Stop Cooking! Have Healthy Nutrition Delivered
A Menu Based on Balance - Arena Base Café’s Philosophy as Explained to Chris Morvan

Those who sell us meals are not generally interested in our health. Many of them appear to be intent on simply giving us more than we really need to eat.

On the other hand, who wants to be subjected to the joyless regime of a health nazi who bans just about everything except lettuce?

Balance has to be the key, and it’s a theme that crops up regularly in a conversation with the proprietor of the Arena Base Café in Billy Folly Road. Katsiaryna Otkan (she pronounces it Katrina) is an entrepreneur whose interest in food and health evolved into a business.

Originally from Belarus, Katsiaryna moved to St. Maarten 21 years ago.

“My husband and I always had lots of people around for dinner,” she begins, “I would come up with new recipes, and eventually I started giving cooking classes: not just how to cook but how to be efficient and quick, because mothers are busy people. And there are other aspects, like buying a huge piece of meat because it’s cheaper, but what are you going to do with it? Steaks, kebabs, how you season it, what you can freeze and how long you can keep it in the fridge. It was hours and hours of jokes and explanation."

Eventually, some of the students suggested Katsiaryna should just sell them the prepared food.

Find Jamaican Dishes and Much More at Little Mobay

Of the various Caribbean cuisines, Jamaican food might have the most substantial influence on the region. Curry Goat, Ackee and Saltfish and even Jerk Chicken, are now favorite dishes all over the Antillean islands.

Everything Stops for Tea at La Boîte à Thé in Marigot

What do you do if you’re a tea lover and you live on an island where you can’t get the kinds you want? Order it online and have it sent is the obvious answer. But then you can’t smell and taste it before you buy.

By: Chris Morvan

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"Take home our jewelry, have it appraised, then pay us!"
Letter From the Editor
November 2nd, 2018

November has finally arrived! It feels like summer flew by. I hope our local readers enjoyed their vacations and I’d like to give a warm welcome to our island visitors. We appreciate your patronage and support.

This issue offers you a bit of untold island history, and of course some must see hot spots during your stay. I encourage you to visit our advertisers for a fun and fabulous time on St. Maarten/St-Martin.

Something new! The numbers 1-11 that you see on our advertisements correspond to our island map on page 6.

If there is a topic or establishment you would like to see covered by one of our writers, drop me a line.

Thank you for reading our newspaper! If you enjoyed our publication and wish to read from the comfort of your home, you can subscribe to our electronic version by using the QR code to the right.

Hilary Grant
Editor

Online Portal

For in-depth information about our island, consult ST-MAARTEN.COM - the official online portal. Please use the convenient QR codes with any smart phone to access individual pages directly.

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Everything Stops for Tea
Chris Morvan visits La Boîte à Thé

Continued from Page 1

What do you do if you’re a tea lover and you live on an island where you can’t get the kinds you want? Order it online and have it sent is the obvious answer. But then you can’t smell and taste it before you buy.

That was the situation Élise Terrasson found herself in. But the answer she came up with was to start a tea shop. And so, a year and a half ago, La Boîte à Thé opened its doors in Marigot.

The Tea Box, as it is known in English, is Lou’s passion (Élise is known as Lou for reasons she herself doesn’t seem sure of). It’s in Rue du President Kennedy, next to Western Union.

Lou was born and raised in Brittany, northern France, and spent time in London and Jersey before making her home in St-Martin. While the French are known for their coffee and cafés rather than their tea shops, this Breton lady went the other way, and when asked what kind of tea she drinks, she reeled off a list.

“Black tea, green tea, white tea.” She also likes red tea, although she points out that rooibos – sometimes anglicized to red bush - is not really tea at all; it’s just used in the same way.

