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CARNIVAL TAKES TO THE HIGH SEAS DURING MARTINIQUE'S YAWL BOAT RACE

25th annual Tour des Yoles Rondes to be held July 26 to August 2, 2009

NEW YORK, NY – June 11, 2009 – Festivities are to the Caribbean as fish are to the sea – one simply cannot exist without the other. In Martinique, the analogy is taken one step further when “la fête” and sea are brought together for a celebration unlike any other, the famed Yawl Boat Race (Tour des Yoles Rondes). A yearly highlight of the Martinican social calendar, the Yawl Boat Race will be contested this year between July 26 and August 2, literally encircling the Isle of Flowers with the boundless spirit of carnival, replete with pulsating rhythms, prodigious libations and nonstop parties.

“This is a uniquely Martinican cultural event that gives a wonderful expression of our seafaring past and the importance that the daily catch still holds in our society today,” said Muriel Wiltord, director of the Americas for the Martinique Promotion Bureau/CMT USA. “At the same time, it’s a great party with daily celebrations across the island open to all.”

Yawl boats featured in the race are constructed with painstaking detail in the grand tradition of Martinican fishing vessels initially developed by local craftsmen in the 70’s. Each vessel flies brightly colored rectangular sails over rounded canoe-like wooden hulls made from local Pear trees. As distinctive in style as they are challenging to sail, quick and agile yawl boats test the mettle of even the most experienced sailors; their rounded hulls ensuring an instant capsizes if ever the vessels should come to a stop at sea.

This year’s race departs initially from the picturesque seaside village of Vauclin, continuing in a counter-clockwise fashion around the island in seven stages. Teams representing various towns across Martinique compete alongside international competitors from neighboring islands. Visitors and locals turn out by the thousands each day of the race to offer vociferous support and enjoy the festivities.

As is the case with traditional land-based carnival celebrations, the Yawl Boat Race is a spectacle of color. Each vessel is brightly festooned for the occasion with crewmembers sporting matching corporate-sponsored race-wear akin to that of a Formula One race team. Carnival-style celebrations punctuate each day’s victory with the largest spectacle reserved for the race finale and the crowning of the overall winner.

Throughout the race, the party extends to the high seas where hundreds of yachts, catamarans, speedboats, and other private vessels trail the racers, partying along the way. Charter boat operators offer affordable race packages, including meals, excursions to secluded beaches and more, enabling visitors to experience the race up-close and at sea.

Whether experienced on land or by sea, the Yawl Boat Race is a uniquely Martinican take on traditional Caribbean carnival that is not to be missed.

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For more information on the 2009 Yawl Boat Race, including the latest details on tour and charter packages, travel agent referrals, and more, please contact the Martinique Promotion Bureau/CMT USA at Tel: 212-838-6887, or Email: info@martinique.org.

About Martinique (www.martinique.org)

The Caribbean island with French flair, The Isle of Flowers, The Rum Capital of the World, The Isle of the Famed Poet (Aimé Césaire) – by any one of its many names Martinique remains one of the most alluring and enchanting destinations in the world; as unforgettable as a summer romance or a first kiss. Named “Best Gourmet Island of the Year 2008” by *Caribbean World Magazine*, Martinique is an overseas region of France that stirs the passions with distinctive culinary delights, awe-inspiring natural beauty, a rich cultural history, warm smiles and so much more. Napoleon’s bride, Empress Josephine, was born and raised here. The Pompeii of the Caribbean, St. Pierre, is found here. The finest French products, from Chanel fashions to Limoges porcelain, are readily available here. *La Route des Rhums*, a tour of the world’s finest rum distilleries based on France’s famed *Route des Vins*, is offered here. A special place, to be sure, with so much to offer – Martinique c’est magnifique!



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