



L'Anse aux Épines, or Prickly Bay, in front of Grenada's Calabash hotel. *Opposite:* The entrance to the all-inclusive Spice Island Beach Resort, which sits on Grande Anse Beach.





# STILL LAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

Grenada has long remained off the tourist grid, a blissful old-school Caribbean outpost with uncrowded shores, a pristine rain forest, and a British-, French-, and African-influenced culture all its own. New hotels are poised to bring more visitors—who will discover a slow, easy pace, welcoming locals, and an offbeat vibe that just isn't like the other islands. By **Tony Perrottet**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **CHRISTOPHER CHURCHILL**



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“THIS IS YOUR FIRST TIME in Grenada?” the airport official asked me, with open suspicion. “You have never been before?” I fidgeted nervously as he analyzed the stamps in my passport. His stern British demeanor, like his starched colonial-style uniform, seemed plucked from *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. Was there some problem? Did I need some obscure island visa? But then the officer broke into an ear-to-ear smile. “Well then, sir, you are most welcome! We are very pleased to have you!”

It was my first taste of the preternatural friendliness of Grenadians, which for someone from New York City can be shocking, even downright unnerving. Over the next week, I would be startled by strangers who said hello to me randomly in the street and taxi drivers who wanted to banter about the latest cricket matches. Driving the labyrinthine rural back roads, I would pause to ask directions from the most piratical-looking characters—farmers carrying machetes they actually called “cutlasses”—who would lean into the car with boyish grins to pore over my map and discuss the best routes and attractions.

There’s a decidedly retro vibe on Grenada, which drifts along in the casual style often referred to as the Old Caribbean—the mythic world of empty beaches and free-flowing rum brilliantly captured in the 1957 Harry Belafonte movie *Island in the Sun*, which was largely shot on Grenada. The unhurried sense of “island time” is almost an article of faith here. St. George’s, the capital, is less a city than a drowsy seaside village spilling down a mountainside. The languor is even more pronounced on Grenada’s smaller sister islands, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

“I have spent a lot of time puzzling over what makes Grenada different,” said Jorge Collazo, sales director of the new Silversands Grenada resort on the spectacular arc of Grand Anse beach. One factor, he concluded, is St. George’s University, which has 9,000 students (many of them American) and gives Grenada a degree of economic independence unusual in the Caribbean. “The island has never had to rely on





*Clockwise from above left: Operating since 1785, River Antoine Rum Distillery produces the spirit using locally grown sugar cane; Grand Anse Beach, Grenada's most popular, is nearly two miles long; visitors can hike to the Seven Sisters Falls, located in Grand Etang National Park.*



tourism, so people are genuinely curious about visitors,” he mused.

Another factor, of course, is Grenada's troubled history. In the 1970s, when other Caribbean nations were luring investors to build luxury resorts, Grenada went through political upheavals that resulted in a 1979 revolution supported by the Cuban government. The climax was perhaps the unlikeliest episode of the Cold War: after a 1983 coup, the new military leadership invited the Cubans to construct a new airfield, which President Ronald Reagan worried would become a base for Soviet aircraft. His solution: send in the military. The “invasion” (“You mean ‘the liberation,’” many Grenadians will correct) began shortly after 5 a.m. on October 25, 1983, with almost 2,000 American troops arriving by helicopter, parachute, and amphibious assault vehicle. Fighting was over within three days.

Grenada has been stable for the 35 years since, but it has remained off the radar of most American travelers. Only now is word leaking out that the island's lack of development has made it one of the most enticing corners of the Caribbean, with pristine beaches, a wild, lush interior, and historic spice plantations. (Grenada

was for centuries the center of the world nutmeg trade, giving it the nickname “the Spice Island.”) And the destination is opening up. Next month, Silversands opens its doors as Grenada's first super-high-end designer hotel, with a crisp, minimalist aesthetic, a 330-foot infinity pool (the Caribbean's longest!), and high-tech niceties like iPads in every room. Next year, the resort will be joined by a Kimpton.

Grenada's late bloom has also fostered its charming eccentricity. The British-Caribbean culture, reflected in photos of Queen Elizabeth II on the walls and a local fondness for heavy stout, overlays older French-Creole traditions stemming from nearly a century of rule from Paris, from 1664 until 1763. This mixed heritage was obvious from the moment I left the airport for the Gallic-sounding L'Anse aux Épinés (“Prickly Bay”), home to the Calabash hotel. Far from offering thorns, the genteel, very Anglo property has manicured lawns, lapping waves, and elegant villas cooled by fresh sea breezes. I settled in for British afternoon tea and cucumber sandwiches, while lizards paraded past tropical flowers and tiny birds hopped on my knee looking for crumbs.

