

# A Marina for Vieux Fort (Oct. 2014)

by Dr. Anderson Reynolds

Established to spearhead tourism and economic development in the southern half of St. Lucia, The Vieux Fort Tourism Development Group has the broad support and participation of tourism stakeholders, the business sector, cultural organizations and the national and local government. The Group views the establishment of a full service marina that can accommodate all size yachts as a key to further tourism and economic development in the South of the island and therefore is seeking investors to establish and operate a marina in the town.



Located toward the southern end of the chain of Caribbean islands, St. Lucia has a long history of yachting activity and is well known for its world heritage sites, breathtaking vistas, stunning beaches, exotic cuisine, rich creole culture, and internationally acclaimed festivals.

Vieux Fort is St. Lucia's second largest town and its southernmost settlement. Surrounded on three sides by the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea and on the fourth side by distant mountains, Vieux Fort is a land of wide open spaces, salt-laden Atlantic breezes and seemingly non-ending, white sandy beaches.

Moule-A-Chique peninsula, separating the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea, has helped to create a protected bay along Vieux Fort's peaceful Caribbean waterfront. Preliminary analyses of the bay by marina developers and coastal engineers, taking into consideration such factors as wave energy, ocean currents, the



degree of protection the bay offers, and ease of construction, have identified the area of the bay to the right of the fishery complex as an excellent site for marina development.

Besides basic marina infrastructure, the bay and immediate adjoining areas offer ample space for the establishment of ancillary facilities such as boatyard, shopping mall, convention center, exhibition park, hotel, restaurants and bars, concert hall, etc.

The establishment of a Marina at Vieux Fort's Caribbean waterfront is not only sanctioned by the national government but forms part of its Vieux Fort development plans as detailed in the 2008 southern quadrant vision plan, and more recently in the Invest St. Lucia Asset Portfolio Plan presented at the 2014 St. Lucia Investment Forum.

Vieux Fort has a long history of maritime and water sporting activity; it is home to the St. Lucia International Kitesurfing Fiesta, its fishermen and their pirogues have made the town the fishing capital of St. Lucia, and it has a rich tradition of water sporting activity and competition. Its finger pier dock, built by the Americans as part of their World War II installations and more recently expanded to serve as a Caribbean containerized cargo transshipment center, has been accommodating ocean going vessels since 1956.

With two established marinas, namely Marigot Bay Marina and Rodney Bay Marina, both in the north of the island, St. Lucia is increasingly becoming a world yachting center. Rodney Bay Marina has served as the final destination for the world famous Rally for Cruisers (ARC) for the past 20 years. More recently, the World ARC, the Mango Bowl Regatta, and the Russian Regatta have been added to the island's yachting activity; and the Argentina-St. Lucia Rally is expected to come onboard soon. Also, recently, Taiwan and St. Lucia signed a boatbuilding and registering pact, further strengthening St. Lucia as a yachting center. A Vieux Fort marina





**Vieux Fort and surrounding landscape**

can further buttress St. Lucia's prominence as a world yachting center thereby increasing the island's yachting traffic from which all marinas will benefit.

A Vieux Fort marina can also provide the critical mass of clientele for sport and cultural events, dining and nightlife, and hotel and upscale housing. Additionally, a marina will help promote Vieux Fort as a visitor destination, help diversify the tourism product, help develop the town's coastline, and can serve as a catalyst for a boat repair and building industry.

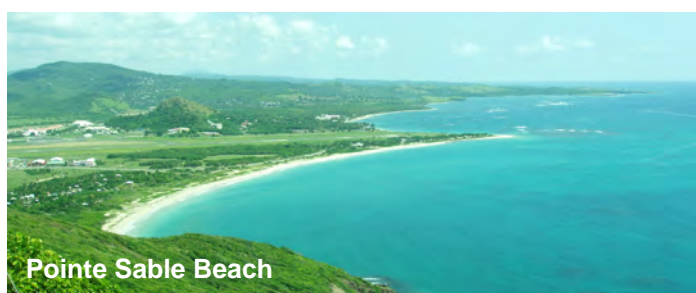
Vieux Fort is well situated to serve as a home porting and chartered yacht service center. Less than ten minutes' drive from the proposed marina site, its international airport considered the gateway to St. Lucia, would facilitate yachters flying in to pick up their yachts and dropping them off before flying back home. And having a clear line of sight to the Grenadines, one of the great yacht cruising centers of the world, Vieux Fort can serve as the



**Maria Islets**

starting point of exploring the Caribbean chain of islands. As the commercial hub of the southern half of the island, Vieux Fort has all the basic facilities and infrastructure to support a thriving marina enterprise, including telecommunications, banking, shopping, public utilities, hospital and medical services, and a well-developed road system.

Unlike the island's congested northern corridor that is quickly running out of room for further development, Vieux Fort has an ample supply of available and affordable land for development with easy access to air and sea port. This combined with a national government actively promoting and seeking foreign investment suggest Vieux Fort as an opportune place not just for marina de-



**Pointe Sable Beach**

velopment but for investment and development in general.

Notwithstanding, Vieux Fort offers much more than landscape and seascape for development. There is plenty on land for yachters to see and do. Vieux Fort boasts the island's best snorkeling and scuba diving waters, and its Atlantic beach is the longest and most inviting stretch of white sandy beach and offers the best kite and windsurfing on offer. Its islets present fertile ground for kayaking; and Moule-a-Chique, a government proposed national landmark, on top of which sits the second tallest lighthouse in the world, offers a panoramic view of the Vieux Fort landscape and seascape, including the confluence of the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Moreover, Vieux Fort surrounding waters, which has made the town the fishing capital of the St. Lucia, offer the best fishing waters on the island and represents a sport fishing paradise, a definite attraction to yachters.

