

Country Guide: Guadeloupe

I spent my year abroad (2011 – 2012) working as a British Council assistant in Guadeloupe, in the small town of Le Moule on the east coast of the island. I was an assistant in primary schools in the town.

Location

Guadeloupe is a French department situated in the north eastern Caribbean between Dominica and Antigua. The butterfly-shaped island is split into two islands: Grande Terre and Basse Terre. There is a population of around 400,000 and is about a nine hour flight from Paris.

Transport

Whilst Guadeloupe is relatively small, getting around can be quite difficult. On Grande Terre there is a bus service which runs to the commercial capital Point-à-Pitre from most towns. However, it is unreliable and can take up to four times longer for a bus. The situation is even worse on Basse Terre. This island is much more volcanic and has steep hills and much smaller towns meaning that buses take much longer and are more infrequent. The best option is to rent a car whilst you are in Guadeloupe. This will cost you in the region of 300 – 400 € per month, if you live with other assistants, this can be shared between you. Make sure that all of the paperwork for the car is done properly and that your *caution* (deposit) is signed for as they can prove difficult to get back as you're leaving. Renters will try anything to not give it back.

Driving is quite difficult in Guadeloupe. The roads are in a bad condition and at night they are terribly lit. Also, look out for drunk drivers in the evening which are commonplace. Automatic cars are not available so make sure you are a confident manual driver before arriving, especially if you are living on Basse Terre.

Going further afield is quite easy. There is one airport in Point-à-Pitre with regular flights to St Martin, Dominica and Martinique. These are around 150€ return. If you fly with Air Caraïbes, then make sure to join the loyalty scheme as a couple of flights can result in a free return flight to a local island.

Point-à-Pitre also has international ferry services to St Lucia, Martinique and Dominica for 90€ return. The passage is longer and much rockier than flights.

Money

The pay is just over 1000€ per month for assistants. You are not allowed to have another job whilst you are contracted to the Rectorat, but you are allowed to give private English lessons.

Rent is around 300 – 500€ per month, bills included. Depending on which city you are assigned will dictate your rent. More touristy towns such as St Anne and Le Gosier will have higher rents, but generally have more options for accommodation.

Food is very expensive in Guadeloupe. Expect to pay around 40€ per week on groceries. The cheapest place is Ecomax or LeaderPrice. Carrefour has a wider range of products, but much more expensive.

The best bank to go with is Le Bred and you will pay monthly to have an account. If they ask you for a cheque book, take the option because you will find that it is easier to pay with cheques in some situations. There is a young person tariff, so ask for that.

Health

Health care works exactly the same as in France. As an employee of the *Education Nationale* you will be given health insurance through MGEN. On your induction, the Rectorat are supposed to take care of this for you and a letter is sent to you from MGEN to give you your *carte vitale*. This can take up to 6 months to arrive. As a backup, it is best to carry to E-111 health card and use that if your *carte vitale* doesn't show up.

You need no injections to go to Guadeloupe but should keep an eye out for Dengue Fever, and sleep with either air conditioning or a mosquito net to avoid getting bitten.

Mobiles and Internet

The best mobile phone company to go with in Only. They have a young people tariff and you get free texts after 3pm. Calls are also cheaper to those with Only numbers. They also provide internet packages which include free international calls to the UK landlines and are the best option if you need to find your own internet provider.

The best deal is to pay as you go. If you enter into a contract it is quite hard to get out of it when you leave the country and you may be tied to a 12 or 24 month contract and can't get out.

Bureaucracy

The French have an unrivalled passion for pointless bureaucracy. You will be asked for photocopies of all of your documents, translated and so it is a good idea to arrive with at least 10 copies of the following:

- Passport
- Long birth certificate (translated)
- Driving licence
- Arrêté de nomination (your contract)

As soon as you get them, you'll need to photocopy

- Accommodation Contract
- RIB (Bank Account Information)

You are entitled to housing benefit through the CAF. You need to apply in person as soon as you can at your local office. Queues are extremely long and you can expect to wait up to three hours to be seen. You have to persevere and keep going back to the office. Also make sure that the Rectorat provides you with all your pay slips.

The Guadeloupians will get confused with whether or not you need visas, a *carte de sejour*, and other various things which you don't need. Make sure to explain you are an EU citizen and that you have the same rights as the French.

Weather

The weather is typically tropical with temperatures between 25-30°C most of the time. October – November are the most humid and hot months with temperatures cooling slightly during January – March. That being said, you are expected as an assistant to always be appropriately dressed in schools and so invest in lightweight clothes as in jeans you will be very uncomfortable. Only the large shopping centres and supermarkets tend to have air conditioning.

Rain is a reality in Guadeloupe and you should always have a light rain jacket for the tropical storms; The rain tends to be in the mornings, or during the night and not last longer than a couple of hours.

Leisure

Guadeloupe is perfect for those who love sports! There are surf clubs, amazing scuba diving, windsurfing, beach tennis, and cycling. On Basse Terre there are some fantastic walks to waterfalls and through the mountains. You can also climb *La Soufrière*, the volcano.

There are some of the best beaches in the Caribbean on offer in Guadeloupe, each with their own distinct character. You will probably find your favourite and go to that. Most Sundays, local families will have huge BBQs at the beach and they can get especially busy during tourist season (Dec-Mar).

Going out is expensive but the music is fantastic! The best bars can be found in Le Gosier and the surrounding areas. Some bars are free to get into, and others will cost around 20€ for entry. There is a good social scene with Erasmus students and other assistants who tend to organise beach parties at the weekends.

There are some interesting museums and visiting centres about Guadeloupe's past in the slave trade, as well as its rum producing heritage. One of the best distilleries to visit is Damoiseau which is free to visit and had one of Guadeloupe's oldest windmills.

Food

Créole food is a staple when eating out; The typical menu is prawn accras, which are best described as deep fried spicy prawn balls, followed by chicken Colombo (coconut curry), and then a banana flambéed in rum. It should cost around 20€.

Most towns will have a fresh fruit market on a weekly basis and you will be able to buy fresh fruit and vegetables much cheaper than in supermarkets. There are a huge variety of fruits that you can't get in the UK including plantains, fig bananas, igname, and star fruits. The fruits depend on the season.

One of the best foods available in Guadeloupe is the Bokit. A bokit is a deep fried sandwich filled with whatever you like, usually egg, steak, cheese and hot pepper sauce. They can be bought at bokit vans which are found everywhere from the beach, to outside nightclubs. At 3€, they are a bargain and make the perfect sandwich/takeaway. You can also get crepes from the Bokit van, and agoulous, Guadeloupe's answer to the burger.

Being in France also means that the patisseries are to die for, the wine is really cheap, and the rum is too.

English Lessons

Most people choose to do some private English tutoring. If you are British, you are much more in demand than Americans. Typical rates are 20€ per hour.

You will find that people will ask you if you give English lessons in the street and will ask for your number. Make sure you are honest and up front with people as Guadeloupians won't talk about the price until after your first lesson.

Another option is to contact private language schools who will contract you for 20€ per hour and manage your students. It's much less hassle but less flexible on hours.