On the wall behind the counter stand rows of metal containers, a bit like a Dickensian apothecary’s establishment. The sample jars on shelves by the door tell their own story, with all manner of blends and specialties. Not just maté, the Brazilian leaf with an indescribable flavor all its own, but also two blends of it. She brings me a small pot of the version with poppy and cactus, and it’s a sweet flavor like I’ve never experienced before.

Lou serves the tea in a large glass cup which can take the whole potful.

Back at the sample shelves she shows me green tea with peach, with ginger and lemon and the intriguingly named Green Russian. Then it’s on to the real mystical ones with names like La Sérénité de Pharaon, Remède de Sorcière Nouvelle Recette, Marchand de Sable and Elixir de Chasse l’Hiver. With sorcerers and pharaohs around the place, you don’t have to be fluent in French to get the general idea, and if you visit the shop you will get the full explanation, in English if you prefer.

All the blends are prepared exclusively for The Tea Box by Lou’s tea master in France.

There is also a relatively small selection of coffees and there are tea bags as well as the loose stuff. When asked how the bags compare to the loose leaves, she says they’re pretty good because they are put in special handmade bags of organic cotton. Lou has no time for the mass-produced brands with their chemicals and dubious origins.

Also on the shelves are all manner of teapots and other tea-making paraphernalia, while in a corner where chairs and a little table are positioned there is a collection of secondhand books. You can flick through one while you drink a hot infusion (which she times using old-fashioned powder-filled glass egg-ttimers), or, as is the main purpose, bring in a book you have already read and swap it.

All in all, the word that springs to mind here is “genteel”, an English term that, fittingly, owes a lot to French. It’s a little haven of tranquility.
Menu Based on Balance: Arena Base Café’s Philosophy as Explained to Chris Morvan

Continued from Page 1

Selling food wasn’t at all what she had intended, but she began offering a few desserts and baked goods and then found herself being asked to cater for parties, dinners, etc.

Somewhat reluctantly Katsiaryna began to take it seriously and gave the business a name – although she says she can’t remember how she came up with it.

“I wanted it to have a military look,” she says – hence the camouflage cars you see around the island with Arena Base Café emblazoned on the sides.

It was at that point that she had to get her fundamentals straight.

“I want to cater for everybody and show them that it’s healthy, but food doesn’t have to be bland,” she explains. “The only way you can sustain a good diet is if it tastes good. If you’re in training for something specific, yes, you can eat nothing but chicken breasts and kale for a few weeks, but in normal circumstances, you have to enjoy your food because it’s such an important part of life.”

Katsiaryna’s outlook is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that at one point in her teens she was so gripped by anorexia that she almost died. It was an experience that taught her that extremes are dangerous.

This extends to a contempt for a concept of detox diets.

“Our body is designed to do that job,” she asserts. “If we do it for ourselves our body thinks ‘okay, I don’t have to do that anymore; she’ll do it for me.’ Our bodies are smarter than we are.”

She quickly qualifies this. “If somebody does it for health reasons, because of kidney problems or liver problems, or on medical advice, that’s different. But when people do it to lose weight or because they feel they need to clean up, that’s really wrong thinking.” This extends to a contempt for the concept of detox diets.

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Katsiaryna has no time for diets which demonize carbohydrate.

“We need carbs for energy. If you don’t give your body some carbs, it will start using proteins inside itself. It will eat your own muscles. So you need carbs, and you need fat because if you don’t eat enough fat, you will feel hungry right away. And you need protein too. Some people use vegetable proteins, and that’s fine. I’m a meat eater but I sometimes cook vegetarian meals, and I love them. And I respect other people’s diets, which are sometimes based on religious ideas.”

As the mother of four teenagers, she is acutely aware of how children are influenced by their parents and also points out that what is right for an adult is not necessarily right for a child.

“Children are always running around, using up energy, so they need carbs, they can actually need sugar. And parents who fill their kids’ lunch boxes with salads don’t realize that a lot of it ends up in the bin while they use their pocket money to buy what they do want to eat.”