Vieux Fort's history is no less enchanting. It is the site of

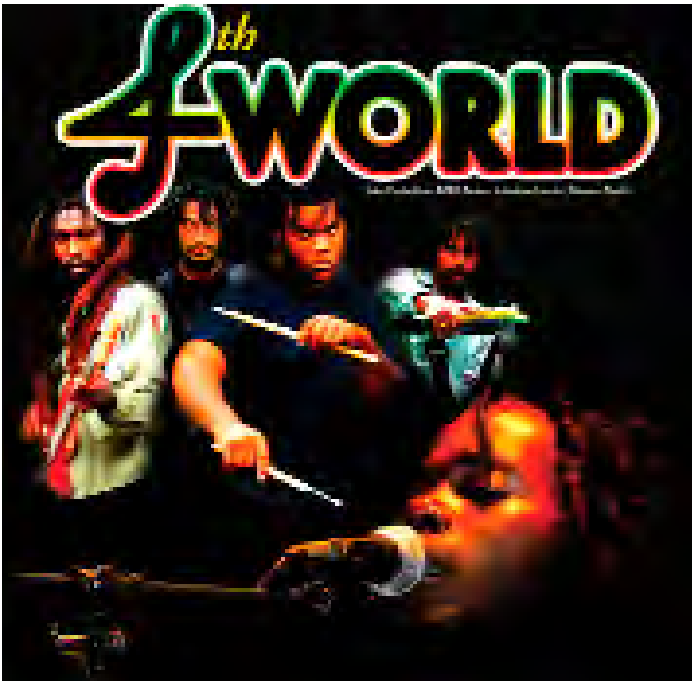


**Americans during World War II**

Amerindian first occupation of the island and home to possibly the island's greatest concentration of Amerindian archeological sites and artifacts. The fascinating story of the Oliphe Blossom, a ship landed in Vieux Fort in 1605, represents the first recorded attempted English settlement in the Caribbean, and the St. Lucian Amerindians' first encounter with Europeans. Vieux Fort was the initial center of the island's sugar industry, and its Central Sugar Factory built in 1882 was one of the first such factories in St. Lucia and the Caribbean. Vieux Fort's history also speaks of World War II, when the Americans transformed the Vieux Fort landscape and seascape into a military base, leaving behind many vestiges of their military adventure. Indeed, it appears that Vieux Fort has served as the gateway to St. Lucia since time immemorial, the



**Lighthouse on Moule-a-Chique**



present proving no exception considering its airport and seaport. The Vieux Fort Marina would just be the latest installation of this gateway infrastructure.

Vieux Fort’s culture is just as compelling. It is home to the island’s highest concentration of East Indian heritage and culture, and Vieux Fort North (Belvue) is home to some of the island’s richest folk culture. The African population and heritage laying side by side the island’s largest East Indian population and heritage has given rise to an interesting blend of people and culture, probably nowhere else as pronounced as in Vieux Fort.

There is more. Vieux Fort is host to a number of cultural and sporting events that help augment its natural, historical and cultural attractions. Some of these include the Reef International kite and wind surfing Fiesta in March/April, the Jazz Finale in May, The South Calypso Tent Show in June/July, Vieux Fort Carnival and Pageant show in July, the Jounen Creole Day Festival in October, horse racing, drag racing, and dirt bike racing in the summer months, and the Caribbean YouthFest Music Festival in December.

If all of this — Vieux Fort natural, historical, and cultural attractions, and its festivities — doesn’t tickle the fancy of yachters and other visitors, all is not lost, for Vieux Fort is in close proximity to many other attractions. To the west, the bay and village of Laborie



along with the Rudy John Recreational Beach Park, a secluded bathing spot and a host of the St. Lucia Jazz Festival, is only ten minutes away. Soufriere, perhaps St. Lucia's most picturesque district, along with its many nature attractions, including a drive in volcano, the awe-inspiring Pitons, sulfur spring mineral baths, botanical gardens, spectacular waterfalls, whale watching tours, and one of the best scuba diving spot on the island, is only 25 min-



utes away. To the east, Latille Falls, Mamiku Botanical Gardens, Des Cartiers Rainforest and trails are less than 30 minutes away.

Clearly, the Vieux Fort bay is ideal for a full service mega yacht marina. The bay offers protection from the brunt of inclement weather and its adjoining areas offer ample space for axillary services. The town has all the basic facilities and infrastructure needed to support a thriving marina, and its surrounding areas provide ample space for other developments. Its international airport can create a seamless movement or transition from homes to yachts and back to homes, which along with its clear line of sight to the Grenadines gives it an advantage as a hub for chartered yachts and as the starting point of island hopping across the Caribbean. Its natural, historical, and cultural attractions as well as its sport and cultural events offer plenty to see and experience, and it is in close proximity to most of the other touristic attractions the south of the island has to offer.

Recognizing the potential of a marina to stimulate economic and touristic development in the south of the island, the proposed Vieux Fort Marina is supported by both the Vieux Fort community and the national government and has featured in most, if not all, development plans for Vieux Fort, including the 2008 national vision plan, and more recently the Government’s Invest St. Lucia Asset Portfolio Plan presented at the 2014 St. Lucia Investment Forum. Congruous with these plans, The Vieux Fort Tourism Development Group is pleased to advocate and facilitate the establishment of the Vieux Fort Marina.

**The Vieux Fort Tourism Development Group**

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