

# FORT-DE-FRANCE MARTINIQUE WALKING TOUR

**Difficulty:** 1 for walking; 5 for dealing with many of the locals. That said, there are some very nice people here.

**Starting Point:** The closest parking spot you can find near Fort St-Louis.

**1. Fort St-Louis:** In 1637, 2 years after the first French settlement, a wooden fort was built on the south of La Savane on a small peninsula. It was enlarged in 1640 to become Fort St-Louis. A French naval post today, it can be visited Monday through Saturday from 9-3. It is said that the low ceiling arches inside were intended to disrupt the advances of any invading British, who generally were taller than the average Frenchman.

**2. La Savane:** A beautiful park and one of the best places to buy the local handicrafts, though local vendors can be extremely abrasive. Better to pay attention to the palms, tamarinds and other tropical trees or an impromptu soccer match. Or to the two historic statues. The one statue most visitors will relate to immediately is the white Carrara marble statue of Marie Josephe Rose Tascher de la Pagerie, born on Trois-Ilets across the bay in 1763 and later the Empress Josephine, first wife of the Napoleon Bonaparte. The other memorial is of Pierre Belain d'Esnambuc, who established the first French settlement on Martinique in 1635.

**3. Bibliotheque Schoelcher:** Across the street from La Savanne, this impressive building was constructed in Paris in 1889 for the Paris Exposition by the architect of the Eiffel Tower, Henri Pick. The building, described as Byzantine-Egyptian-Romanesque, was disassembled in 1890 and shipped here to house the extensive book collection of Victor Schoelcher, who was responsible for abolishing slavery in the French West Indies. Still functioning as a library and open to the public, the interior is a must-see. The outside architecture is also one of the highlights of Fort-de-France, best photographed in the morning.

**4. Musee Departemental de Martinique:** Pottery, beads and other items that belonged to the Arawaks and Caribs, including a partial skeleton excavated in 1972. There are exhibits illustrating colonial costumes, slave life and planter's furnishings. Open weekdays 8 a.m. to noon and 3-5 p.m.; Saturday, 8 a.m. to noon. Located at #9 Rue de la Liberte

**5. St-Louis Cathedral:** The 200-foot steeple of this baroque church noted for its iron framework and decorated transepts, also the design work of Henri Pick, towers over the city skyline. Stained glass depicts the life of St. Louis. A number of Martinique's former governors are buried here. Over the centuries the church was built and rebuilt seven different times, the last in 1895.

**6. Parc Floral et Culturel:** A shady park with 2 exhibits, one featuring the geology of the island, the other, the magnificent vegetation. Fruit and vegetable markets near the Parc are open from 5 a.m. until sunset. You can also purchase flowers, coconut water and exotic candies. The fish market is by the Madame River.

**7. Shopping:** Rue Lamartine and Rue Isambert have most of the jewelry shops, crystal, china and silverware. Clothing is at the galleries or malls on Victor Hugo. Remember to ask for the customary 20 percent discount for using credit cards and traveler's checks.

Map available here:

<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=fort+de+france+plan&view=detailv2&&id=7B7C778DB91BFACA877CD28BA6A6DEFD3D919107&selectedIndex=1&ccid=ZCqJODcH&simid=607996859476607745&thid=JN.xp5cG%2fS6Rk1%2bOeABEPA91g&ajaxhist=0>