“My food doesn’t taste like diet food,” she emphasizes. She has a canteen in the Learning Unlimited school, in which the meals include pasta and potatoes. “I used to eat potatoes every day, and I wasn’t fat,” she points out.

In an attempt to influence the eating habits and lifestyle of St Maarten, she is rethinking some local dishes.

“I’m actually working on a recipe for Johnny cakes, making a gluten-free, sugar-free version,” she says.

Arena Base Café is open to the public through a small door next to the big iron gates of the estate, but much of its business is in delivering healthy lunches. Check out their Facebook page for more details.
Find Jamaican Dishes and Much More at Little Mobay

Phillomay White came to St. Maarten about 17 years ago, and yet it took her until last year to fulfill her grandest dream: to run her very own restaurant. Not any eatery, but a place to reflect her home island of Jamaica and to open it in a location where vacationers congregate. Her goal was offering Jamaican food to people who never had an opportunity to try it. She found an exceptional spot in Maho Village, right in the center of a cluster of resorts and so close to the famous end of airport runway that guests can watch the arriving and starting planes.

Little Mobay opened its doors in 2017. Named after Jamaica's second largest city Montego Bay, the venture went off to a great start... until Irma visited in September last year and shut down every single resort in her neighborhood for over one year.

But Little Mobay soldiered on, with services provided and food served while most of the island was in shambles. At the time of this writing, the resorts are still not operational, but Little Mobay is doing a fair amount of business. This fact needs to be mentioned as the strongest endorsement possible: guests come from other regions on our island and travel to Maho Village to have breakfast or lunch at Little Mobay and keep it humming along.

"Dinner will be offered soon, but I need to wait until at least one of the resorts reopens," explains Phillomay. "I guess that the Royal Islander will be ready by December."

Jamaican cuisine includes specialties which nowadays hit a mainstream desire for conscious nutrition and organically produced food as a basis. It was the Rastafarian movement which brought these healthier changes to the table, among a few unhealthy, but non-dietary habits (and we don't mean ganja by this).

When we ask Phillomay about the restaurant's menu, she quickly points out that it reflects what Jamaicans eat on their home island, but not necessarily only authentic Jamaican meals. They do eat Surf and Turf, and you'll find it on the menu. They do know their pasta, and - pronto - Phillomay serves it.

Jamaica has a growing middle class, accustomed to international dishes and Little Mobay brings this international Jamaican flavor to St. Maarten.

With the outside terrace overlooking Maho Beach and the end of the airport runway, Little Mobay is a great place to watch the action while sipping a cocktail. "Try our Mobay Splash!" adds Phillomay.

The atmosphere is laid back, there is no loud music. Conversations flow with ease, and the service couldn't be any more attentive or friendly. We recommend Little Mobay as the island's best Jamaican restaurant and bar.
You See Him Here, You See Him There
Chris Morvan meets the music man of St. Maarten

Ronny Bouwmeester is obsessed with music. It’s his life, and he doesn’t just think about it all day long – he spends most evenings playing in the bars and restaurants of St Maarten.

Who? You probably know him as Ronny Santana.

“Pierre from Pineapple Pete’s gave me the nickname,’ he explains. “Because I do a few Santana songs and he thought I sounded like Carlos.”

He certainly doesn’t look like Carlos Santana, but with his long hair and his encyclopedic knowledge of music and musicians, it’s no surprise he works in the same industry.

Of Dutch/Indonesian extraction, Ronny arrived in St. Maarten in 1992. It’s a long and complex story of meeting influential people while playing at a party thrown by a wine baron in the Beaujolais region of France. One of the guests was the owner of the now-defunct Grand Café Europe at Maho, who was so impressed by Ronny’s band that he invited them to his little corner of the Caribbean to play their repertoire of James Brown, Sam & Dave, and other soul standards.

The band went down well, and Ronny made a quick decision.

“You know what? I’m not going back.”

