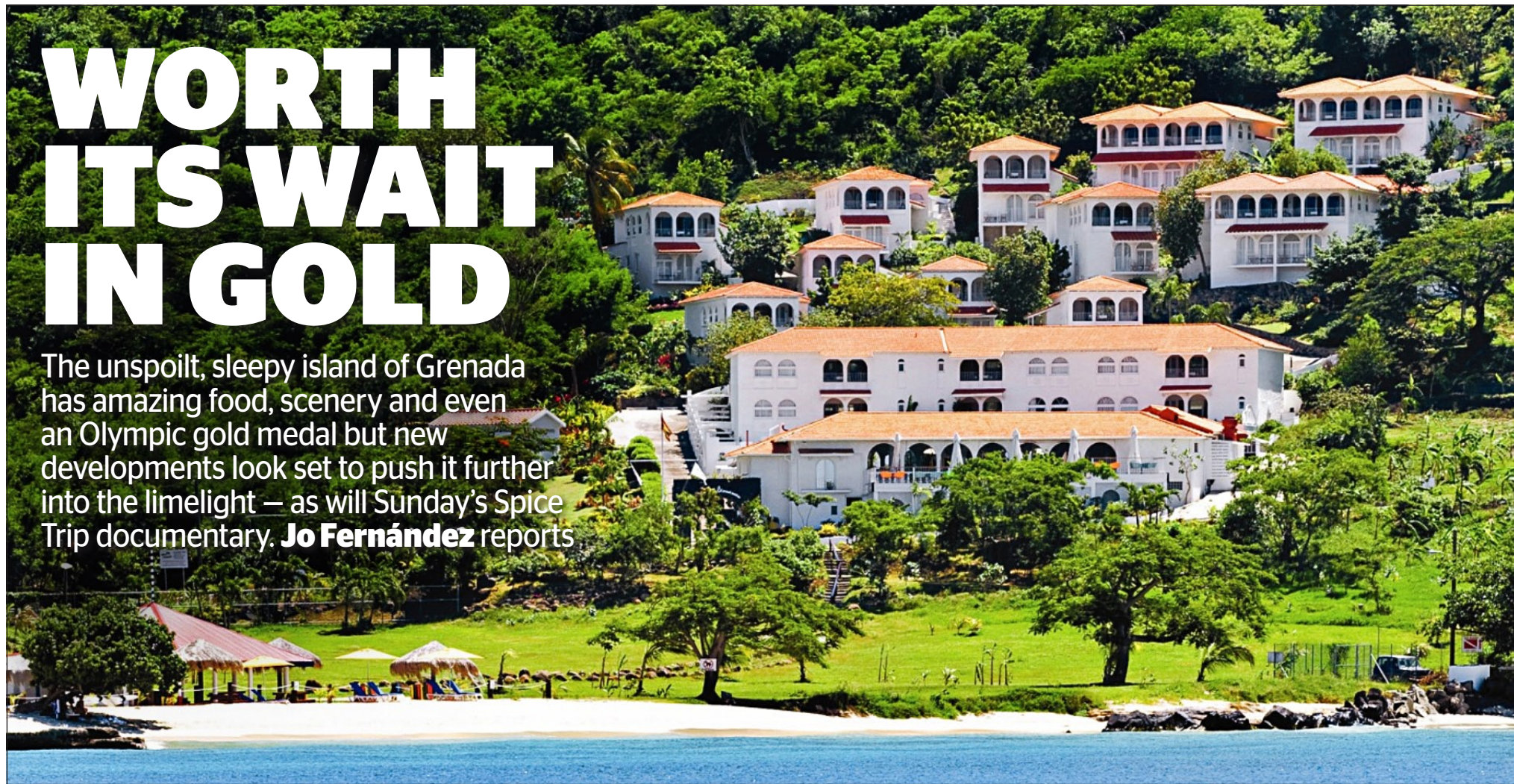


WORTH ITS WAIT IN GOLD

The unspoilt, sleepy island of Grenada has amazing food, scenery and even an Olympic gold medal but new developments look set to push it further into the limelight – as will Sunday's Spice Trip documentary. **Jo Fernández** reports



Spice of life: Mount Cinnamon resort, owned by Peter de Savary, sprawls up the hillside by Grande Anse beach. Guests can also visit de Savary's other properties, Mount Edgecombe plantation and Azzurra Castle

UNLIKE some other Caribbean islands, Grenada has been somewhat unfairly left off the tourist trail. First came the US invasion under Ronald Reagan in 1983, when a split in the Left-wing party led to the overthrow and execution of leader Maurice Bishop. Then in 2004 Hurricane Ivan tore through, causing widespread devastation, wiping out the nutmeg crop which gave the "Spice Island" its name as one of the world's largest producers.

But this year's Olympics was a chance for the tiny island, just 22 by 12 miles, to shine – and Kirani James delivered, winning Grenada's first ever Olympic gold medal, in the 400 metres.

Locals hope this winning streak will turn the island's fortunes. The spice trade is recovering, which is good news for future tourists as, for all its lush, unspoilt beauty, it was the food that stayed with me (and my waistline).

