

MWE KA-ALE TO ST. LUCIA

By Rosemary Parkinson

The Empress Josephine of France, wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, found St. Lucia to be worthy of her holidaying presence so many moons ago; and this captivating island that lies between Martinique and St. Vincent known for its rugged, volcanic landscape with panoramic mountain views, lush vegetation, exotic animal life and spectacular coastline, continues to mesmerize visitors. The Amerindians, however, first enjoyed it all - from the majestic Pitons that seem to rise forever out of the deep blue seas touching the skies with its peaks to its coves and inland beauty. Naming it "Iouanalao" and "Hewannora" meaning "there where the iguana is found", they lived in relative anonymity until one "Jambo de Bois" (wooden leg), an intrepid pirate, used Pigeon Island for plundering passing Spanish ships. Today, after many battles between the Spanish, French, Dutch and English, St. Lucia - Helen of the West Indies - has settled into a way of life that offers from developed and sophisticated to rural and easygoing with a culture of festivals and a people who can move from English to patois as easily as their hips can sway to the sounds of Cadence and Zouk.

Rolling acres upon acres of banana estates; botanical gardens with therapeutic baths where in the past island gentry and officers of the courts of Europe found solace and health that to this day islanders and visitors can enjoy; commanding falls such as Diamond Waterfalls where the rocks covered in minerals seem to glitter like gold in the sunlight that peaks through the surrounding rainforest; the world's only drive-in volcano with its sulfuric smell and bubbling hot craters; fishing villages that still proudly denote the past with their French architectural delights; Castries market brimming with all manner of produce, bottles of special brews and a passageway with wall-to-wall eateries selling from breakfast to lunch in boisterous patois. All of this is St. Lucia. But now, come October, this country will be offering something new, innovative, the first of its kind in the Caribbean, a must for anyone vaguely interested in cuisine.

READY, STEADY, GO!

Book your tickets, find a hotel, pack your bags because the island of St. Lucia is hosting, together with MACO magazine, a Food & Rum Festival starting October 26th, ending October 29th with a glorious bang. Any 'foodie' worth his weight in five-star dishes will want to be there. And if you are interested in booth space to showcase products, all you have to do is contact Neysha Soodeen at neysha@macomag.com – that is if all space has not already been taken!

This gastronomic event attracting the best of chefs, wine connoisseurs, rum fanatics and food critiques from not only across the Caribbean but internationally, will be a fun-packed few days with five star dinners at the best of St. Lucian restaurants (Coal Pot, The Edge, Buzz, Ti Banane and the amazing Japanese TAO), rum boat cruises to the magnificent Pitons, music concerts with Jamaica's own Monty Alexander, Third World - even calypsonian Arrow will be there. And as you walk through the various pavilions wine demonstrations, lectures on the history of rum, chefs doing their do in especially set up kitchens with areas for TV cameras, TV screens and seating for patrons will all have you wondering what to do first.

In an exclusive interview with Neysha Soodeen, the reasons given for such a festival were: "To promote Caribbean Rum Internationally; to put Caribbean distributors in touch with international wine merchants; to introduce new products generally. Expose chefs and other culinary enthusiasts to internationally renowned Chefs and innovative Caribbean cuisine. Educate participants on pairing wine with foods and to promote Caribbean foods. Oh! There is so much to gain from this festival. Caribbean food is not only hot and spicy but it's hot and spicy in the news worldwide right now. All eyes are on us and festivals like this will bring the outside world right into our backyard." How? I asked: "Well, there's the Food Channel (UK), Travel Channel (US), magazines such as Aspire, SHE, Ocean Style, MACO and Destinations (of course), Belle Caribbean, Global Rhythm, Basia and the internationally acclaimed Caribbean Travel & Life. Hmmm, think this is enough to have at one festival?" says Neysha, giggling to herself as she continued:

"Chefs such as Virginia Burke (Walkerswood, Jamaica), Jason Inniss (Amuse-Bouche, Canada), Andy Rose (La Floridita, UK), Kahlil Mohammed (Battimanzelle, Trinidad), Paul Yellin (Pravda, Barbados), Xavier Ribot (The Coal Pot, St. Lucia) will entertain with their food demonstrations. Rums like Appleton (Jamaica), Angostura (Trinidad), Bounty (St. Lucia), Clement (Martinique), Coyaba and Mount Gay (Barbados), El Dorado (Guyana) and Pyat (Anguilla), just to name a few. Rum demos – all at the Rum Pavilion. There will be a Caribbean Cookbook Shoppe. There is so, so much going to be happening. I just want everyone to come down to this gorgeous island, enjoy the festival, maybe stay on for a few days," and with this, she said "Okay, Rosemary, you can take it from there."

Well the only way left to 'take it from there' is to leave you with some images and my personal message – Padon, s'u ple, mwe ka-ale St. Lisi. Ki bel peil. Which means in Lesser Antillean Creole French – Excuse me, please, I am off to St. Lucia. What a lovely country! Just make sure you are there. It's a great start before making it back to Jamaica in time for November's Restaurant Week.

Life is a great big canvas, and you should throw all the paint on it you can. Danny Kaye