



SEADREAM
YACHT CLUB

MARIGOT, ST MARTIN, FRENCH WEST INDIES

The divided status of St. Martin/St. Maarten is a result of the colonial tug-of-war between European powers in the Caribbean. However, the island was inhabited well before Europeans arrived. An archaeological dig in St. Martin has unearthed tools and pottery dating back to 550 BC. When Columbus landed in 1493, the island had been taken over by the fierce and cannibalistic Caribs, which may be why the Spanish never developed it. Dutch settlers arrived in the early 1600s, and every colonial power active in the Americas thereafter owned a piece of the island at one time or another. Legend has it that a Frenchman and a Dutchman finally settled an argument over territorial rights by pacing off their shares. Of the 37 sq mi/96 sq km, the French got the bigger slice, but the Dutch got the most valuable real estate—the Salt Pond and the harbor (the international airport is also on the Dutch side). The 1648 *Treaty of Concordia* marked the formal division. The Dutch part of the island is administered, along with the rest of the Netherlands Antilles, from Curaçao, while the French part is administered from Guadeloupe. Even with the two jurisdictions, there is complete freedom of movement between the two sectors.

The island, which lies 144 mi/232 km east of Puerto Rico, is covered with conical hills. Coarse grass and scrub, palm trees and poinsettias dominate the landscape of the triangular-shaped island. Its coastline zigzags erratically, with rocky peninsulas separating quiet coves of white-sand beaches and soupy salt ponds. On the generally flatter west side, the beaches are washed by the calm Caribbean Sea. On the east side, the hills descend to the livelier surf of the Atlantic Ocean.

MARIGOT

The principal town on the French side is **Marigot**, the seat of the sub prefect and the municipal council. Visitors come here not only for the elegant duty free shopping, but also to enjoy the excellent cuisine in the Creole bistros. Marigot is not quite as large as its counterpart **Phillipsburg** (the principle town of the Dutch sector), and takes on the impression of the typical French village in a predominantly West Indian setting. **Marina Port la Royale** is the shopping complex at the port, but **Rue de la Republique** and **Rue de la Liberte**, which border the bay, are also filled with duty free shops, boutiques and bistros. Unlike Phillipsburg, Marigot has less bustle and the open air cafes are tempting places in which to stop for a rest. The harbour is also a popular gathering spot for the early evening.

Shopping Hours: Monday – Friday 9am – 12:30 pm and 3 – 7 pm. A few shops remain open through lunch.

The north road from Marigot, will take you to **Grand Case**, a small fishing village, an outpost of French civilization. Though it only has a one mile main street, it is known as the "*Restaurant capital of the Caribbean*". More than twenty restaurants serve French, Italian, Indonesian and Vietnamese cuisine, as well as fresh seafood. Near the **Grand Case Pier** are the *lolos*, the Creole version of a fast-food joint. With their rakishness, beach and water views, generous portions of traditional island food and low prices, they attract local residents and adventurous tourists.

Overlooking the activity of Marigot are the ruins of **Fort St. Luis**, the island's largest historical monument. Built in 1767 on a hill behind the harbor to protect Marigot from foreign invaders, it's still being restored, but its view of the harbor and beyond is worth the steep climb up some 90 steps, especially at sunset. **Pic du Paradis** is the highest point on either side of the island (1 412 ft/424 m). From the top, the panoramic view encompasses Marigot, Phillipsburg and surrounding islands. On the narrow road just before Pic du Paradis is **Loterie Farm**, a former plantation whose main house dates back to 1712. This unique Eden of waterfalls, towering palms and tropical-fruit trees, birds, free-roaming goats and monkeys has excellent hiking trails to explore. Near Orleans is one of the islands most unusual attractions, **La Ferme des Papillons** (the Butterfly Farm). Hundreds of rare butterflies from around the world flutter inside the custom-designed butterfly house on the Route de Galion.

BEACHES

The Mediterranean atmosphere of St. Martin extends to all of its beaches, where topless sunning is fairly common and full nudity is also seen. However, **Orient Beach** is the French side's only official clothing-optional beach. The gentle, rolling surf and long, straight shoreline are ideal for jogging or strolling. (To the right of the parking lot is the clothing-optional area.) Facilities include chairs- and umbrella rentals, as well as watersports equipment. There are also several restaurants along the waterfront. At one end of Grand Case's

main street is pretty **Baie de Grand Case**, a beach often frequented by tourists. It's narrow, but the sand is soft and white, and the waves are generally gentle. Among other gorgeous white-sand beaches on the island are **Baie Rouge**, which is possibly the most beautiful and most secluded beach on the French side. This little patch of sand is located at the base of high cliffs and is backed by private homes rather than by hotels. Facilities comprise a small snack and soda stand at the beach entrance. The **Baie Lounge** is a beautiful, mile long curve of white sand on the western tip of the island. This is a good place for snorkeling and swimming, but be aware of the strong undertow when waters are rough. This beach does not offer facilities. **Friars Bay** is a small picturesque cove, just north of Marigot, attracting a casual crowd of locals. A small snack bar serves refreshments.

DINING

France and fine food are synonymous so it's not surprising that there are more than 100 restaurants and cafes on the French side alone. Many of the best are in Grand Case and Marigot. Another two dozen or so restaurants are sprinkled around Cul de Sac, Mt. Vernon, Orient Beach and elsewhere. Dining tends to be a leisurely affair in St. Martin that begins and lasts a bit later than usual. There's no problem finding service at 10:30 or 11 pm.

- **La Vie en Rose**

The balcony tables of the upstairs dining room are much in demand because they overlook the harbor. The grande dame of St. Martin's restaurants has been serving dependably good, classic French cuisine for almost 20 years. *Daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Most major credit cards. Rue de la Republique, Marigot.*

- **Maison sur la Port**

Decorated in shades of pale peach and green, this charming restaurant is right on the waterfront. French cuisine is served on Limoges china amid tropical gardens and waterfalls. *Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner. Most major credit cards. At the port in Marigot.*

- **Bar de la Mer**

This lively corner bistro has a pool table upstairs, a large bar and an outdoor terrace perfectly situated to watch the action on Market Square. Try the pizzas, tuna tartare, salads and grilled food. *Most major credit cards. Rue Felix Eboue at Boulevard de France, Marigot, St. Martin.*

ST MARTIN POTPOURRI

- Don't miss a chance to sample guavaberry liqueur. A blend of rum and a native berry that grows in the hills, the liqueur has been made on the island for 200 years. Most bars and restaurants serve an assortment of drinks concocted with it; a favorite is guavaberry colada—a blend of cream of coconut, pineapple juice and guavaberries.
- There's an upside to having to rebuild after a hurricane: Everything is shiny and new. St. Martin/St. Maarten has been hit hard by storms in recent years, so the island may seem more modern (and less quaint) than many other parts of the Caribbean.
- The fluffy white stuff sometimes seen blowing up from empty fields isn't snow but remnants of cotton from old plantations.
- St. Martin/St. Maarten is the smallest land area in the world where sovereignty is divided between two countries.