He sold most of his equipment, keeping just one guitar and an effects pedal board, and set about recruiting replacements for his Holland-bound bandmates. The new outfit played at the Surf Club on the French side, the Boathouse and the Iron Horse, a biker bar.

But as bassist Timothy B. Schmidt says in the documentary History of the Eagles, “All bands are on the verge of splitting up at all times,” and sure enough it happened in this case.

Fast forward to 2018 and Ronny Santana is still here, chain-smoking Camel Filters as we sit outside his house on a near perpendicular hill overlooking Simpson Bay Yacht Club. Propped up on a settee in the living room are three guitars: a jazz-style electric, a tragically battered Takamine acoustic and an ancient, unusually small, all-mahogany Martin, king of the acoustics.

On the wall hangs a life-size painting of his favorite electric guitar, with real strings attached, the work of his girlfriend, Ingrid. “It needs tuning,” she jokes.

Venues and their resident musicians change as often as band personnel, and at the time of writing Ronny can be seen, solo or in a duo, at Pineapple Pete’s, The Hole in the Wall at Maho and on the first Sunday of each month with a four-piece band at the Café Rembrandt at Madame Estate for late afternoon-early evening sessions of classic rock.

When performing solo or with one other, the effect is of an acoustic gig, even though he prefers to use electric guitars, and the range of material runs from those old soul classics to Santana. Ronny rejects the idea of doing it for the ego: he gives the public what they want.

“I’m here to please people,” he says. “It’s like therapy. For two of three hours I can take them away from the bullsh*t of their lives.”

With his fluent, relaxed guitar style and competent singing (he makes no extravagant claims about his voice), it’s an outpouring of love for the music, an expression of what he is thinking about every waking minute (and you suspect he probably dreams about it too).

Somewhere in the house is a room he uses as a studio, recording those who come to him to get a snapshot of their music for posterity, and he teaches guitar – not to children but to adults who have reached a certain level and want to progress a little.

No doubt he would like just a fraction of his namesake’s money, but how many of us manage to live our lives doing what we enjoy?
Who Said You Could Drive on the Beach?

Continued from Page 1

By Leslie Hickerson

Many people that live on St. Maarten regularly park their cars on beaches around the island. Sometimes to use their car sound system for parties, to get closer to the water for swimming and fishing, or maybe just have a nice view of the sea while they eat in their car. Very often driving on the beach is viewed as part of the job for those who set up beach chairs for tourists. Unbeknownst to some, it is not permitted for motor vehicles to drive on the sandy beaches of St. Maarten, and there is a good reason for it!

Without being aware of it, drivers can do significant damage to the animals that live or nest on the beach as well as cause a loss of sediment. We feel that once people are informed about the damage they can do just to get a few steps closer to the water’s edge, they will abandon this kind of behavior. Unfortunately, around Kimsha Beach and Simpson Bay Beach, beach-driving is still being practiced.

The most common problem with driving on the beach, is disturbing the animals that live or nest there. Both land and marine animals frequent the beaches to breed, hunt and lay their eggs.

Sea Turtles come ashore and dig out their nests before laying their eggs inside and covering them back up with sand. These shallow nests are enough to protect the eggs inside from natural predators, but even small vehicles like four wheelers or dirt bikes would crush them. With a completely undisturbed nest, only one in 1,000 sea turtles make it to adulthood. When we add in the amount of human impact on the beaches for nesting, it makes the odds even harder for these creatures to survive.

“Turtle nesting season lasts from March until October, with some nests hatching as late as January. Every beach in SXM has the potential to be nesting habitat for turtles. So, driving on any beach has the potential to negatively affect nesting sea turtles,” says Tadzio Bervoets Director of the St. Maarten Nature Foundation.

