

ST-BARTHS: THE BEST LITTLE RESTAURANTS IN PARADISE



The island of St-Barths is synonymous with fine dining in the Caribbean. Residing in the French West Indies about 150 miles east of Puerto Rico, it has taken its French connection to heart and delights visitors with a rich assortment of exceptional foods and wines. Cuisine extraordinaire from all regions of France is available, along with an abundance of Caribbean favorites.

On the south end of the island, about 6 miles from the capital of Gustavia, is Le Gaiac at Le Toiny Hotel in Toiny. Whether you are in search of gastronomic delights or those of the Hollywood sort -- both can be found nightly at Le Gaiac. This elegant French restaurant glows with perfection, from a panoramic view of the Caribbean Sea, to the soft shades of tropical greenery, to the service and selection that have been fine-tuned for the seasoned traveler.

Le Gaiac is about its exceptional cuisine! Executive Chef Maxime Deschamps serves a wonderfully savory sliced scallops with shavings of black truffles, topped with cauliflower mousse, accompanied with a mushroom and liquorice soup (Noix de coquille St Jacques et truffe, une royale de choux-fleurs a la noisette, un consommé de champignons a la relisse a boire). Followed by steamed fois gras served with balsamic and passion fruit jus on a bed of lentils (Fois gras de canard du Gers cuit a la vapeur, un trait de vieux balsamique, fruits de la passion, lentilles braisées au sucre), with its liquid companion, a Chassagne Montrachet, 1997 (Verget) Premier Cru La Romanee -- all this gastronomic heaven is just a prelude to a superb appetizer of light and smooth warm lobster soup with a dash of tarragon oil (Mousseux de langouste au cremeux de cepes, a l'huile d'estragon). Marvellieux!

(Le Gaiac's contact is 011-590-590-29-77-47.)

Keeping the level of gastronomic excellence on the island is Frank Renimel, the Michelin Star Head Chef of Relais de Pigasse in South West of France. Each year for six months, November thru April, Renimel will delight you with an innovative Mediterranean inspired cuisine. An extensive wine list specialising in organic French wines and a carefully selected water list completes your experience in the art of fine dining.

Brought to the island by owner and Languedoc winemaker, Robert Eden, 42, his concept is to offer only the best that there is. "And to do that, we only open for six months out of the year," he explains.

"Why try to spread yourself too thin during the off season? We just go back to Languedoc and focus on our Michelin restaurant there."

Eden set up his company Comte Cathare (Grands Vignobles en Méditerranée) in 1994 with two friends, American Kevin Parker and Englishman Richard Dunn. These three wine lovers never stopped

investing. In eight years, they have built a range of various Languedoc Domaines, all cultivated "biodynamically:" Château Maris, a 55 ha vineyard in La Livinière (Minervois), Château de Combeville, in AOC Saint-Chinian, Domaine Bégude, where they grow Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vins de pays d'Oc, and so on. They put a bit more than US\$7 million to reconstitute the vineyards, the vathouses and a wine boutique called La Tuilerie, a historical tile factory. Moreover, Eden opened a restaurant in 2001, Le Relais de Pigasse, situated beside the Canal du Midi, a US\$1 million investment, and is looking forward to opening a hotel at the same place. In the meantime, he brings his wine and his gastronomic sense to Francois Plantation.

(Francois Plantation contact is 011-590-590-29-80-22.)

Another gastronomic tour de force is Hubert De La Motte's in-house restaurant in his Hostelleries Le Trois Forces in Morne du Vitet. Up in the "Alps" of St. Barts, Hubert's serene New Age Inn, guests can have an astrological reading, yoga classes and "blissful" cuisine. Hubert is your host AND your personal chef and he will greet you with a warm smile and a glass of champagne. Although it is a French restaurant by definition, you will also find some of the best Caribbean cuisine available anywhere -- fish, meat, poultry, vegetables, a variety of homemade breads, chateaubriand, and wonderful deserts. One word captures it all: délicieux!

Hubert, a dashing figure in his signature red pantaloons and ponytail, is a renowned Chef, Grand Bailly for the Caribbean area of the Confrérie de la Marmite d'Or, a famous French cuisine Order. The wine cellar of the Hostellerie des Trois Forces is known well beyond the St. Barth's beaches for the quality of its vintages.

Among the menu favorites is a grilled steak filet in a peppercorn sauce (steak au poivre avec sauce au poivre et les spices delicate). However, the house special is the escargot recipe Hubert de la Motte has carried on from his Great great grandfather, generation after generation. And there is a reason: this escargot is THE creamiest and delicate escargot you will ever eat. Mon dieu, mon ami! One cannot describe the indescribable!

The in-house restaurant at Hostellerie de Trois Forces is down-to-Earth and unpretentious. Just the way most of us prefer it!

P.S. Be sure to book a one-on-one spiritual astrology reading with Hubert, who uses the alignment of the stars to chart your "life purpose." Then open your mind to his other offerings, including past-life regressions, rebirthing, yoga and kinesiology.

(Hostellerie de Trois Forces' contact is 011-590-590-27-61-25.)