



[Click here to view the current issue](#)



## Articles

[» Search Past Articles](#)

### OOH LA LA ST. MARTIN!

(2022 - Fall/Winter Issue)

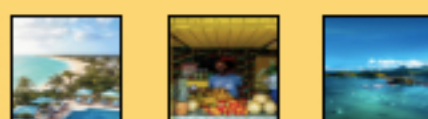
Writer: MEGAN HONAN

[→ Back](#)



When Alexandre Deglise offered to cook me Churrasco Entraña steak, I knew it would be good. Alexandre is head chef and owner at L'Atelier Bar à Viande et Poisson, a lip-smackingly good steakhouse tucked away in Orient Bay, St. Martin.

What I didn't expect was the warm hospitality that immediately made the place feel homey, almost as if I'd been an islander in a past life.



In fact, it's the very concept behind the newly opened atelier. "I have these warm childhood memories. Every Sunday, grandmother made us a family lunch. She called the little room we

used to cook in *l'atelier*," he reveals, comparing his dining experience, which is best enjoyed gathered around the table, to his grandmother's house.

#### Rebuilding Paradise

Far from the all-inclusive lifestyle the Caribbean is known for, St. Martin is rich in spirit: jovial locals, five-star restaurants, breathtaking vistas and 37 beaches—many of which are world-class—that stretch as far as the eye can see. "One for every square mile," declares Elsie Marishaw, my local guide as we zip in a tiny car past craggy shorelines, pocketed with protected inlets and coves.

But times haven't always been good in St. Martin. In 2017, Hurricane Irma, a Category 5 storm, struck, leaving a wasteland behind and a battle to rebuild. The hurricane caused mass destruction across the 88-square-kilometre island, which is split between two countries—the French territory of St. Martin and Sint Maarten, a Dutch territory.

#### Prix Fixe Fine Dining

Now, five years later, the island has seen a revival, with an influx of new restaurants and luxe villas transforming the destination into the next European hot spot for jetsetters and renowned chefs alike. With an enticing blend of French and Caribbean gastronomy, top European chefs like Michel Portos, Laurent Huguet and Jimmy Bibrac have flocked to introduce their classic French menus, while paying homage to the island's Creole roots.

One evening, I find myself perched on the edge of a cliff, vying for a dinner table at one such spot that boasts considerable accolades. La Villa Hibiscus teeters atop St. Martin's highest point. At the recently allotted "Best Gourmet Restaurant" awarded at the island's Festival de la Gastronomie, courses are swiftly whisked out of the kitchen. There's mouth-watering wahoo fish topped with lemon jelly and pearly dill milk, followed by Bresse chicken dipped in buttery Ivoire sauce. The fish tastes salty, straight from the sea.

"It's apparent we're all seafood lovers here," laughs co-owner Sabine Schenk, adding her favourite cooking pastime is sourcing seafood straight from the fish market. "It's the perfect time for locals and travellers to meet and authentically interact," she quips, whisking her fork.

#### Creole Lolos Cookin'

While there are often whispers that true Creole cooking is dying, I find the tradition alive and well on St. Martin. A stroll along the waterfront of Margot reveals rows of brightly coloured shacks, better known as "lolos" to the locals.

"Lolos are exactly what they sound like, local and low-cost food stands. What more could you want?" remarks Daryl Brooks, owner of Hot Spot, as he flips a large heaping of plantains, eggs and bacon—an island breakfast tradition—at his hut. "Creole dishes are hard to make, they require a lot of time and patience. You can't miss specialties like *accras* (crab fritters), *crabe farci* (stuffed crab), or *blaff* (seafood soup). That would be a sin."

And simply no Creole dish would be complete without a swig of guavaberry liqueur. Tucked away in the verdant jungle of the remote Colombier region, I stumble upon a property bursting with guavaberry trees swaying on the hillside.

Here, Louis and Maria Maccow show me their small but mighty family-run business, Guavaberry Colombier Tradition. Thanks to their dedication to local craftsmanship and tradition, the spirited couple has helped strengthen distilled guavaberry as the national liqueur. "We literally do everything by hand. From fruit collecting to barrelling, even the stickers for our bottles are locally printed. It's very much our family legacy," says Maria Maccow, bestowing deep pride.

In St. Martin, there is something to be said about the sense of belonging, of legacy, and homegrown pride. On my final night, I opt for a taste of the sea, the only proper send-off from a Creole island. Feeling sated—both by food and by people passionate about the simple pleasure of cooking—I know it won't be long before the song of the island calls me once more.

#### Tropical Retreat

For a unique private nature reserve experience, head to Loterie Farm in the Colombier region. The 54-hectare property offers a natural water pool, Jungle Room Restaurant and an eco-resort for overnight stays.

#### Insider Tip

At Hot Spot, sample a homegrown tradition called Johnny cakes—a warm, baked bread patty.

#### Travel Planner

For more travel information, visit [st-martin.org](http://st-martin.org)

[→ Back](#)

