



Ann Abel, Contributor

I travel luxe but smart: I know what's worth shelling out for.

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Enlightened Gluttony In The Caribbean: The Taste Of Saint-Barth Festival



St. Barth is widely and rightly known to have the best grub in the Caribbean—you can drive all the way around the tiny French island in just over an hour but spend weeks eating your way through its 70-plus excellent restaurants—but the island just did itself one better. Last month it brought in a quartet of much-lauded chefs from Europe to co-create dinners with the chefs at some of the island's top hotel restaurants. The Laurent-Perrier, of course, flowed freely.

For the inaugural edition of Taste of Saint-Barth, which the country plans to turn into an annual season-starting event, the only disappointment was that there were four chefs and only three nights of dinners; no one got to try all four. French celebrity chef Martial Enguehard, named the “best craftsman in France,” shared the stoves in La Case de l'Isle at Hotel Saint-Barth Isle de France; Michelin-starred Jean-Jacques Noguier made dinners at Le Taino at the Christopher Hotel; rising Swedish star Daniel Berlin brought Nordic elements to Le Gaïac at Le Toiny; and Amandine Chaignot, a Bocuse de Bronze award winner, cooked at Le Sereno. (I was one of a handful of international journalists who attended the festival as a guest of the tourism board, which also took care of my easy, direct flight from New York to St. Maarten.)

The group lunches, which the chefs shared with festival-goers, were more laid-back and local affairs, ranging from an upscale beachside lunch at the Sand Bar at Hotel Eden Rock, to a traditional creole feast (blood sausage, okra

1 sur 2

16/04/2014 12:36

dumplings and fish soup) at La Langouste at Hotel Baie des Anges, to a club-like meal at Le Plage at the Tom Beach Hotel, where what you eat is second to what you look at—both the impossibly gorgeous models in the daily fashion show and the planes taking off right overhead, as the place sits right at the end of St. Barths' famously steep and short airstrip. Lunches were generally followed by a dip in the sea and a surf-side nap.

It added up to the kind of indulgence that should have been offset by swimming a few laps around the island. Instead, recovery from the food overload came at the sublimely skilled hands of massage therapist Christophe Marchesseau, which have indeed been named some of the best in France. (Really: He has a diploma for Best Hands of France.) For years at his Excellence des Sens spa in downtown Gustavia, he's been plying his trade, a mix of physiotherapy, chiropractic adjustments, deep and intuitive massage, and postural exercises. He deployed some techniques I've never encountered before, which turned out to be wildly effective. I'm plotting my next visit to the island—if only for another session with him.

Next year's festival will be November 7 to 11.

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<http://www.forbes.com/sites/annabel/2013/12/02/enlightened-gluttony-in-the-caribbean-the-taste-of-saint-barth-festival/>

2 sur 2

16/04/2014 12:36

Ann Abel, (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/annabel/>) Contributor

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Adventures Of A Lifetime: My 12 Best Travel Moments Of 2013

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Best Travel Moments of 2013



Horseback Trek from Fazenda Catucaba to Pousada Picinguaba in Brazil

Emmanuel Rengade, who owns two of my all-time favorite small hotels, has spent years working with Brazilian park authorities to create a two-day horse-and-foot journey between them. I went along for a dry (partial) run in August, riding through UNESCO-preserved rain forest so dense and untouched our picnic guides had to clear paths with machetes—then stopping for a lavish picnic of homemade gourmet goodies from the farm.

I've been fortunate enough to have taken a life's worth of trips of a lifetime and put together vast catalogs of exotic and exciting memories. But what really stands out, and what will leave the most lasting impression, isn't the staggering scale of landscapes or the lavish architecture of lodges. Don't get me wrong: I like a high thread count, a five-course dinner and a sybaritic spa afternoon, but that's not what leaves the most indelible memories.

Instead, those memories come from (the luxury version of) what Paul Theroux

had in mind when he wrote about how travel transforms us, or what Mark Twain meant when he advised us to “throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor.”

My most incredible moments went beyond the “experiences” that every resort chain is promising these days, and allowed me to see myself as the glamorous heroine in a dramatic story or forced me to see the world around me differently. They gave me the satisfaction of achieving a difficult task, or the intoxication of being pushed ever so slightly outside my comfort zone. They made me laugh. Or they just felt really darn good.

They weren't headlong adrenaline rushes: not bungee jumping or cage diving with sharks (though I've done one of those things and am totally open to the other). The thrill wasn't in my racing heart but in the joy of discovering something unexpected.

Check the slideshow to see what I'll still be talking about decades from now. (*Disclosure: I had these experiences as a guest of the resorts or operators offering them.*)

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2 sur 2

16/04/2014 12:36