Island Tours: Sometimes You Get What You Pay For

They say that immigration officers are the first chance for a tourist destination to make a good impression. It's a bit sad having to admit that St. Maarten has a somewhat shaky history in accomplishing this goal... on the other hand, we do hear though that professionalism has improved during the past year.

Still good to know that there is a second chance, and this time the responsibility of being ambassadors of our island rests heavily on the shoulders of our tour guides and taxi drivers. Whoever doesn't deliver the goods puts a big dent in our chances to see this guest returning. Tour guides need to be knowledgeable about locations, history and island folklore, taxi drivers must know the best path to deliver their passengers to the desired destination swiftly.

Joseph 'Joe' Liburd of Jo Junie Tours is one of the TripAdvisor champions of his trade. Joe has created several tour packages to suit the interests of individual visitors. “But the itinerary of a tour can't be written in stone, there must be some flexibility,” explains Joe.

“Attractions and sights change every day. To give an example... Maho Beach as a major attraction has ever changing sand coverage. Sometimes it’s just rocks and nothing more. We tour guides know all this, and I would not bring a group for an extended time to a rocky Maho Beach - even if the official itinerary lists it.”

Heard It Through the Grapevine

If you consider yourself to be a vino, take a trip to St-Martin's Hope Estate to shop wines, chocolates and more from a store where the only thing mass produced is originality.

Garbage Dilemma: Who Is to Blame?

Reduce your footprint and reuse your plastics. The event held November 4 at Kimsha Beach tackled the growing problem that plagues our island: trash.
Letter From the Editor
November 9, 2018

I'd like to take a moment to thank you for choosing the ST-MAARTEN.COM Weekly Edition as your newspaper of choice.

If you are visiting on island and would like to continue to read our publication from home, please scan the QR code to your right with your smartphone to access our electronic version.

A couple of articles in this issue focus on some matters that need light shed on them. St. Maarten/St-Martin has been a top Caribbean destination for decades. To continue to make that list in post-Irma times, we need to take a hard look at the actions (or lack of action in some cases) taken.

As always, we continue to give you the hidden gems on our island to see our one of a kind paradise through a local's eyes. Have fun exploring these incredible locales.

I wish you a pleasant week.

Hilary Grant, GIA GG
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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Fire Department: 919 or +1 721 545-4222

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Tired of breathing in the toxic fumes of the dump? After decades of poor waste management, the constant landfill fires have forced the public into a frustrated and loopying conversation. But while we wait on the government to do their jobs and take action to fix this massive problem, do not lose sight of how we got into this situation.

According to the St. Maarten Nature Foundation, research shows that our island produces the highest amount of waste per capita in the entire Caribbean. Per person per day we create 9.7kgs of garbage compared with the island of Curacao where they create 44kgs per person per day. In the results of one study, the landfill was expected to be near capacity in the year 2008. Now, one decade later and we are still dumping all our unsorted trash onto what is now a mountain of garbage.

It is true that we need the support of the government to make a massive change in our waste management system. But while we wait for them to do their jobs, we can control the amount of garbage we are sending to the landfill each day.

The Reduce and Reuse Project is an initiative by the St. Maarten Nature Foundation focused on limiting the public’s use of single-use plastics by educating residents, children and businesses. Bernard Fourie, owner of Bucanneer Beach Bar, supported this program by hosting a presentation at the restaurant on the evening of Sunday November 4. Fourie has already made a great effort to Go Green by restricting the amount of waste they produce by switching over to biodegradable take-away containers/cups and paper straws at Bucanneer’s, which is located on Kimsha Beach.

One highlight of the evening was the rendition of a poem called “Trash Talk”. Written and performed by Cornelius Raymond. To begin, he paints a picture of a beautiful day on a St. Maarten beach, then the subject of the story goes home only to find that the stench and smoke from the dump has seeped into the house making it hard to breathe.

“The stench is now indoors, and it’s such a diabolical odor,” He wonders whose bring idea was it to put the landfill in the capitol anyway.

