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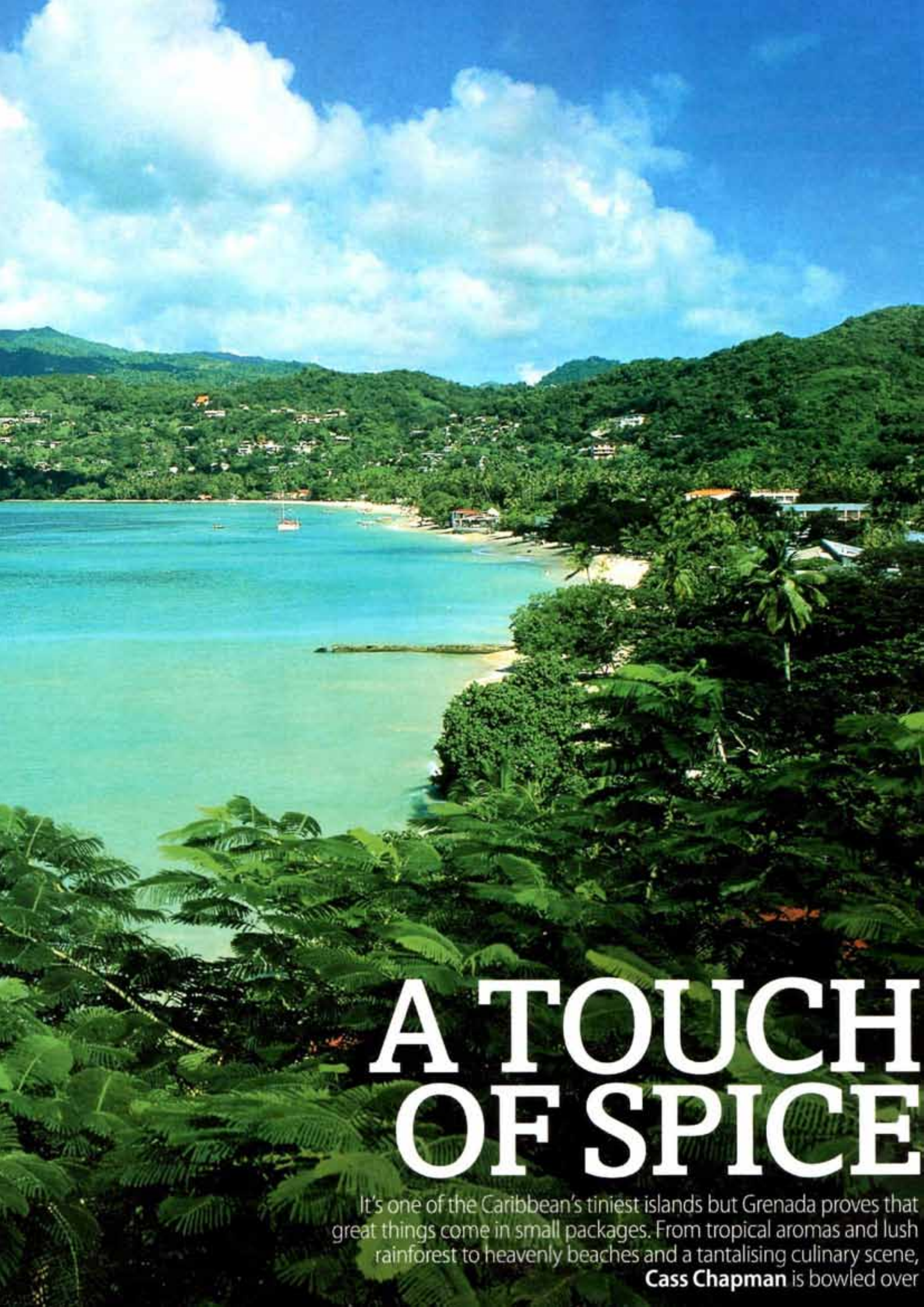
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London 2012

Heston Blumenthal,
Tracey Emin and
Richard E Grant on the
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London 2012



A TOUCH OF SPICE

It's one of the Caribbean's tiniest islands but Grenada proves that great things come in small packages. From tropical aromas and lush rainforest to heavenly beaches and a tantalising culinary scene, **Cass Chapman** is bowled over

Filled to the brim with fresh lobster and Oil Down (I'll explain later), I have to drag myself away from the buzz of Umbrellas on Grand Anse Beach. At this wooden bar, its roof terrace quite literally covered in umbrellas, the party is only just beginning. But after a day on the Island of Spice, as Grenada is known, I am reluctantly destined for bed. As I head for my hotel the rain starts to fall. Liquid Sunshine they call it here, and it seems a perfectly romantic way to end a packed day.

