



The capital of Grenada, St. George's, is at the southwest end of the island and these homes and businesses overlook the beautiful harbour.

Spicing things up *in* Grenada

WHO KNEW NUTMEG COULD BE USED IN SO MANY DISHES?

Story and photographs
by Melody Wren

BE CAREFUL IF YOU visit Grenada — you may not want to leave. This traveller met several tourists-turned-residents on this island at the southern tip of the Windward Islands.

Of course, some of them were Brits who feel particularly at home in Grenada, where

you drive on the left and can enjoy a traditional afternoon tea. The island was a British colony for nearly 200 years before achieving independence in 1974. And one can understand abandoning England's pitiful climate for Grenada's tropical warmth, 12 degrees north of the equator.

But Grenada has other virtues. With a population of just 109,000, it is small

enough to retain a humble, friendly atmosphere yet special enough to attract celebrities. I have travelled extensively, but have never encountered the ease and warmth of the Grenadians. They exude positive energy, grace and beauty, from the small school children to the elderly.

The island also has a topography of unusual beauty, from mountainous rainforest to dry lowlands, all thanks to its volcanic origins. Forty-five white sand beaches and nine black sand beaches ring the island's 310 square kilometres. Grand Anse beach, the island's signature beach,



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stretches over three kilometres and is home to several resorts and luxury hotels.

Along with its smaller sister islands, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, Grenada draws those who worship the sun and everything that comes with it – beaches, aquatic sports, hiking and Caribbean culture.

It's also a place for foodies. There are many types of scrumptious fresh fish, locally grown vegetables and herbs, but it's the spices that set Grenada apart. In fact, the island's main products — nutmeg, cinnamon and sorrel — give it its other name, Spice Island, and they are used in local dishes in fresh and inventive ways.

I have always avoided using nutmeg in my cooking, but that has changed after tasting the locally grown nutmeg in drinks, soups, pasta dishes and desserts. It is vastly different from what many of us are used to, and during one meal I even overheard "Nutmeg is the new salt."

There is no end to the residents' uses for nutmeg. Full pods are used as a garnish in rum punch or poached as a topping for pancakes at breakfast; the shells become mulch on sidewalks and gardens.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

• **St. George's Market:** Spices play a key role in the bustling, noisy market in Grenada's capital, St. George's. The bright, colourful stalls are crammed together, and particularly busy on Friday and Saturday



The street scene (above) was taken in the town of Soubise. The Seven Sisters Falls is another popular tourist stop, and if the timing is right, fearless cliff jumper, "Super Butterfly" (upper left photo) may be on hand to chat between dives. A guide can be hired to lead a tour through the rainforest to the falls (right photo).

mornings, the main market days. But the vendors are friendly and happy to show you their handmade crafts, produce and spices, and will even offer cooking suggestions if you ask. Apparently, Martha Stewart has been known to shop here.

• **Seven Sisters Waterfall:** Our group hired a private guide, 70-year-old Telfor Bedeau, a hiker for 46 years, to lead us through the rainforest to the Seven Sisters Waterfall. During the hike, Telfor pointed out nutmeg, cinnamon and guava trees. He didn't break a sweat as he traversed



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the steep rocks and muddy paths with the agility of a mountain goat. It's no wonder — he hikes about 20,800 kilometres throughout the island each year.

If you are lucky, a cliff jumper known as Super Butterfly will be diving from the top cliff, as he does up to 10 times a day — with “no fear,” he says. Having skinned my knees on the many rocks in the lagoon, I asked how he avoids them. “I know the water like the back of my hand,” he says.

• **Concord Waterfalls:** Walk or drive up the narrow paved road that meanders through the village of Concord, alongside the river. You climb the hillside through a beautiful valley before reaching the first waterfall. The entrance is just through the shop and bar where the stone steps lead down to the bathing pool. The scenic waterfall cascades down a rock face into the pool. From there, the river runs down a second cascade, which you can view from the top.

• **Fort George:** Located at the northern entrance to St. George's Harbour, it was constructed in 1667 by the French when they first settled on the island. It is well known for the 1983 execution of the prime minister, Maurice Bishop, along with 24 supporters, which led to the U.S. military intervention. It is worth a visit, but be prepared for an uphill climb.

• **Dougaldston Spice Estate:** A historic cocoa-processing station makes this estate well worth a stop. The main wooden building, known as the boucan, has displays of cocoa and spices. Beneath the boucan are large cocoa-drying trays that are pushed out manually along iron rails to allow the cocoa to dry naturally in the sun. At the end of the day, the trays are pushed back under the shelter of the building.

Near the boucan, you can also see the wooden fermentation bins used for the first stage of the cocoa process, and inside there are displays of cocoa and other spices produced in Grenada. The estate, open daily, is free to visit. You can stock up on inexpensive, locally grown nutmeg,



Local musicians entertain during Fish Friday, a weekly event in the small fishing town of Gouyave. During the event, various stalls sell a variety of foods and beer, which visitors down while enjoying the music.

bay leaves, cinnamon and cocoa.