Grenada's quirkiness is evident even below the waves, as I found out the next morning when I hopped a boat to dive in Molinere Bay. One of Grenada's obscure claims to fame is that it opened the world's first underwater sculpture park in 2006. Accessible to both divers and snorkelers, it was conceived by the young British artist Jason deCaires Taylor. On a purely volunteer basis, he offered to create a series of concrete artworks that would help restore a





MY PLACE FOR ORIGINAL ROTI & DOUBLES



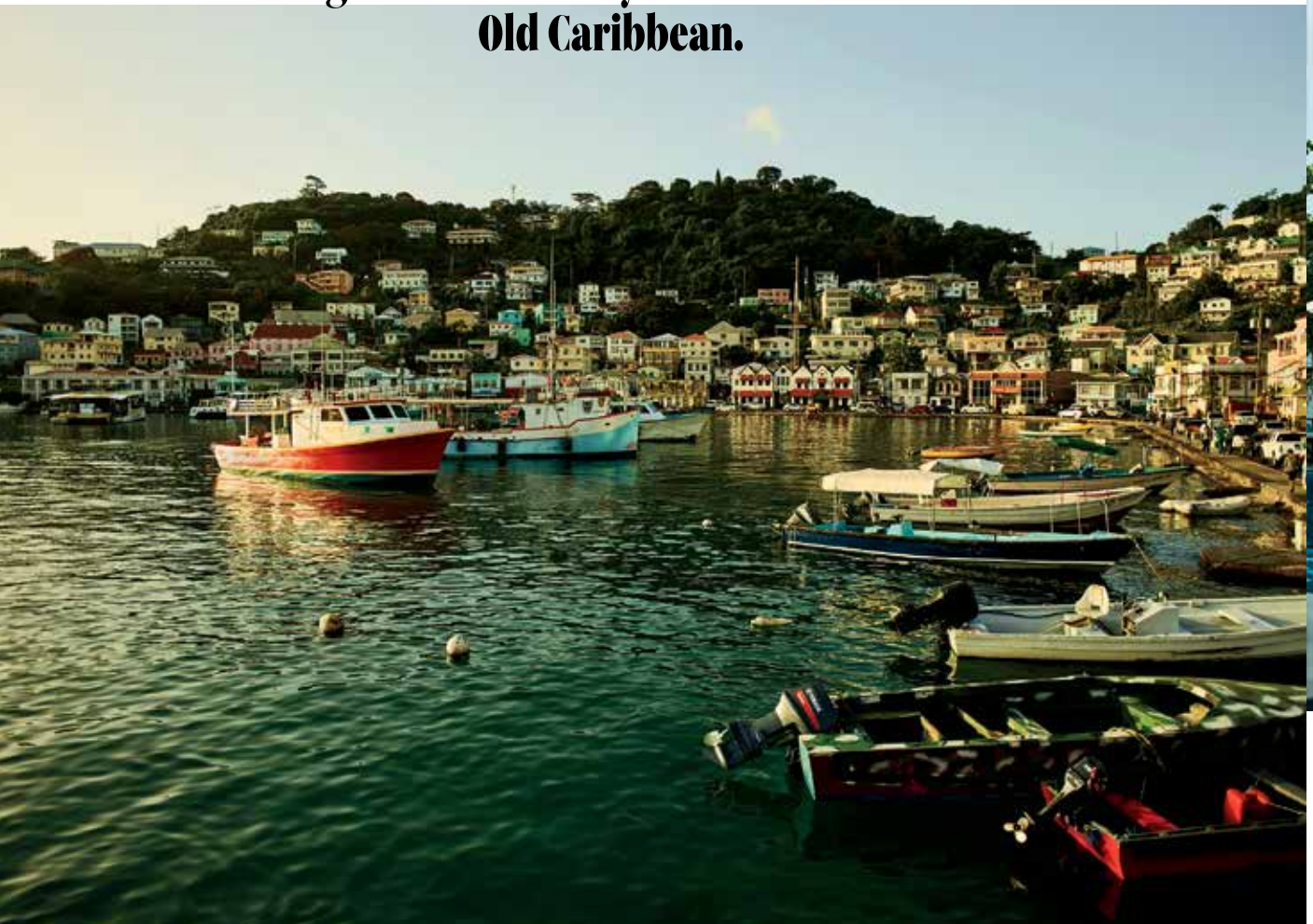
**With its pristine beaches, a wild, lush interior, and historic spice plantations, Grenada is one of the most enticing corners of the Caribbean.**



Duquesne Bay, as seen from the road that skirts Grenada's western coast; *Opposite*: A shack selling Trinidadian food in the town of Grenville.