Just 21 miles long and with a population of only 100,000, the island moves to the treacle-like pace that the West Indies is famed for – but that doesn't mean there's a dearth of things to do and see. Christopher Columbus first recorded sighting Grenada in 1498 and the French later moored up in 1650, the elegant Georgian architecture across the island serving as a permanent reminder. Impressive, original cannons at the 18th-century Fort George still stand protectively, commanding views over the capital, St George's. It's a place that's proud of its history – and has its fair share of contemporary heroes too: F1 driver Lewis Hamilton, athlete Kirani James (400m world champion and one to watch at London 2012) and footballer Jason Roberts.

For the visitor, though, it's the island's lushness and the scent of spices in the air – nutmeg, cinnamon, clove, ginger, bay leaf, bird pepper, turmeric and even saffron – that strike most. The hills are alive with birdsong, which echoes throughout the rainforest covering the island's centre. Nutmeg, a beautiful, bulging, black-and-red nut that weighs down its branches, is plentiful. Placed in water, sinking nuts are dried and used for spice. Those that float are considered imperfect and make soap and mosquito repellent.

One of my first stops is the Bay Gardens, a 20-acre natural forest of ferns in a small suburb of the island's capital. A mecca for

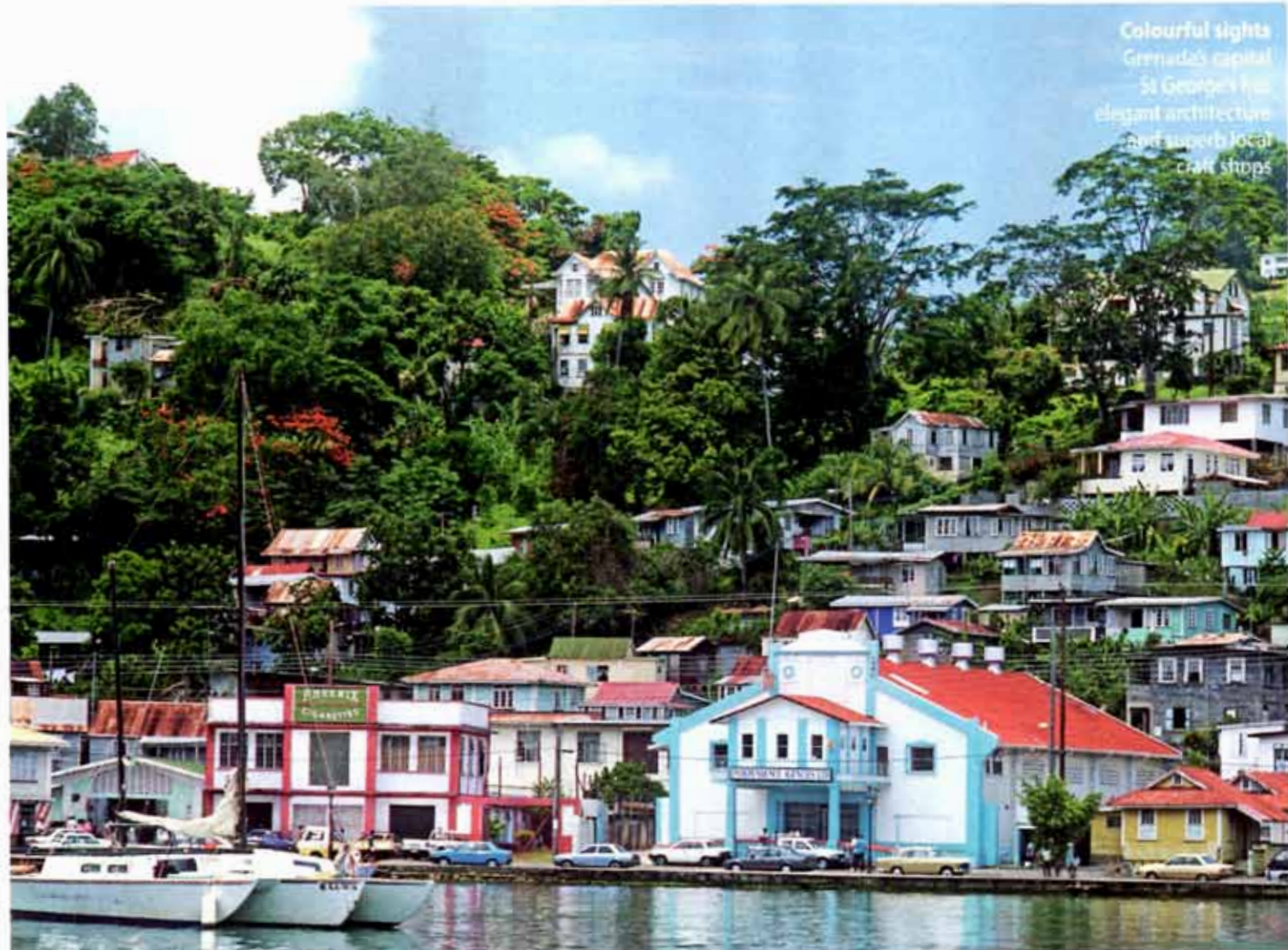
“THE BEACH IS THE OBVIOUS PLACE TO HEAD. THERE ARE 45 OF THEM. NOWHERE IS OFF LIMITS”