Cornelius talks about the efforts the residents have made to protest and petition the government regarding waster with no results. He also notes the effects this will have on the future generation, “No finger pointing at the government that is failing its St. Maarten citizens too. Respiratory illness is coming in our children, and our children will inherit our current problems.”

At the end of the poem his subject rushes back to the beach to get back to the fresh air.

After the performance of ‘Trash Talk’, Project Officer of the St. Maarten Nature Foundation, Melanie Meijer Zu Schlochtern, gave a presentation about the effects of poor waste management around the island.

“When plastic breaks down in the sun it releases greenhouse gasses, so now it has been proven that our garbage creates a worse climate for us.” She also explained the difference between normal plastics, which are degradable, and those products that are biodegradable.

“Plastics donot ever go away, they just break down into smaller pieces.” These small microplastics are often ingested by birds and marine life.

At the end of the evening Schlochtern gave several examples of ways residents can help reduce the amount of litter and buildup of waste on the island:

1- Provide straws and bags upon request.
2- Use reusable cups and cutlery
3- Use biodegradable products (straws, cups, lids, cutlery and to-go containers).
4- Advertise your eco-activism!
5- Encourage other companies to use less plastic!
Island Tours: Sometimes You Get What You Pay For

Continued From Page 1

And there is timing: St. Maarten/St-Martin is an island with a relatively affluent population and traffic congestion to prove it. But there are patterns to heavy traffic, and instead of wasting precious time in a jam, Joe knows how to keep the wheels moving by picking the best route.

Even though Jo Junie Tours operates large buses as well, Joe believes that they are not ideally suited for individual island sightseeing. “With our air-conditioned vans, we are flexible, and our guests never feel rushed. They can enjoy the stops, and they are going to see way more with us than on an excursion with a big tour bus. Just think about the time it takes for fifty passengers to leave and board the bus at each stop. I feel that our comfortable vans are way more efficient.” Part of the comfort is the well-filled cooler Joe always takes along; with beers, sodas and even his particular recipe of rum punch.

What are the sights Joe recommends to first-time visitors? “Orient Beach used to be a must-see for visitors. Some go there to check out the clothing-optional section, others enjoy the fancy French beach bars with great drinks and food. And it’s a good thing that some of these places are reopening right now. But in recent years, Maho Beach with the airplanes landing overhead became the most requested attraction.”

After about two hours on the beach, we take our guests to Marigot to check out the local craft market and for them to get a general feel of the town. Marigot is so different from Philipsburg that I think they need to see it. After that, we move towards the Dutch side, to Maho Beach and the Driftwood Boat Bar. Everybody has seen the YouTube videos of planes landing and taking off, and this is what they want to experience too! I make sure we arrive there at a time when the transatlantic jets from Europe are coming in, they are the most dramatic sight.”

But what about shopping? Isn’t St. Maarten the bargain capital of the Caribbean? “I know, we can’t leave out the shops in Philipsburg. We get there in the afternoon, and I drop my passengers off in the center of town so that they have a few hours of browsing.”

Joe Liburd is aware of his role as an ambassador to the island: “We want to give our guests an impression of what St. Maarten/St-Martin has to offer. And we need to do such a good job that they come back to St. Maarten for an extended vacation. People need to realize that this is a special place and worth a longer stay.”

There are some drivers, who follow their profession with passion, and there are others who just see it as a convenient job. And - as in all walks of life - there are the vultures who prey on someone else’s efforts.

The legit tour operators create realistic itineraries, never ever return their passengers too late to the cruise ship facility and overall ascertain that everyone has a wonderful time touring the island.

But other drivers try to undercut a confirmed reservation by luring passengers with lower rates. Little do these guests know that they will get a shortened tour version by a driver motivated to finish as fast as possible to do a second run. That’s why it is important for short-term visitors to stick with reservations they have made online.

Celebrating St. Martin’s Day in Other Countries

For us on St. Maarten, it makes total sense that the holiday carrying the island’s name is our unique holiday, named after the island, not the other way around.