River Antoine Rum Distillery: This historic distillery, south of Lake Antoine, is the oldest functioning water-propelled distillery in the Caribbean.

Take the tour and experience the rum-making process almost exactly how it was performed over 200 years ago. Stay to the end of the tour for samples and opportunities to purchase.

• **Snorkel trip:** Dive Grenada takes visitors to Molinere Bay to view the only underwater sculpture park in the world. I spent a delightful half day, which included a 30-minute snorkel to view the unusual gallery of works by British sculptor Jason Taylor, plus a boat tour of St. George's harbour. If you don't swim or snorkel, you can enjoy the scenery from the boat and catch some sun, while the others view the sculptures perched on the seabed below.

FOOD SUGGESTIONS:

Grenada has lots to see and eat. Among the possibilities:

• **Fish Friday:** The small fishing town of Gouyave hosts this popular weekly event. It was established after hurricane Ivan in 2004 as a community project to generate income. The streets are crammed with stalls selling lobster, shrimp kebabs, fish pizza,

grilled marlin with a side of pumpkin and carrots, local rum and beer. You can try food at each stall and give the leftovers to the many stray dogs looking for handouts.

The deliciously enjoyable experience includes grilled marlin, lambie (conch meat), tuna fish cakes, jacks (which are similar to fresh sardines), fried plantain and coconut bake, all washed down with a glass of Carib, the local beer, while listening to the steel pan drummers.

• **Dine on a ship:** The Vastra Banker at Le Phare Bleu Marine and Resort is a lighthouse ship from 1900. Its recently imported British chef has a special flare with local vegetables, fruits and spices. Among his selections are pan-roasted scallops glazed with cardamom and apple, and fresh tuna with local passionfruit glaze. Even the rum punch is served with nutmeg pods.

• **Cooking class:** At Maca Bana Villas, Point Salines, you can enjoy a cooking class and stay for lunch in a program offered by the villas' Aquarium Restaurant. Our group cooked callaloo soup, pan-fried grouper and locally grown sweet potatoes.

Sail on a catamaran: Even a snorkelling cruise can become a food experience. A six-hour Banana Boat Tour on the Shadowfax includes a lobster and champagne lunch. 

IF YOU GO

About the weather

Twelve degrees north of the equator, the average temperature is in the mid-20s C, made more comfortable by trade winds. September is the hottest month and the dry season normally occurs between January and May. The remainder of the year is the “rainy season,” and during an October visit, this traveller experienced a few short showers.

Where to stay

The island has a wide range of accommodation (www.grenadahotelsinfo.com) including:

• **Spice Island Beach Resort, on Grand Anse Beach:** It is a leader in the Caribbean in green initiatives, even though this resort is luxury, with a capital L. It has also won the Virgin Gold Award for customer satisfaction for four years in a row at the World Tour Market awards in England.

There is a choice of spacious beachfront rooms, garden rooms and rooms with their own pools. Besides the helpful staff who fill the most mundane requests (“Band-Aids for blisters, please!”); the rooms feature Frette linens, Philippe Starck-designed taps and faucets, and double Jacuzzi tubs. If it is out of your price range, you can just go for lunch, dinner, afternoon tea or a spa treatment. www.spiceislandbeachresort.com

• **Maca Bana Villas, Aquarium Beach, Point Salines:** There are several luxurious villas, beautifully furnished using local wood, with ocean views. It also offers cooking and art classes. www.macabana.com

• **Petite Anse Hotel:** Off the beaten track, at the north end of the island, this private hotel has only 11 rooms, all one bedroom. With one of the best views on the island, the rooms are moderately priced, with breakfast included. www.petiteanse.com

• **Bel Air Plantation Villa Resort:** Situated on about seven hectares, the villas have private verandahs, one or two bedrooms with ocean views and an infinity pool at the ocean's edge. Moderately priced. www.belairplantation.com

• **La Luna Resort:** Secluded, the property has 16 one- and two-bedroom private guest cottages in open-concept design to take advantage of the ocean view. It also has a fitness room and yoga classes and the



Map • Carolyn McLeod-McCarthy

spa specializes in a nutmeg scrub. It's a luxury resort with prices to match. www.laluna.com

• **Grenada Grand Beach Resort:** This enormous, child-friendly resort sits on eight hectares, on the Grand Anse Beach. It has two pools, 240 rooms, two tennis courts and a nine-hole, par three golf course. www.grenadagrand.com

Celebrity spotting

According to Grenada's board of tourism, Formula 1 racer Lewis Hamilton often visits his family on the island. Morgan Freeman, who came to Grenada's aid after hurricane Ivan, can be seen sailing in the region. And Tom Hanks, Heidi Klum, Mick Jagger and Oprah Winfrey have all been spotted on visits.

Getting there

Both Air Canada and Sunwing offer direct flights from Toronto to Grenada. As well, Air Canada and West Jet have flights from Toronto to Barbados with connections on LIAT to Grenada.

More Information:

For general information about Grenada, check the board of tourism's website: www.grenadagrenadines.com

Additional sites for attractions include:

www.lepharebleu.com

www.macabana.com

www.bananaboattoursgrenada.com

www.divegrenada.com

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