natural-beauty lovers, it is run by a delightfully mustachioed local called Albert St Bernard, who proudly tells me how his flowers have won awards at London's Chelsea Flower Show (Grenada has been awarded no fewer than nine gold medals at the prestigious show in recent years). A short stroll around the gardens, the air heavy with the scent of cocoa, and I can see why Albert has garnered so many accolades. He's worked on the property for decades, maintaining grounds so dense they're like rainforest; my eyes sweep over gigantic, fan-shaped palm trees, bursting black pepper plants and luminous tropical flowers. After a morning in the hustle and bustle of St George's, the calm of these botanical gardens is a welcome respite.

But that isn't to say the island's capital doesn't captivate. Tiny local craft shops punctuate the food stalls and jostling restaurants that line the streets. Small crescent-shaped streets curve around the edge of Horseshoe Bay. Leaving tourists to bargain for spices in the colourful market, I drive on to the historic Belmont estate, a colonial cocoa plantation that emerges from nowhere at the end of a dirt track. Complete with a clapboard museum that pays moving tribute to the island's history, featuring 19th-century furniture and original slave narratives, it also produces some of the finest chocolate I've ever tasted. Tours of the estate take place daily and visitors are invited to participate in chocolate production. I try spreading cocoa beans with my feet across giant outdoor drying racks, an oddly gratifying experience, especially when I'm later



Colourful sights
Grenada's capital
St George's has
elegant architecture
and superb local
craft shops



the obvious place to head. Forty-five of them – a mix of volcanic black and heavenly white sandy strips – fringe the island. All are public so nowhere is off limits. A favourite for beach lovers is Grand Anse Beach. Sheltered from high winds and waves thanks to its western location, it's two miles of perfection. Bathway Beach on the northeastern side is another popular choice, though those with children should head to the calm, shallow waters of La Sagesse Beach. If you crave serious seclusion, Sauteurs Beach on the northern tip is often deserted.

For those wishing to burn off a bit more energy than sunbathing requires, Grenada is recognised as the wreck diving capital of the eastern Caribbean and the marine life doesn't disappoint. It's an exhilarating experience and you see fish of every possible size and shape. Or take a peek at the world's first underwater sculpture park, created by artist Jason deCaires Taylor, which can be viewed by divers, snorkellers, or from a glass-bottomed boat. Life-size figures and epic marine seascapes form a series of artificial reefs that emerge from crystal-clear shallow waters. It's breathtaking and oddly surreal.

Back on dry land, trek around Grand Etang Crater Lake, finishing up with a picnic at either the Annandale or the Concorde waterfall. Or, for something more relaxing, I recommend the rum tasting sessions at the historic River Antoine Distillery, a place that transports me back in time with its musty, dusty rooms that swell with the heady aroma of alcohol. Totally exclusive to the island, there is also the newly opened Spice Basket cultural centre and the Caribbean's only dedicated cricket museum.

And, of course, there is the food. Fine-dining aficionados will love Rhodes Restaurant in the Calabash Hotel where Gary Rhodes' à la carte menu focuses on locally sourced seasonal >

NEED TO KNOW

WHEN TO GO

The average temperature in Grenada falls between 75°F and 85°F so there is no cold season as such, but the wet season can run between June and December. This is, for many, the best time of year to visit as the crowds are few and the rainfall usually brief.

GETTING AROUND

Aside from standard car hire and taxis, public buses service most of the island and water taxis provide easy access between Grand Anse Beach and the main port in St George's. A ferry service makes

day trips to the local islands of Carriacou and Petit Martinique possible and personal tour guides will take you around the island. Recommended is Mandoo Seales, an ex-naval officer with an unrivalled knowledge of the island and wonderful warmth. +1 473 440 1428

BRING BACK

St George's, in particular, is packed with local craft shops but the dried spices and oils make wonderful souvenirs. The local rum and chocolate is also far cheaper when purchased on the island.

