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## St. Martin ~ Tropical Getaway for Your Senses

GG Staff | Sep 22, 2013 - 07:54

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### Mom/daughter getaway turns into a fragrant adventure

Please welcome Brette Sember, travel shopper extraordinaire who has a taste for flavors around the world. Brette is the author of more than 50 books. She blogs about travel, travel shopping and food.

We're a community-based travel blog and we welcome submissions from everyone. Whether you're a budget-baller or a first class only kinda traveler, we'd love to hear from you. Visit our [Writer's Guidelines](#) and learn how you can share your travel advice, stories and adventures!

### Discovering St. Martin's hidden sweet-scented secrets

Typical scents of the Caribbean include blooming flowers, salty breezes, rum and ripe, tropical fruits. When my 20-year-old daughter and I planned a mom/daughter getaway to St. Martin, we were ready to spend a lot of time on the beach enjoying sun, sand and frozen drinks, with a few forays for souvenir shopping.



One quiet afternoon we traded our bathing suits for clothes and browsed the tiny French town of Grand Case. It's a typical Caribbean town with clothing, jewelry and art shops along with

the famous lolos (roadside barbecue stands) where we enjoyed grilled lobster for lunch. Tucked away in a far corner of Grand Case is its secret treasure: [Tijon Perfumery](#), where you can take a class and create your own personal fragrance. The small, discrete building looks like an uninteresting store or maybe even an office building, set off on a side street in the town. If you didn't know it was there, you might miss it.

We signed up for a Perfume 101 class. Co-owner John Berglund, a U.S. expat, welcomed us to the lab (his wife Cyndi is his co-owner). He began by talking briefly about the

history of perfume and showing us his small perfume museum. Berglund left his corporate job to pursue his passion and live in the tropics, opening Tijon Perfumery with his wife in 2007 (they also have a location in La Jolla, California, run by their daughter).



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On [Bed Bugs While Traveling ~ 5 Tips to Help You Avoid Them!](#), Jacki said "The little buggers can be found anywhere - top notch hotel or run-down roadside motel. People would think I was crazy popping off the headboard (easily done in many hotels) and looking behind, or checking the beds. Ask my BlissDom roomies - I always check! I've heard of cases in restaurant booths, too. Ew!"

On [Desire, Hedonism, Temptation & Couples Resorts](#), Jacki said "We've been to something similar and bumped our boundaries bit by bit. Communication is the key. Never do something or be in a situation that you're truly uncomfortable with just because you think your partner wants to. Step back and discuss. And get to know yourself. There's a difference between tummy butterflies of the exciting and unknown, and really being not ok with something. No always means no - even moreso than a "regular" - and yes means OH GOD YES! ;) I'm sure you'll find a very respectful environment. Have a blast!"



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## Beautiful scents in a beautiful setting



Berglund has always had a passion for chemistry, so perfumery was a natural progression of that interest. But how does a former lawyer and lobbyist end up on an island

that has one traffic light, frequent power and water outages and roads that are often taken over by goats and cows? Turns out, St. Martin is the perfect place for a perfumery. It's the only completely duty free island in the Caribbean, so none of his supplies or output are held up in customs.

"St. Martin is a third world paradise," said Berglund. "It has beautiful beaches, delicious foods and the friendliest of peoples. It is a slow-paced lifestyle where you have time to get to know your neighbors."

## Getting to work making our perfect scent

Berglund asked what we knew about perfume and why we were there. He shared briefly how important our sense of smell is — 90% of taste is actually smell and Berglund is passionate about how our sense of smell informs everything we do.



He wanted us to think about how emotional smell is. The smell of your grandmother's cookies takes you immediately back to that place and moment in time when you were a child in her kitchen. A quick whiff of something can convey what it would take many words to explain to someone.



We donned our white lab coats and pulled up stools to the stainless steel counters in the lab. Our first order of business was to test our sense of smell. Berglund presented

us with 10 different scents in laboratory beakers and asked us to identify them. Between scents, he asked us to sniff coffee beans to cleanse our smell sensors. Coffee beans have not been scientifically proven to clear your sense of smell, but it's believed to give your brain a reset, so you can freshly approach the next scent.

After we practiced thinking about and identifying scents, Berglund taught us the basics of how to create perfume. There are two parts: a base essential oil and a top fragrance, but you can add as many of each as you like (most perfumes include several of each). The oils last longer and the top notes evaporate more quickly. 80% of perfume is actually denatured alcohol, so the oils and top notes you choose are heavily diluted before they get applied.

On [An Open Letter to Hotels Everywhere](#), Lisa McDonald said "Pool & Hot Tub!"