## There's a decidedly retro vibe on Grenada, which drifts along in the casual style often referred to as the Old Caribbean.



marine site that had been damaged by Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Today, art and nature interact there in surprising ways: the strong currents have moved or knocked over some of the 65 sculptures, but the arrangement somehow seems deliberate and artful. Most of the pieces are also now coated in a sumptuous, multicolored armor of coral, while the entire site is patrolled by tropical fish. It was an eerie experience, swimming around statues of children holding hands and maidens scattered along the ocean floor like broken pagan idols. My favorite statue was *The Lost Correspondent*, a writer sitting at a desk with a typewriter, his head a blur of algae. I could only sympathize: I felt the same way after finishing my last book.

**T**HE REALITY OF “ISLAND TIME” became clear when I decided to explore Grenada by car. The morning I planned to head off, the usually brief summer rains turned into a

biblical-style deluge that kept pounding all day. The aptly named River Road in St. George’s turned into a literal torrent, carrying off vehicles in its wake. I spent the day reading a novel, taking more afternoon tea, and going for a swim in the rain. Despite all this, by the next morning life had returned to normal.

Shaped like a teardrop, Grenada is only 21 miles long and 12 miles wide, but it feels many times larger. In my tough little rental car, I zigzagged through the rain forests of Grand Etang National Park, along roads so crowded by foliage that they were virtual tunnels. The route wove past somnolent villages filled with Caribbean huts painted tutti-frutti colors and the remains of colonial fortresses. I ended up at the northern tip of the island at Leapers Hill, where legend holds that a group of Carib Indians threw themselves off a cliff rather than be enslaved by the French. A Catholic church now rises like a mirage near the spot, alongside a



From left: St. George's, the capital of Grenada, is known for its beautiful harbor, winding streets, and 18th-century hilltop fort; the pool at Spice Island Beach Resort; shrimp with avocado salsa, fried plantain, and sumac at Calabash, a Relais & Chateaux property.

flower-filled cemetery with sweeping ocean views. In the tiny church coffee shop, an elderly lady called Miss Agnes was making ice cream with an old wooden churn. She gave me a tour of the graves, pointing out the old British families who once ruled Grenada.

But my real goal was an "attraction" I had noticed on my tourist map: a spot on the northeastern coast marked "Revolutionary Relic Planes," with no explanation. I knew I must be close when I found myself driving slowly along the runway of an abandoned airport called Pearls, now a muddy pasture for cows and goats. Next to the former terminal sat two vintage Soviet-made planes, both left to rot after the 1983 invasion. Under one wing, a lone security guard was standing in the shade. "My job is not to look after the aircraft," she explained. "It is to look after you!" Still, she raised no objection when I hoisted myself inside the larger aircraft, an Antonov AN-26 whose cabin was entirely gutted. I sat in the only chair and gazed out the glassless window at the palm trees, trying to imagine the unlikely conflict. The invasion is all but forgotten in the U.S., but the reality of it hit me when I saw a page pasted up on the cabin wall: a photograph of a mother kissing a young Marine in uniform, and the handwritten note, Sgt. Jon Sabatino,



USMC, KIA 25 Oct 1983.

In fact, 19 U.S. soldiers were killed in "Operation Urgent Fury," along with an estimated 45 Grenadian soldiers and civilians and 25 Cuban troops. Islanders are willing to talk about those three days, about being awakened before dawn by the drone of the American choppers. Once I started asking around, I found memorials in the unlikeliest places. The most moving was on the grounds of the Calabash, where the rotor mast of a Black Hawk helicopter was mounted on a concrete base, with a plaque in honor of its American pilot, Captain Keith Lucas. Its dedication on the 25th anniversary of the invasion was attended by Lucas's family. "Keith was a true hero," the owner of the Calabash, Leo Garbutt, told me. "As far as we can gather, he knew he had to ditch the copter, and not in the water, or the whole crew would be lost. When the Black Hawk came down, all of those on board got out except Keith."

**"IF YOU THINK GRENADA** is on 'island time,'" a local woman chuckled as we sat waiting for the ferry to leave St. George's, "wait till you get to Carriacou. It's on 'double island-time'!"

