

Unfamiliar Grenada Is Authentic Caribbean

Mention a vacation in Grenada (pronounced gre-**nay**-da), and most people think you are visiting a city in Spain (gre-**nah**-da) even if you pronounce the difference very carefully. That is how unfamiliar this three-island nation is, located in the southeast Caribbean Sea near Trinidad.



Since a government overthrow and brief occupation by US and Caribbean forces that ended in 1984, Grenada has rested peaceably in the deepest shadows of global tourism, a repeat destination mainly to those who would like it to stay that way forever.

With strong French and British historical connections and easy charter flight access from Europe, the majority of visitors are European. However, new seasonal and year round direct flights from Canada and the US are encouraging exploration by those looking for alternative Caribbean horizons where pristine white sand beaches are only one focus of this diverse country.

For the active environmentally-conscious traveler, Grenada offers many hiking trails, rainforests, waterfalls and sustainable activities. Development in Grenada has been deliberately unobtrusive. With none of the country's hotels (all family owned) allowed to exceed the height of the palm trees, unobstructed views of beautiful surroundings abound from every hillside and lookout. One ninth of the nation is dedicated to wildlife sanctuaries and rainforest parks.

Telfor Bedeau is the country's ultimate nature ambassador who has spent much of his 72 years hiking, sailing, and rowing around his precious islands. On our hike to the Seven Sisters Waterfall, we talked plants, birds and animals, and how to look after them on these fragile islands. Telfor does guide groups and individuals who share his passion for nature, best contacted through the Grenada

Board of Tourism (Grenadagrenadines.com).

The country is proud of its nickname, The Spice of the Caribbean, and there is certainly no exaggeration about that claim. With its own micro-weather and volcanic soil peculiarities, Grenada has near-perfect growing conditions for nutmeg, allspice, mace, cloves, cinnamon, turmeric and bay leaves. After Indonesia, it is the world's second largest producer of nutmeg and mace so the odds are very high that back home you are seasoning your food with something grown in Grenada.

There are wonderful opportunities to sample delicious local cuisine whether staying at resorts or smaller local properties. With a countryside abundantly sprouting both cultivated and wild fruit and vegetables and fresh fish a major part of the daily diet, the robust health of Grenadians of all ages says a lot about the quality of food accessible to everyone.



Don't miss a traditional "Fish Friday" street celebration while wandering the antique streets of Grenada's fishing capital, Gouyave. This is where locals from all over the main island meet each other at the many stalls offering creatively-cooked, super-fresh seafood delivered in newspaper or on paper plates. Visitors are always welcome at this colorful local event.

Still focusing on cuisine delights, agritourism richly-laced with history is one of Grenada's most attractive features. Best sampled with a rental car, visitors can easily spend several days discovering authentic countryside properties that offer deeply educational tours and free tastings, product gift shops and local-menu restaurants. Not to be missed are the Dougaldston Spice Boucan, the Gouyave Nutmeg Processing Station, the Laura Herb & Spice Garden, Belmont Estate's cocoa/chocolate operations, and the River Antoine Rum Distillery, in business since 1785.

Most international travellers explore only the main island of Grenada, though a high speed catamaran ferry service (Ospreylines.com) makes it easy and efficient to visit the smaller islands of Carriacou (pop. 5,000) and Petite Martinique (pop. 1,000) either for the day or longer.

Despite the French having given up colonial ownership to the British in 1763, these islands have retained more of a visible French heritage, not only with their geographical names but also with the patois language and many unique music and dance festivals (Carriacoupetitemartinique.com/festivals.html) around which to dovetail a visit.

On the main island of Grenada, I headquartered at the Flamboyant Hotel & Villas, (Flamboyant.com) which offers best-value rooms and modern self-catering apartments overlooking Grenada's finest beach, Grand Anse. As well as staff providing excellent service and insider advice, there are locally-themed menus in the beachfront restaurant and weekly steel drum performances. The hotel has special offers year round so check the website.



On Carriacou I stayed at the Grand View Hotel, (Carriacougrandview.com) owned by an island couple with a gracious personal style of hospitality as well as great home cooked food. This property does indeed have the grandest view on the island, up a steep hill above Carriacou's only town, Hillsborough. Grenada's Governor General always stays there on his visits to Carriacou, though regrettably I missed him this time around.

By Alison Gardner

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