Turtles return to the same beach that they hatched from themselves to lay their eggs. Since some can live to be over 100 years old, these turtles sometimes hatch on pristine uninhabited beaches but return to find beach bars, hotels, and boardwalks. In early October this year, the St. Maarten Nature Foundation had to relocate one nest of eggs from Great Bay Beach where the turtle had nested. The team moved the eggs to a more secluded area to protect them from human traffic and impact. Other animals including birds, crabs, and lizards are also affected by the constant pressure of vehicles traveling up and down the beach.

An additional factor is the protection the beach offers during storms. Driving on the sand causes loss of sediment. Melanie Meijer Zu Schlochter, Project Officer for the Nature Foundation, says: "Driving on beaches makes the beach more susceptible to over-wash during storms and hurricanes. We need to protect our beaches if we want them to protect us during hurricanes.” Sand that is loose or disturbed quickly erodes away and brings the breakpoint of the waves closer to the shore and us.

If a simple plea for the lives of the animals that live there is not enough to stop motorists from driving on the beach, perhaps knowing that it is illegal will.

“Two pieces of legislation specifically protect sea turtles: The Nature Conservation Ordinance Article 16 and 17, and the beach policy forbid driving on the beaches. Sea turtles and their nesting habitat are also protected internationally under the Cartagena Convention, which St. Martin/Maarten is a party to,” says Bervoets.

Tourism is the primary source of income for most people that live on the island. With that comes difficulties in protecting the environment that we depend on. Increases in tourism mean that there will always be building and excavation on the shores and beaches of St. Maarten. Increased foot traffic near the cruise ship docks means more garbage from single day travelers enjoying piña coladas as they shop. Large buses shipping in guests for beach days like to park as close as possible to the lounge chairs.

It is possible to limit our effect on the ecosystem by making sure we do what we can to protect it. A simple start is to avoid driving on the beaches to protect and promote the growth of the indigenous animals that live there. So, the next time you spend the weekend at Kimsha beach, park in the brand-new parking area, bring a handheld speaker and team-lift your cooler to the shady spots under the trees.
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Located at the Allegria Resort - enter at security gate - free parking! Call 1 721 553-6322 for reservation
There are some who deny the existence of the elusive Green Flash altogether. Because sunset and Happy Hour go together in the Caribbean, many times the sighting of a Green Flash has been attributed to the generous consumption of rum punch and the general public views any report with a healthy dose of skepticism. Even by spending a lifetime close to the water, the lucky ones might see the flash once or twice.

But there are a few sober, scientifically minded observers that confirm a sunset can turn green indeed, for a split second. The green flash is a natural phenomenon occurring in the latitudes close to the equator, which happens during the final seconds of the sun setting into the sea. It is a rare event and only happens if the atmospheric conditions are just right: no clouds on the horizon and the air must be crystal clear. If this is the case, during the last split second of sunset, a bright green light covers the Western portion of the sky; so, short that blinking will make you miss it.

Waiting for the phenomenon has been turned into public rituals in some areas. The town of Key West in Florida, for example, has large crowds gathering during the late hours of the afternoon, all in anticipation of their chance to become a member of the Green Flash Club. And once the sun has set - almost always without providing the extra satisfaction of flashing - the crowd applauds (for what reason exactly is unknown).

The best spot on St. Maarten to watch sunset would be the Maho beach area. The Driftwood Boat Bar offers a perfect view during most months of the year, as does the Sunset Beach Bar.
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Simpson Bay Eye Sore

More than one year and another complete hurricane season have passed since the building in this picture was severely damaged. It would have taken only another minor tropical storm to have wooden boards and debris fly from this structure to adjacent buildings and on parked cars and to cause severe damage.

Nobody had the interest to invest either time and energy or plain money to hire someone to remove what remains of the third-floor structure. No skills needed, just a few guys and two weekends of exertion. And it appears that no government agency deemed it important enough to correct this eye sore in the center of our island's tourism district.

This building is right in the heart of Simpson Bay, the one spot of the island almost all stay-over guests will see.

What message will they take home as the response to the hashtag #SXMSTRONG?
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