests and combining the best of the French modern infrastructure with genuine Caribbean heritage, Guadeloupe offers no shortage of charm.

Traces of the Past

Slavery became institutionalized in the region in 1644 after a decade of successive attempts by the French to colonize the islands to the authority of the French crown and subjugate the inhabiting Carib Indians. While slavery was abolished in 1794, Napoleon I's government reestablished it in the French colonies in 1802. It was finally abolished permanently in 1848 marking the most significant 19th-century development in the territory – and central to its story of culture and resilience. The Memorial ACTe Museum – located in Pointe a Pitre, precisely on the Darboussier site, which used to be a sugar factory – is a cultural center dedicated to the memory and history of Slavery Trade. Part of UNESCO's Slave Route Project, a global initiative to promote the rapprochement of peoples through the shared legacy of this tragedy more than 150 years later, there is still much untold about the difficulties and struggles of bondage in the Guadeloupe Islands. A few-hours walk through the museum's exhibits is wholly worth the trip. And yet at that point, you're ready to peel back more of the islands' layers.

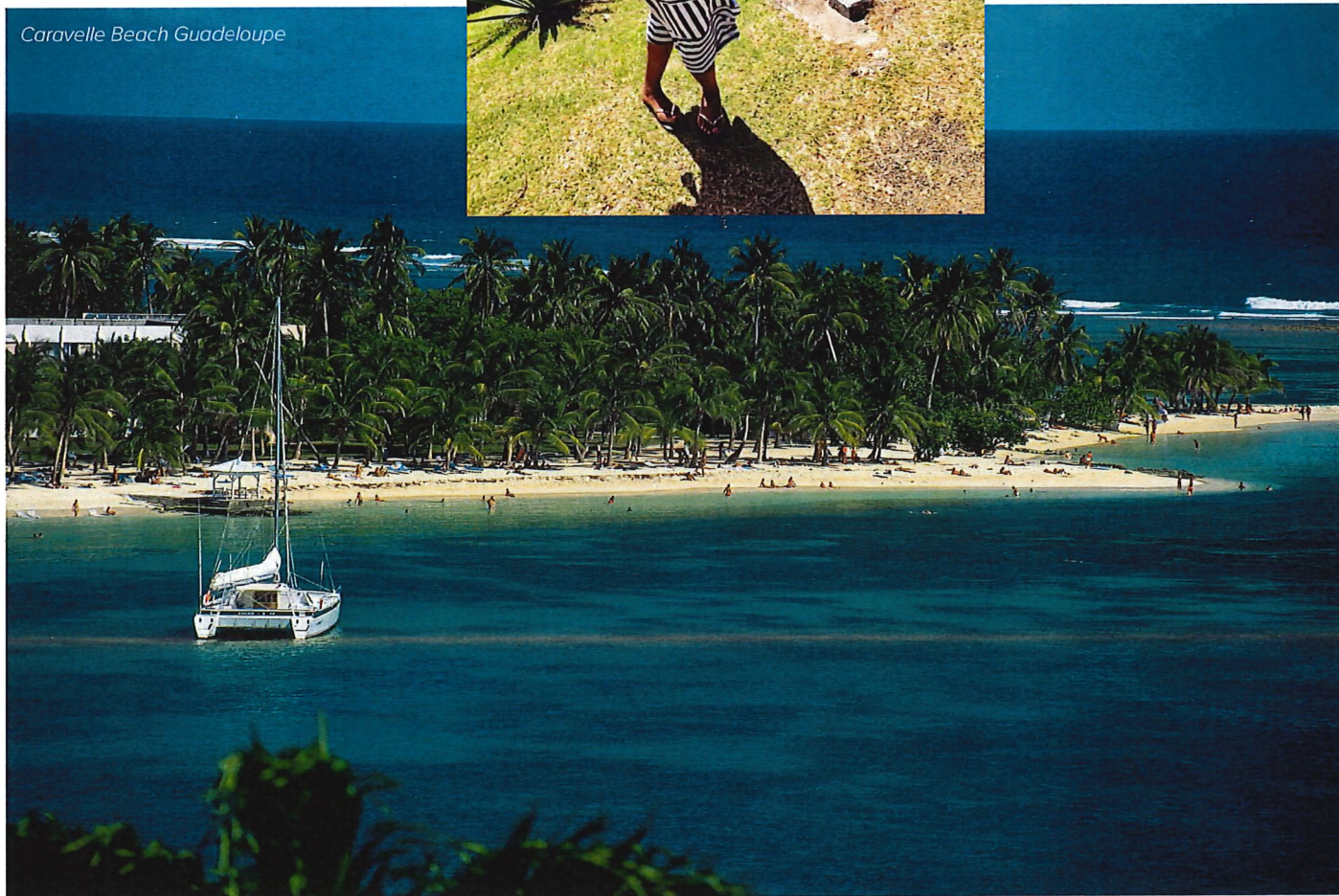


Memorial ACTe Museum slave exhibit



The view from Fort Napoleon overlooking Terre-de-Haut Island in the Îles des Saintes, Guadeloupe

Caravelle Beach Guadeloupe





Bananier Beach

Beauty All Around

Beautifully lush landscapes lured me out with a mountain guide to hike Soufrière volcano, rising at 4,813 ft. The heavily trekked trail up is covered by a thick rainforest and summits at an accessible crater – the only active volcano sitting atop of the highest peak on Saint Vincent as well as the highest point in the island. Designated a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1992, Guadeloupe's National Park in Basse-Terre Island encompasses 246 miles of way-marked hiking trails. Birdwatchers enjoy the diversity of its resident species such as the black woodpecker, pearly-eyed thrasher, and lesser Antillean pewee. Below, Basse Terre and its eccentric volcanic landforms is the beneficiary of magnificent landscapes and glittering black sand beaches such as Bananier.