On [Summer Skinny Dipping](#), Pete K said "Been out there, at nude resorts, playing volleyball etc. But favorite is on the trails midweek in Ontario, nobody anywhere, small lakes begging to be swum. Or in kayak finding hidden bays. Not shy, been spotted a few times, I just wave. Not doing anything embarrassing, Just fun."

On [An Open Letter to Hotels Everywhere](#), Paula schuck said "These are great tips. From the simplest detail to the most luxurious add on hotels can make your experience charming and memorable or nightmarish. Either way I am sharing the experience. So aim to please. Outlets are a necessity. What charms me immediately though is the simplest of greetings when it is personal and cheery: good morning Mrs. Schuck. That makes me happy and it should be standard."

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## Free Samples

Berglund set us loose to experiment to our hearts content. At Tijon, the collection of 800 bottled oils and fragrances are displayed on a



perfume organ, a corner shelving unit specifically designed to hold them and allow counter space underneath to gather your bounty. It really does feel like a musical instrument, as you stand before it and pull off bottle after bottle to consider. Each bottle is a musical note and combining them creates a symphony.

Under Berglund's careful tutelage we started slowly, identifying scents we liked and gradually putting them together, adding one top note with a pipette to one oil and then adding additional ones slowly, creating a variety of versions so we could compare them. Berglund is a man of ultimate patience.

"We're here all day. Take as much time as you need," he offered.



When I asked him about what it's like to work with people as they discover perfume-making, he said, "The typical reaction of a guest creating their own perfume is first of adventure, then it turns to a bit of confusion with so many oils to choose from, then sometimes frustration and then typically elation as they succeed in creating a fragrance on their own. We love to see such reactions

and meet so many wonderful people."

To Berglund, perfume is more than a business and goes beyond just chemistry. "Creating perfumes is an art – the blending of fragrances as painting is the blending of colors. Like any artist, the perfumer starts with an inspiration – anything from a specific emotion to a beautiful or powerful aspect of nature. Then he goes to work in the lab to compose an original and unforgettable combination of aromatic oils that is both pleasurable and memorable." Berglund's goal is to help individuals experience this art and discover their inner perfumist.

### Fragrant results

Berglund encouraged us to experiment until we reached the perfect scent. He made sure we kept each version of our creations and recipe separate because often you only recognize the perfect scent once you have gone past it – added too much to it. Keeping your progression on the table in labeled beakers allows you to backtrack at any time to the ideal mix.

Visitors leave the perfumery with a bottle of their own fragrance (1.7 ounces), as well as a travel size version. Tijon keeps your recipe on file so you



can call and have more made for you at any point in the future. The entire Perfume 101 class costs 119 Euros (approx. \$155USD). A shorter, less expensive class is available with fewer mixing options. In addition to your own scent, you bring home a bottle of one of the 18 Tijon fragrances that you select as well as samples and a t-shirt. If you're curious, visit [Tijon online](#) or visit them on [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#) or [Twitter](#).

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My daughter took to this process like the true scientist she is: smelling, evaluating, mixing, taking notes and finally reaching her conclusion. She was completely engrossed in the process and allowed her nose to guide her to the scents that appealed to her. It was a perfect afternoon for her.



Now it's time for my confession. I'm the only person who has ever flunked out of Perfume 101. As we began the class, Berglund was impressed by my

sense of smell. I was able to identify most of the scents he presented to us. To his surprise, my strong sense of smell means I react strongly to fragrances, which makes it impossible for me to wear them.

I left the class without my own fragrance, because I have what Berglund calls an "aversion" to fragrance (and Berglund refunded my class fee since I left empty-handed). My daughter however, named her fragrance Q (her initial) and proclaims it to be her most favorite perfume. And it garnered high praise from Berglund who called it "lovely."

### About Brette Sember

Brette Sember grew up fascinated with the treasures her grandparents brought back from their travels as they visited every continent but Antarctica. Her passion for travel



includes unique shopping finds, local foods, and breathing in the air of new places. Sember is the author of more than 50 books about food, divorce, organizing, credit, business, pregnancy, parenting, as well as college textbooks. She is also a professional indexer, ghostwriter, and freelancer. She blogs about food, travel, organizing, decorating, and gardens at [PuttingItAllOnTheTable.com](http://PuttingItAllOnTheTable.com). She lives in Clarence, NY with her husband, two children, two golden retrievers and tortoise. Catch up with Brette on [Pinterest](#), [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

***Have you ever designed your own perfume? Have you visited Tjon Perfumery in St. Martin? We'd love to hear about your experience. Tell us on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) ...***

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