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## **Anneka hunts for treasure in Grenada**

By Anneka Rice, The Mail on Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2009



Relaxation therapy: Anneka loved Grenada's spectacular scenery

Two years ago during the Cricket World Cup in the West Indies, my most glamorous friend Tim Rice took a boat for the season, in the way other people take cottages in Cornwall. Actually 'boat' is rather a dull word for what was a large luxury hotel. Anyway, each night as we slept the boat would purr its way to the next island and the next match and thus we had a grand tour of the Caribbean, starting in Antigua, popping into St Lucia, Bequia, Grenada and Barbados. Of all the islands, Grenada struck me as being the one to revisit. It is stunningly beautiful and friendly. Known as the Spice Isle, it is made up of three islands: Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. Grenada is the largest of the three at 120 square miles but its volcanic origin has produced a topography that makes little of it accessible.

The land soars from the coast to almost 3,000ft and is a tumble of rainforests, waterfalls, windy roads and lush fauna and flora. Exotic fruits, cloves, cinnamon, turmeric, ginger, cocoa and nutmeg spring from every shoot.

Another glamorous friend and I stayed at the Spice Island Beach Resort, an all-inclusive family-run hotel owned by the legendary Sir Royston Hopkin. It is a gem - friendly and discreet - and apparently Sir Royston is too, although sadly he wasn't there when we were.

The hotel, and most of the island, was flattened during Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Over one terrible day and night, 80 per cent of the buildings lost their roofs and the spice trade all

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but collapsed. There wasn't a leaf left on a tree. Today, Grenadians frequently refer to Ivan but stoically they see it as an event that brought everyone closer together and an opportunity to embrace a new era of tourism.

The newly renovated Spice Island Beach Resort snuggles among the mangrove trees lining Grande Anse beach, a two-mile stretch of glorious sand. I started off in one of the spectacular Royal Suites, complete with private swimming pool, stunning tropical garden and sauna, which seemed a slightly eccentric addition to the facilities when a walk to breakfast in 90-degree humidity gives you the same result in seconds.

But I'm basic when it comes to hotel rooms - just give me a view of the sea and the sound of the waves. So the accommodating staff found me a bungalow on the beach, with French windows opening straight on to a terrace, a day bed and hammock, and the sea sparkling in front of me.



Stunning: Grenada's Grande Anse beach

At dawn, I could see the fishermen bringing in the morning's catch. The sea was dotted with locals up to their necks in water, bathing hats on, sorting out the world. Women sat in the sand exfoliating their feet. Visitors here are in the minority and the rhythm of the day is natural. Beach sellers wander by very occasionally but with no expectation of tourists buying anything.

We spent a morning with friends of my glamorous companion - they are developers of the planned Four Seasons Hotel. A 500-acre plot on Mt Hartman and Hog Island will become home to private villas, a marina, golf course, tennis academy and sailing school.

It was difficult to sound enthusiastic as I looked out over coral reefs and lush rainforest awaiting the bulldozers. Lewis Hamilton has also bought a hotel on the island. Peter de Savary is already up and running with a whole port. It's alarming to think of this mild island being thrust into such highlevel tourism. But with 60 per cent of the island a conservation area, and two-thirds of the islands unable to be built on because of the topography, expansion is limited.

Grenada is secret and hidden. It can never be like the west coast of Barbados, where buildings are jammed in. The sea wraps round long inlets and the hills soar up from the mangrove trees.

We went to explore the capital, St George's, with Geoffrey, our driver for the afternoon. The town is considered the most beautiful in the Caribbean. Houses painted pastel pink, blue and green tumble down the hillside. Ivan hit nearly every church and it was extraordinary to see roofless Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian churches on the skyline, all in a row.

It was 4pm and the streets were ablaze with children in pristine blue and green uniforms, spilling out in long crocodiles along the narrow streets. We passed a funeral by the old fort, with prayers being said outside at a spectacular hilltop cemetery. The scene all at once could have been Mediterranean, passionate yet respectful, against a backdrop of Georgian, Victorian and Regency architecture.

Grenada's turbulent history is represented in the town. In the 1400s, passing Spanish sailors called the island Granada because it reminded them of their native Andalucia. The French and

British battled for possession over the next century, leaving a legacy of forts with names such as Frederick, Matthew and George.

Grenada finally got full independence from the British in 1974 and in the capital's museum is a gift from the British Government, a tea set laid out in a rickety glass cabinet. A mere five years later, a communist government had taken over and in 1983 there was a dramatic invasion by US and Caribbean forces. How the Grenadians have remained so gentle, tranquil and charming is beyond me. Geoffrey even insisted on taking us to his house, picking up his daughter along the way.