I was heading to Grenada's tiny sibling (the name is pronounced *car-ry-coo*), 25 miles north, for the annual Workboat Regatta. For more than 50 years, the competition has celebrated the traditional wooden sailboats that have been built on Carriacou since the 18th century, when Scottish artisans came to work outside the Caribbean's hurricane belt. Today, the Scots' ancestors still ply their trade, launching each boat with the sacrifice of a goat, a priest's blessing, and a more agnostic splash of rum. When the ferry was delayed, Carriacou quickly lived up to its laid-back reputation. To pass the time, I went downstairs to the bar, where two dozen raucous Rastas were knocking back frosty tins of Heineken beer at 9 a.m. Clearly, the fiesta had already begun.

A couple of hours later, we somehow did





make it to Carriacou's long jetty at the main town, Hillsborough. From the sea, I could tell that this speck of an island was flatter, drier, and emptier than Grenada, its shoreline scalloped with gorgeous coves. I took a room in the Mermaid Hotel on the beach in Hillsborough and tried to find the sailboat races. Nobody seemed to know where they were. But what I did find was one of the best meals I have ever eaten in the Caribbean, at the family-run Bogles Round House, a circular stone building perched on the coast a 10-minute drive north of town. The fresh snapper in lime-butter sauce was cooked by Roxanne Rock, a native of Ireland who grew up on Carriacou and whose résumé includes a seven-year stint in the British merchant navy. "It's not for me," she told me. "I was always coming home."

When I returned to Hillsborough, the entire town had gathered for a beauty pageant on the local tennis court. But the races? Next day, I got my first glimpse when a taxi driver named Stanley drove me to a perfect beach called Petit



Carenage, reached by a trail lined with conch shells. As I waded out to one of the island's many historic shipwrecks, a red trawler perched on the reefs offshore, I noticed half a dozen wooden yachts with colorful spinnakers blowing past like feathers on the horizon. So the regatta did exist!

The next day, I took matters into my own hands and hired a dinghy and a skipper to weave among the racing boats. When we floated past one moored contestant, a yellow-trimmed sloop from St. Bart's, the captain, a restaurateur named Thierry Badereau, invited us on board. Joining him were the boat's builders, Alwine Enoe and his son Callistas, from Carriacou. Although the tradition has died elsewhere in the Caribbean, this tiny outpost still supplies sailboats to customers around the islands. "I am going to keep building boats as long as I can!" Callistas said. "It's my true love."

**I**F CARRIACOU WAS on "double island time," Petite Martinique was on triple.

At first, I thought I had made a terrible mistake taking the short ferry ride there. Only 900 people live on the 586-acre speck, and not one of them was in the streets. I wandered along the deserted beach, looking to grab lunch, but the one functioning bar, GG's, had run out of

*Clockwise from top left: At the family-run Calabash, the 30 suites and five estate villas are spread out over 27 acres; debuting next month, the minimalist, 52-room Silversands Grenada resort has a prime location on Grande Anse beach; divers and snorkelers can explore the underwater sculpture park at Molinere Bay, on the island's western coast.*



everything except Carib beer. And then I heard music wafting in the distance. I wandered toward it, and I recognized one of the women I'd chatted with on the ferry. She was ducking into a house, and waved me over—she was heading to a *saraka*, an old African thanksgiving rite.

Before long, I had met three generations of the proud owners, the Roberts family. Some were cooking pots of food over open fires, while on the porch four musicians played with guitars and a violin. As I ate mutton soup, a cousin named Martin showed me how to dance a jig imported straight from 18th-century Glasgow. “Heel, toe, heel, toe,” he explained earnestly.

More food came out: callaloo, a spinach-like

green cooked with coconut, *coucou*, a local corn meal dish, and mounds of stewed pork and chicken. Suddenly, I realized it was 3 p.m., time for the only ferry to leave. I didn't want to be stranded on Petite Martinique overnight. “Don't you worry,” Martin said. He called the ferry captain, another relative. “Don't go anywhere!” he ordered. “You have another passenger.”

It took 20 minutes to shake everyone's hand goodbye, and another 20 to make it to the jetty. I wasn't rushing. After a week on Grenada, I was learning how to make island time work for me.