My first meals were at Mount Cinnamon all-villa resort, set just above powder-soft Grand Anse beach, one of many island properties owned by British entrepreneur Peter de Savary (or PDS, as he likes to be known).

The menu isn't traditional Caribbean – the overall theme is Italian – although local breakfast specialities such as salt fish souse and bakes are served. The space was a little dark and dingy, its saving grace the dazzling bay view.

Sharing this view are 22 villas scattered up hillside tropical gardens. Mine – a duplex reached up a puff-inducing two flights of stairs – fused traditional whitewashed exteriors with a cooler vibe incorporating Smeg fridges in citrus shades. Although normally useful, the kitchen was largely ignored as I ate out so much.

This winter brings a new ultra-luxurious villa, Cinnamon Heights, with two dining rooms. Guests can also stay at other de Savary-owned properties,

Azzurra Castle or the shabbier hillside plantation property Mount Edgecombe.

The second day of the trip was Friday, which means only one thing in the Caribbean – the fish fry.

Grenada's takes place at Gouyave fishing village on the west coast. By night the narrow streets are lined with stalls selling mahi mahi, fish kebabs and, most popular, lobster.

Speakers putting out booming sounds account for the carnival feel but perhaps the presence of tourists accounts for the prices – 50 East Caribbean dollars (£11.50) for a half lobster.

Another food-related trip on a sun-drenched Saturday was to the market at St George's harbour capital, where bunches of bananas and stalls piled high with earthy-coloured spices – mace, cinnamon, nutmeg – vie for your attention.

The U-shaped Carenage harbour is one of the prettiest in the region, its colourful streets rising steeply from the waterfront, backed by mountains and forests. Its charms caught the eye of de Savary, who has his mitts in something far larger aside from owning properties on the island, including two plantations – one intended for development and a strange Moroccan-meets-a-castle-

style villa. The \$500million Camper & Nicholsons Port Louis marina project is an ambitious development. Smaller boats will be joined by super yachts and a high-end development including hotels and villas. De Savary is touting it as the next Portofino.

Despite talk of the recession a spa and boutique open this month. The marina project is not without controversy, with claims that locals moved from land bought to develop were rehoused in poorly-built shacks. But PDS's team seem loyal and committed to both his projects and Grenada.

I set sail, armed with rum punch and Team PDS's Mark and Barry, to see the beautiful underwater sculptures just off Moliniere Bay created by British artist Jason deCaires Taylor in response to Hurricane Ivan.

Striking photographs reveal a ring of life-size children holding hands. I'd like to say I dived down to take one, but in reality I struggled to snorkel down even as far as their mossy little heads.

From here I headed up and over to the other side of this mostly undeveloped island, passing picturesque and

fertile valleys, rainforests and streams. The rural scene is punctuated with mountain villages – scatterings of small houses with locals "liming" outside.

Like the other Windward islands, Grenada is originally volcanic. The island's interior, shrouded in densely-grown tropical jungle, covers the remnants, mainly visible at the Grand Etang National Park. Wild monkeys and exotic tropical birds share it with a large crater lake.

Further up, Pearls Airport has its own nature display in the form of cows and goats sat in the middle of the weed-sprouting, disused runway.

The rusted fuselages of the Soviet era sit on the sidelines – Cuban planes sent over before the US invasion are now an almost accidental attraction.

I passed through coastal Grenville, Grenada's second city, the smell of frying fish tantalising. But nothing equalled the aromas wafting from the coal pots at the idyllic Belmont Estate in the green hills of St Patrick's.

This 17th-century working plantation follows Slow Food – and religious – principles in its 250-seat food hall,

serving tender organic beef curry and sweet guava chicken but no alcohol.

They also grow all the spices your kitchen holds, as well as producing goat's cheese and cocoa harvested here and sold to the Grenada Cocoa Association.

Still full from lunch, I could have followed my nose to find dinner at Boots Cuisine on the Grand Anse Valley Road (alternatively get a taxi).

The simple setting – a few tables in a side room – belies the reputation chef Roland 'Boots' McSween has gained for his twist on Grenadian food.

Deciding to work for himself following stints in a hotel kitchen, the be-hatted Boots chalks up the daily changing tasting menu on a blackboard: pumpkin soup (smooth, with a hint of nutmeg); tettrie wrap (a fish-filled roti); TLC (tomato, lettuce and cucumber with a secret dressing reminiscent of Christmas pudding).

Mains were lambi (conch) and Borden pork with the aroma of lemon and spice. On my heaped plate were island staples – cocoo (cornmeal and coconut milk), dasheen and plantain. Pudding was the sweetest scoop of banana ice cream with brown cubes of guava jelly.

You won't find nightlife and casinos here – yet – but Grenada is one of the most unspoilt and safest islands in the Caribbean. And for this – and its food – it surely merits another gold medal.

■ **Spice Trip:** Grenada is on *More 4* on Sunday at 8pm.

DETAILS: GRENADA

Golden Caribbean has seven nights at Mount Cinnamon from £1,211pp room only, including return flights with Virgin Atlantic and private transfers.

■ goldencaribbean.co.uk
■ bootscuisine.com
■ Grenadagrenadines.com.



Marine dream: Eerily beautiful underwater sculptures off Moliniere Bay on the west coast; Carenage harbour; inset: nutmeg