Grenada has 156 inches of rain a year and most of it seemed to fall on our heads as we went hiking in the rainforest one day with our amazing guide, Mandoo.

Bamboo and ferns were steaming in the gentle drizzle and we saw birds of paradise, herons, and startling peonias and hibiscus. Mandoo stopped at a nutmeg tree and scraped back the pulp for us to taste.

We ate guavas and admired the pink ixoras and ginger flowers. We saw avocado trees, 300-year-old silk cotton trees and the ubiquitous cocoa trees. The bright green sap everywhere was vibrant against the red earth.

Our journey became more precarious as we stumbled down slippery rocks until we emerged from the gloom of the forest path to a 200ft waterfall. We swam in the cool water, sunlight flashing through the hanging forest. We needn't have changed afterwards. By the time we climbed back up to our car, there was torrential rain.

Staying in an all-inclusive hotel is liberating and fattening and we were thankful for the wondrous spa, huge swimming pool and daily steam bath that was the weather.

The food and wines were exceptional and we could hardly drag ourselves out, but we did have two memorable evenings. One was at a restaurant called Patrick's, on the road to St

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George's. There was glass collecting at the bottom of the broken windows, peeling paint and two tables on a rickety veranda.

Patrick settled us down with lethal rum punches, perhaps to steel us for the giant feast of home-style dishes to come.

We had swordfish floaters, fried jacks, curried goat, conch salad and marlin to start with. Luckily three dishes were off that night as we barely made inroads into our 18-dish feast. As the seemingly last plate went down, he looked at us challengingly: 'And do you want rabbit?'

After paying the bill we were given our instructions: 'In the morning you will suck an orange.' So we left clutching our oranges, frankly quite dazed because he never explained why we needed them.

Afterwards we headed for the Dodgy Dock Bar, about as far removed from Patrick's as you can get. It was the Grenada Cricket Classics weekend and there was a bit of a party, or 'a lime', going on in this restaurant set on stilts over True Blue Bay. It was like being in the middle of a Martini advertisement, with stunningly beautiful young people wafting around, swaying to the reggae. We found out that they were medical students from St George's University. What a place to become a doctor.

One of the most endearing things about Grenada is its big nightly get-togethers. If it's Monday it's crab racing, Tuesday is poetry night and on Friday, in the town of Gouyave, it's fish night.

Our journey to Gouyave took an hour along mountain roads, through tiny hamlets. Gates and walls were bedecked with green, yellow and red paint. It is a matter of national pride to graffiti your village in the most creative way possible - the government even supplies the paint.

In Gouyave chefs had set up stalls selling every conceivable type of seafood, from sizzling shrimp kebabs to lobster and jerked marlin. The familiar medical students were there with their tiny skirts and glossy hair.

Locals and visitors were all mingling and swaying to the steel band, steam rising from barbecues and vast vats. There was a whiff of spicy edginess in the air. The Carib beers were cracked open and it was party time.

During our stay we also went to Carriacou, which is 90 minutes away by ferry. Or it should be. Every now and again the regular boat is serviced and a juddery supply vessel takes over. When we arrived two-and-a-quarter hours later, having slightly lost the will to live, we were nonplussed by the heat and lack of shelter.

We decided to turn left and walk off into the unknown. After a few hundred yards of tired shacks and dusty shops, we turned round and tried the other way. Luckily we met a friendly jogger who told us we should have a swim right where we were - so we ploughed through the foliage by the side of the road and found the most idyllic beach, with soft white sand and shoals of colourful fish swimming in the clear water.

We then walked back along the beach and found the Sand Island Cafe. 'You want fish lunch or chicken lunch?' asked the owner. We opted for both and I had the meal of the week - red snapper fried in garlic with rice and plantains. Not quite worth five hours in a boat and, to be honest, the main island of Grenada is so unspoiled and eccentric that you can find your own adventures off the beaten track without going very far from your hotel.

And when you are staying in such a perfect hotel you can hardly bear to go anywhere at all.

**Travel facts** Kuoni (01306 747008, [www.kuoni.co.uk](http://www.kuoni.co.uk)) offers seven nights at the Spice Island Beach Resort on an all-inclusive basis in an Oleander Suite, including flights with British Airways from Gatwick with private transfers in resort and use of airport lounge in the UK. Prices start at £1,948 per person based on June departures. Further information: Mandoo Tours, [www.grenadatours.com](http://www.grenadatours.com); Patrick's, 00 1473 440 0364; Lennox St Bernard taxi service, 00 1473 407 3013.