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## GRENADA, A CARIBBEAN THROWBACK

Part of the Windward Islands, a subset of the Lesser Antilles and not far from South America, Grenada consists of a mountainous main island, also called Grenada, and two worthwhile satellites, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. Nothing is rushed there: give yourself a week to explore all three destinations, stopping at remote beaches, the markets of the capital, St. George's, and waterfalls in the rain forests.

### GETTING AROUND

Grenada has become more accessible from the U.S. now that **JetBlue** (*jetblue.com*) is offering nonstop service from New York City. Once there, I rented a rugged Jeep-like vehicle to navigate the winding roads. Travelers can also take a guided tour or hire a taxi through their hotel.

The smaller island of Carriacou can feasibly be visited as a day trip, but I would recommend spending the night. The **Osprey Express Ferry** (*ospreyair.com*) makes the two-hour trip daily, leaving the dock at St. George's at 9 a.m. and returning at 3:30 p.m. **SVG Air** (*flysvgair.com*; \$100 round-trip) has light planes that do the run in less than 30 minutes. Once there, taxis are the best way to get around. From Carriacou, a small ferry makes the 30-minute trip daily to Petite Martinique at 11:30 a.m. and returns at 3 p.m.

### GRENADA

#### LODGING

I started my trip at the secluded and stylish **Calabash** (*calabashhotel.com*; doubles from \$525), where the cottages, lawns, and tropical gardens have an almost Edwardian charm. There is also the all-inclusive **Spice Island**

#### Beach Resort

(*spiceislandbeachresort.com*; doubles from \$1,140) on Grand Anse Beach, Grenada's iconic stretch of sand. Its sumptuous villas have an Asian flair, and every second week, owner Royston Hopkin hosts a reception in his home for guests. The December opening of the **Silversands Grenada** (*silversandsgrenada.com*; doubles from \$800) on Grand Anse Beach is a major event. The new resort's sleek, light-filled design by AW<sup>2</sup> (veterans of Amanjena in Marrakesh) and glamorous facilities such as a 100-meter infinity pool make it a stunning addition to Grenada's scene.

#### EAT & DRINK

Some of my best meals were at Calabash and Spice Island Beach Resort. Outside of the resorts, I loved the casual, toes-in-the-sands ambience of **Coconut Beach Restaurant** (*the.coconutbeachgrenada.com*; entrées \$10–\$25) on Grand Anse, where the grilled catch of the day was simple and delicious, and the papaya soup and mashed sweet potato at **Belmont Estate** (*belmontestate.net*; buffet lunch \$23), a 200-year-old cocoa plantation complete with goats, a vegetable garden, and its own chocolate factory.

### ACTIVITIES

Wander the streets of St. George's on the culinary walking tour **Savor the Spice** (*grenadaculinarytour.com*; \$69), which weaves between markets and out-of-the-way eateries. Don't miss snorkeling in the haunting **Molinere Underwater Sculpture Park** (you can make arrangements through any hotel). And set aside a morning and go with **Mandoo Tours** (*grenada-tours.com*) to the spectacular Seven Sisters Waterfalls in Grand Etang National Park and Forest Reserve.

### CARRIACOU

#### LODGING

Try to snag one of the three cottages at the family-run **Bogles Round House** (*boglesroundhouse.com*; doubles from \$85), a short taxi ride north of the main town of Hillsborough, which has a restaurant popular for its farm-to-table cooking. I stayed at the **Mermaid Beach Hotel** (*mermaidhotelcarriacou.com*; doubles from \$165), where my oceanfront room was delightful, with large windows and a wraparound balcony, but the restaurant—affectionately dubbed “Fawltly Towers” by locals—was erratic.



### EAT & DRINK

In Hillsborough, head to the **Kayak Kafé & Juice Bar** (*kayakkafe.restaurantwebx.com*; entrées \$5–\$13), in a wooden cottage hanging over the beach, for well-prepared local delicacies like grilled lionfish with rice and a twist of lime.

### ACTIVITIES

Even if you can't make the annual regatta in August, take a taxi to check out the traditional boatbuilders in the seafront village of Windward. I continued on by taxi to Petit Carenage, where a trail marked by conch shells leads 100 yards through mangroves to an idyllic beach where Union Island hovers on the horizon and a wrecked trawler sits perched on the reefs.

### PETITE MARTINIQUE

A trip to this speck of an island feels like you're falling off the map: almost nobody spends the night, although a few homes are available on AirBnB. There is very little to do other than stroll along the single road, swim, and call in at the handful of beachfront bars. Keep an ear out for parties on weekends; the amiable locals are genuinely delighted to meet the rare visitor. — T.P.