Wikipedia wrongly states that the island was divided into a Dutch and French side on St. Martin's Day. Not so. It was Columbus who spotted the island on November 11th, but didn’t even consider it important enough to stop and check it out. He just named it Saint Martin... because the discovery happened on this Christian holiday, honoring a Roman soldier from the fourth century named Martin.

As the story goes, this soldier on a horse saw a poor chap improperly dressed for the miserable weather conditions they both endured. Martin took his sword, cut his coat in half so that the underdressed man could wrap himself up and keep warm. This nice act of compassion eventually led to sainthood.

Little is it know that St. Martin's Day is celebrated in other parts of the world as well, and this by people who have never heard of our tiny rock in the Caribbean.

Germany especially turns this day into a special celebration for small children, who parade candle-lit lanterns and sing their songs while trying to avoid that the paper lanterns catch fire. Which they frequently do, and it is this drama which makes the day so fun and unique.

In the Northern hemisphere around Germany, St. Martin's Day is the soft start of the Christmas season; the weather has already turned bad, with short, gloomy days and long rainy nights. The first snow is to be expected. The traditional meal is a St. Martin's Goose; a heavy dish which would feel like bricks in the belly if consumed in a tropical climate, but is strangely fitting for November days up north.

As additional trivia to the origin of the St. Martin’ Day celebrations: Martin Luther, the original Christian troublemaker, was born on November 10th and christened on the 11th. There are some learned opinions which speculate that it is his arrival on Earth which is the reason for the celebration, not the good deeds of the Roman Martin.
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Advocacy, Information and Tasty Treats at the Vegan Festival
By Chris Morvan

There was certainly plenty of interest in the Vegan Festival on Sunday November 4. By 2 PM, having fed the ravenous masses, most of the stalls were pretty much cleaned out.

Jenny Budhram, for instance, was down to jars of chutney, while the gingerbread men on Marianne Marchant’s Vegan to Go stand had taken a battering.

Maya Marchant holds the fort at daughter Marianne’s Vegan to Go stand

With veganism being, for many people, part of a mindset that advocates caring, not just for animals, but for the world in general, the morning included a lecture on a plastic-free planet.

Due to a last-minute cancellation, the cookery demonstration was improvised by Jackie van Zand and Marianne Marchant, who, after scouring the stalls for ingredients, whipped up a “pulled jackfruit stir fry”.

Ernesto Guzman, chef at 3 Amigos, won the vegan burger competition

The vegan burger competition was won by chef Ernesto Guzman from 3 Amigos, who rethought not just the patty (black beans and rice) but the bun, which he fashioned from plantain – and there was a splash of mojito in the coleslaw.

One of the event’s organizers, Divina Mirpuri, summed it up.

“We had an overwhelming response this year and we really appreciate everyone’s positive feedback. It’s great to see the awareness growing and people coming together to share ideas which eventually can sow the seeds to make changes in the way we live.”

Massage with Peter Smith
Now Proven: Gourmet Vegan Dining is Not an Oxymoron
Our Publisher - Jan Thoelke - Goes Vegan for One Night at the Pop Up Vegan Dinner

A fundraising event for the Animal Defenders organization set a fitting theme by offering a gourmet four-course vegan dinner; the logic being that you shouldn't eat animals while trying to help them. Jenny Budhrani, Jackie Sattler and Marianne Marchant were the chefs for the evening, which took place at the soon-to-open Mandarin Pan Asian restaurant at Port de Plaisance.

The dining room was packed, sold out to the last seat. Many of the prominent members of our local business community present appeared to be familiar with the vegan lifestyle, while there was also a significant section of novices, including myself.

Limiting my diet to a vegetarian one is easy; I have lived this way for years. But to also cut out all dairy products and eggs seemed to stretch the idea a bit far and I was under the impression that the limitations of vegan cuisine are too severe to be attractive to mainstream foodies.

But our three chefs proved me wrong; they smartly avoided the trap of attempting to copy traditional meals with vegan surrogates. Instead, they worked with the strength of their chosen ingredients, creating savory flavors which were new and exciting to the palate uninitiated to vegan cooking. To each course, matching organic wines were served.