Blue lagoon
The pool at Grenada's
Spice Island Beach
Resort – the spa's
pretty special too



WHERE TO STAY

BEST FOR FAMILIES

Set on Grand Anse Beach, **The Flamboyant Hotel & Villas** has accommodation in villas and apartments and an all-inclusive option – ideal for families. *British Airways offers seven nights from £1,299pp all-inclusive basis.** ba.com/grenada

Blue Horizons Garden Resort is set in beautiful tropical gardens on the southwest coast with self-catering cottages, a fresh-water pool and lovely restaurant. From £134 for a double studio. grenadabluehorizons.com

With its chic villas and apartments, **Mount Cinnamon** is set in a lush hillside overlooking Grand Anse Beach. Savvy's restaurant has some of the best cuisine on the island, with all the fruit and vegetables from the de Savary plantations. From £312 for a one-bed suite. mountcinnamongrenadahotel.com

BEST FOR THOSE ON A BUDGET

Built around an Arawak-Indian theme, **Coyaba Beach Resort** has two great restaurants and pool with swim-up bar as well as lots of activities – all included in the price. From £153 for doubles. coyaba.com

The Palladian-style **Grenadian by Rex Resorts** is set on two beaches (one for watersports, one for relaxing) and has a lake in its grounds, with dining choices from à la carte to buffet. *BA offers seven nights from £699pp, accommodation only.** ba.com/grenada

BEST FOR SPAS

As romantic and relaxing as a resort can be, **Laluna** offers understated luxury, with a first-class Balinese-influenced spa and sea-facing yoga pavilion. From £233 for a cottage suite for two, accommodation only. laluna.com

A place dedicated to rejuvenation of body and mind, **LaSource** is a beautiful place to recharge, with delicious food and a choice of activities designed for wellbeing. *BA offers seven nights from £2,269pp, all-inclusive.** ba.com/grenada

Owned by legendary Grenadian Sir Royston Hopkin, the idyllic **Spice Island Beach Resort** has a stylish newly redesigned spa that uses local herbs and spices in treatments. Ideal for weddings and honeymoons too. *BA offers seven nights' half-board from £2,109pp.** ba.com/grenada

BEST FOR FOODIES

Fine dining with a Caribbean twist awaits at the Gary Rhodes restaurant at boutique hotel **The Calabash**. The new 'Heaven and Earth' spa is a treat too. From £245 for a suite for two, with breakfast. calabashhotel.com

** Prices are based on January 2012 departures and include return flights from London Gatwick for bookings made during 3-22 November. Subject to availability, based on two sharing, including all UK taxes. All ATOL protected. Visit ba.com/grenada or call +44 (0)844 493 0758.*

produce, seducing foodies with dishes of buttered dorado and roast coffee-rubbed pork fillet. There's also the elegant Vastra Banken, found on board a Danish lighthouse ship moored at Le Phare Bleu, and The Aquarium, a vintage favourite, which is often packed with locals and tourists who flock for the freshly caught seafood and wacky underwater-themed interior.

After a slightly more authentic Grenadian experience, I head for Fish Friday in the small west-coast town of Gouyave. Held weekly on the town's streets, locals from every corner of the island construct food stalls filled with makeshift kitchen equipment, and beaming women sell ice-cold Carib beer, thick fried hunks of dorado and sweet juices. Local chatter and reggae soundtracks it all and I'm drawn instantly to the stalls selling grilled whole lobsters. It's a street party Caribbean-style and it's here that I try Oil Down, Grenada's national dish: chicken, salt beef, salt fish and pig's tail cooked up with callaloo and breadfruit, then blended with coconut milk. It is served from almost every street stall along St Dominic and St Patrick Street, and tastes far more flavoursome than its ingredients suggest.

As I stroll through Gouyave, watching the women sashay around their temporary kitchens, dancing as they flip fresh fillets of fish and singing about their wares, I am struck by the intense character of Grenada. Small in size it may be, but lacking in big personality it certainly isn't.

For more information, visit grenadagrenadines.com. ■

WAY TO GO

TAKE OFF

British Airways flies to Grenada twice a week from London Gatwick. Flight time: about ten hours. Visit ba.com

BA MILES

Join the Executive Club and earn up to 21,776 BA Miles when you fly Club World to Grenada (return). Or redeem them. You only need 50,000 to get to Grenada*. From 16 November, BA Miles will be renamed Avios points.

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