La Pointe des Châteaux, or The Cross of the Pointe des Châteaux, is the most visited site of Guadeloupe. A peninsula that extends into the Atlantic Ocean from the Eastern coast of the island of Grande-Terre, builds to a cliff dug with tiny bays and creeks, and lined with sand and rocks nestled at the foot. Ravines carved and bathed in water and sun – the view from here is unmatched.



Summit of Soufrière



Pointe-à-Pitre Spice Market

Island Hop

A visit to the Saint-Antoine market in Pointe-à-Pitre, a listed historic monument, offers an evocative journey into the world of Creole flavors and aromas. Also known as the spice market, it is housed in an open market hall renovated in 2006 which bears witness to the vogue for metallic architecture at the end of the 19th century. You won't be able to resist stopping to smell the fresh cinnamon and vanilla.

Take an afternoon excursion by ferry to Terre-de-Haut Les Saintes, which is formed by nine unspoiled islands, two of which are inhabited. With its bistro lined streets and turquoise waters, Terre-de-Haut is one of the best kept

secrets of the region. Fort Napoleon is in the commune overlooking the bay of Les Saintes and just about a quarter of an hour walk from the dock. You could easily spend hours on the island between its beach and lunch at Hotel Kanaoa complete with a panoramic view of the Saintes' Bay.

A Sense of Place

Set along a beach on the shores of the Caribbean Sea, La Creole Beach Resort is an airy upscale hotel that will be just what you want to feel immersed in your surroundings. Newly renovated rooms and suites, complete with balconies are surrounded by a tropical garden and palm trees; take your pick of sea or garden views. Ample and inviting common

spaces throughout the property have a drawing effect whether your ideal getaway involves winding the day away by the pool or just lounging for drinks and the balmy breeze in one of its open-air lounges. The resort offers dining in two restaurants, a relaxed cocktail lounge with a terrace, and beachfront cafe/pizzeria. Button up your vacation nicely in La Créole Spa which features treatment cabins and massages, a balneotherapy cabin and a massage cabin as well as a mammam, sauna and relaxation space.

And if you don't know instantly upon arrival, one time here simply won't be enough.