Another highlight of the evening was a raffle - again to benefit the Animal Defenders. Among the prizes were jewelry pieces and vouchers for vegan dinners.

As punishment for doubting the appeal of vegan food, I won a coupon for a large pizza at Domino’s Pizza. Not that I don't love their pizza, I'm just not sure that Domino's is entirely vegan...

For more information, contact Jenny Budhrani at jbudhrani@gmail.com or go online and visit facebook.com/StMaartenVegans.
Heard It Through the Grapevine

By Chris Morvan

In an age when supermarkets dominate the food and drink industries, it is all too easy to pick up your wine and fine foods along with the toothpaste and toilet paper. Supermarkets are full of special offers at prices that might be good for the customer but often come at the expense of the suppliers. The profit margins of everyone from farmers and fishermen to wine producers are squeezed dry by purchasing power that guarantees they sell plenty of their produce – but only if they virtually give the stuff away.

To survive as a small producer these days is increasingly difficult.

Fortunately there are still retailers in the world who care about such things and endeavor to pay a fair price when they buy and a fair price when they sell.

One such place in St-Martin is Grapewine, the purveyor of wines, spirits and delicatessen-style food at the fast-maturing Hope Estate. Just as the area itself is developing into a cultural hotspot, Grapewine is expanding to provide many of the things the bon vivant needs.

If you are the kind of person who likes to eat and drink as well at home as you do in a restaurant, this is the place to look. At first glance it looks like a wine shop – or at least it did when it was operating out of one small unit before the recent expansion. Now the premises are big enough to allow the business to breathe and the shelves to reflect the philosophy of the owners.

As many people do, Véronique and husband François came to St-Martin to improve their quality of life. Both in senior positions in businesses in Paris, they realized that they were little more than spectators as their own lives went speeding past in a blur of commuting and childminding. They took the plunge in 2008, arriving with a three-month old daughter, a son of almost two and no clear idea of what they were going to do.

They started small, importing some wine and champagne, and things grew gradually to the point where they moved into a small Hope Estate unit. Word of mouth being a wonderful thing, the business’s reputation continued to grow and eventually they took over the whole ground floor of the building.

Another way of referring to word of mouth is “I heard it through the grapevine”, and that is where the shop’s name came from. François found himself humming the old Motown song and it occurred to him that that was how he wanted the business to grow. Then adjust the spelling to emphasize wine and voila!

That is also how the network of suppliers grew. They started off with one or two and those suggested others. Customers began to mention food, so that was introduced.

“We knew someone who produced pâté and someone with smoked salmon,” Véronique remembers. Being food lovers themselves, there was the added incentive of importing things they couldn’t find here. And so came the foie gras, and the list wouldn’t be complete without some good ham and sausages.

Then there are the chocolates which, like everything else, are produced using traditional methods and with none of the additives the mass producers slip in to aid their cutting of corners.

Although the accent is very much on French products, there are also wines from other countries and a nice selection of Scottish male whiskies.

Coming soon will be a frozen goods section with all manner of vegetables, fruit and more, sourced from small, trusted suppliers. There are many wonderful things about life in St-Martin, but with Christmas coming up, this is the icing on the cake. There really is nothing else like it.
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2. **Little Mobay**
   - **Phone**: +1 721 545-0279
   - **Location**: Maho Village
   - **Specialty**: Authentic Jamaican Cuisine
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   - **Reserve**: Call +1 721 545-0279 for reservation

3. **RDiVous Lounge**
   - **Phone**: +1 721 545-3070
   - **Location**: Porto Cupecoy
   - **Specialty**: Enjoy the elegance of marina dining!
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4. **The Boon**
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   - **Location**: Simpson Bay
   - **Specialty**: Right on pristine Simpson Bay Beach!
   - **Offer**: Casual Gourmet Bistro
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5. **Caribbean-TexMex Fusion - Swim-up Bar**
   - **Phone**: +1 721 544-3600
   - **Location**: Simpson Bay
   - **Specialty**: Home of the Megarita!
   - **Offer**: Open for lunch and dinner (11 AM to 10 PM)
   - **Reserve**: Call +1 721 544-3600 for reservation

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9. **Lagoones Port Cupecoy**
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   - **Offer**: Sunset on the Lagoon

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12. **Mario Bistrot**
    - **Phone**: +1 721 523-2760
    - **Location**: Porto Cupecoy
    - **Specialty**: Blends of French, Asian, and Caribbean cuisine
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    - **Reserve**: Open for dinner (Sunday Lunch)
      - (Mon-Sat. 6 PM to 10 PM, Sun. lunch only)
      - Porto Cupecoy at the Yacht Harbour
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13. **Sale & Pepe**
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    - **Reserve**: Open 10 AM to 11 PM
      - Welfare Road, Simpson Bay
      - Call +1 721 527-5019

14. **CaloMex Jimbo's**
    - **Phone**: +1 721 544-3500
    - **Location**: Simpson Bay
    - **Specialty**: Home of the Megarita!
    - **Offer**: Caribbean-TexMex Fusion - Swim-up Bar
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      - Call +1 721 544-3600 for reservation

15. **Topperr's SXM**
    - **Phone**: +1 721 544-3500
    - **Location**: Simpson Bay
    - **Specialty**: Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner
    - **Reserve**: Call +1 721 544-3500 for reservation
End of Autumn Celebrated with November’s Birthstone: Citrine

By Hilary Grant, GIA Graduate Gemologist

Reminiscent of autumn leaves, Citrine is the birthstone for November babies. This rich yellow to reddish orange gemstone is often confused with Topaz because of its color.

This tawny colored gemstone is a variety of Quartz, which has been in use in jewelry pieces for thousands of years. Citrine is typically modestly priced, similar to other quartzes like Amethyst. Fine Citrine or larger pieces generally do not have a drastic, sharp increase in price.

This warm colored gem is often cut into fantasy shapes, which lets the cutter’s imagination run wild. So if you are lucky enough to spot a jewelry piece with a Citrine outside of the normal round, oval or rectangular shape; buy this gemstone - it is a work of art!

Perhaps one of the most interesting types of gemstones is found in Bolivia. There, Citrine and Amethyst occur in the same crystal. This means, the gem will be half lavender and half yellow; an ideal gift for a Los Angeles Lakers fan. Aply this gemstone is named, Ametrine.

What is considered the best color? Avoid anything that you can see tinges of brown in the gem. Lush, vibrant hues are what you should be on the lookout for.

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TripAdvisor Review
"Great place. Amazing, beautiful and kind people who I am now proud to call friends. Great service. They truly take great pride in their restaurant, food and drinks. They do a great job and I highly recommend. I stopped multiple times while walking in St. Maarten, sometimes for food and sometimes just to have a drink at the bar."
Caribbean Feisty Flavors Presents: Ponche Kremas

There is a household in the town of Quartier d'Orléans, where all sorts of delicacies come out of a small kitchen. It is the home of Sherlyn Montclair, who has a passion for cooking and the talent to support this passion. For a while now, she has operated a catering service and delivers Caribbean signature dishes to appreciating connoisseurs all over our island.

But Sherlyn doesn't stop with cooking: for a long time, she experimented to find the perfect formula to produce St-Martin's very own version of Ponche Kuba. For years, her concoction was a sought-after gift for family and friends in her inner circle. Now she has turned it into a unique product and made it available to purchase.

Ponche Kuba is a creamy specialty liquor with a rum base and certain (secret) spices. Sherlyn’s Ponche is not based on the Cuban recipe anymore, and this is why it is now called Ponche Kremas, offered under her label Caribbean Feisty Flavors. Some might feel that it resembles Egg-Nog on steroids, but with subtle flavors and no overpowering liquor taste. If you are looking for an authentic St-Martin souvenir to take home, this might be a perfect choice. To find out where to purchase, call +1 721 554-7676 or send an email to caribbeanfeistyflavors@gmail.com.
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