



SpiceIsland

If you like exploring by land as well as by sea,
Grenada ticks all the boxes

BY ERIC VOHR / PHOTOS BY MICHAELA URBAN

For years, I'd been wanting to visit Grenada. There are many things that fascinated me about this island: its rugged, mountainous interior, its rainforests and waterfalls, and the fact that it's less traveled than some other Caribbean sailing destinations. My photographer decided to blend some learning in with the fun, so she took a 10-day cruising course with LTD Sailing before we picked up our boat from Dream Yacht Charter.

There are so many options for sailing and anchoring in Grenada and the Grenadines, it's impossible to visit even a fraction of them. That being said, you'll likely want to visit Molinere Point where you can snorkel the Molinere Underwater Sculpture Park. Installed in 2006, this was the first of Jason deCaires Taylor's famed underwater sculpture gardens, of which there are now approximately 10 scattered across the world's oceans. The park has roughly 75 sculptures, most of which are life-sized stone men and women in natural poses, such as standing in a circle with hands clasped or sitting at a desk working.

Another spot around Grenada that we really enjoyed was Sandy Island. Just off the northeast corner of the main island, this provides a nice day anchorage with a wonderful white sand beach and the ruins of an old plantation-style villa to explore.

If you really want to go off the beaten path, there's a small island between Carriacou and Grenada called Ronde Island that is almost totally uninhabited, aside from a handful of fishermen. There's a sheltered overnight anchorage on the northern end of the western side of the island where you'll find a totally deserted beach you can have to yourself all day long, although it gets a little narrow at high tide.

The beach is also surrounded by a low but steep cliff. So, if you want to explore the island, you'll have to scramble up with the help of a fixed rope that you'll find dangling about half way down the beach. This leads to a network of unmarked trails. One of these eventually took us across the wild interior of the island, past a few small huts and down to the southern side of the island where there's a small fishing community and another nice beach. We liked Ronde Island so much, we spent a second day exploring some of the island's other footpaths, which took us to yet more wild and rugged beaches along the northern part of the island.

Just north of Ronde is Carriacou, an island I was eager to explore because of its long history of boatbuilding. In fact, this is one of the few remaining places in the Caribbean where locals regularly produce traditional wooden sailing and motor vessels, many of which are still used commercially.

While not far from Grenada, Carriacou has its own unique feel, identity and culture. Unlike some more popular tourist destinations, visitors seem more like guests than an overpowering force here. This is (in part) due to the lack of mass tourism amenities, like cruise ships, an international airport, mega-hotels and resorts. In short, Carriacou is the real deal, one of the few remaining places in the Caribbean that can claim that honor.

There are two great anchorages on the southwestern end of the island, Tyrell Bay and Hillsborough Bay. Tyrell is smaller, more laid-back and has one of Carriacou's best restaurants, The Slipway, at the southern end of the bay. Owned and operated by an American named Kate, it has



Grenada's mountainous interior makes for great hiking. Inset, from top: a friendly gecko; nutmeg is a major export; don't miss the underwater sculpture park

great food and a great vibe. The relaxed nature of this restaurant and bay were typified in the restaurant's dog, Baldo, who lay peacefully on the sand near our dinner table in doggy bliss during our entire meal.

While in Tyrell Bay, be sure to take a stroll along the beach. You'll find a few cute little waterfront cottages, a

grocery store, a number of bars and restaurants and a few vendors selling fruit and vegetables. If you're looking for a place to spend a few relaxing days, this is it. There is only one speed here, and it's chill.

Hillsborough, just around the corner and to the north, has a lot more shops and restaurants. All buses and taxis also terminate here. So, if you want to explore the island, you'll want to anchor in Hillsborough.

Much of the shipbuilding takes place in a village on the northeastern shore called Windward. This is a non-formal program, to say the least. Most of the boats are constructed in backyards, and the only way to

locate them is to ask the locals, which is exactly what we did. After being directed down a long dirt path along the seaside, we soon found an older gentleman and his helper hammering away in his backyard on one of the traditional wooden boats that this island is famous for.

As we walked onto his yard, the man stopped, came down the ladder, introduced himself as Anthony and invited us to tour his latest project. He explained that these boats are 100 percent wooden and made primarily from white cedar, mahogany, pitch pine and marine plywood. Anthony told us he was building this particular boat for his retirement plan, which involved using the boat to carry cargo between the islands. When he was finished, he would hold a huge party for his friends who would then help him drag the boat into the water (a local tradition).

After thanking Anthony for sharing his craft with us, we headed to the very northern tip of the island to visit the Petit Carenage Sanctuary, a wonderfully maintained collection of trails that winds through wetlands, mangroves and a beautiful pristine sand beach. The sanctuary is home to a number of migratory birds and

is also a place where sea turtles come to lay their eggs. This wonderful little park is surprisingly untraveled. In fact, we had the entire place almost all to ourselves, and while the beach was fairly narrow, it was wide enough for a towel and an afternoon siesta.

In addition our passion for sailing, we also like to squeeze in a few dives on our trips, and we'd heard that Carriacou has some of the best diving around. Deeper Dives runs a great operation here, so we joined them for a couple of incredible trips to Two Sisters and Whirlpool. These sites offer a variety of colorful coral, plenty of fish, unique rock formations and even a small wreck.

While exploring the attractions accessible at Hillsborough Bay, we kept our boat anchored at Sandy Island — a fantastic stretch of sand sprinkled with palm trees (not to be confused with Sandy Island off of Grenada). A man named Tim also had a beach BBQ operation there, and we spent a memorable evening dining on his amazing lobster by candlelight under swaying palm trees.

Of course, one would be remiss to visit this part of the world and not stop in at the Tobago Cays. While they are

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Clockwise from above: traditional boatbuilding on Carriacou; Sandy Island on Carriacou is picture-perfect; lobsters grilling on the beach; there's no shortage of beautiful anchorages; a fisherman's cottage in Windward, Carriacou

Clockwise from above: traditional boatbuilding on Carriacou; Sandy Island on Carriacou is picture-perfect; lobsters grilling on the beach; there's no shortage of beautiful anchorages; a fisherman's cottage in Windward, Carriacou

technically in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, they are within easy sailing distance of Grenada.

This small collection of islands is one of my favorite spots. Sailing inside the protection of its large horseshoe reef, one enters a magical kingdom where palms and sea grape trees gently sway over shimmering white-sand beaches, iguanas bask in the sun and playful green sea turtles stick their heads out of the water to greet you.

One of the traditions in the Tobago Cays is the beach BBQ with its signature dish of grilled, whole lobsters, and a local named “Romeo” is the Godfather of the Tobago Cays BBQ scene. I’ve met Romeo on a previous trip, and he’s an amazing host. He and a number of other locals grill on the beach of Petite Rameau Island and serve their guests at wooden tables under soft electric lights strung in the trees. Your choice of lobster, fish or chicken comes with rum punch, a selection of yummy local “ground provisions” and rice. There’s a moment when you’re cracking through your lobster, sipping rum punch and burying your toes in the cool soft sand when it’s hard to think of a better place to be.

One of the other great features of the Tobago Cays is the protected green turtle population off of Baradal Island. While snorkeling these waters you’ll see so many of these docile, graceful creatures feeding on sea grass you’ll lose count as you fill up your GoPro memory card.

While touring this part of the Grenadines, you’ll also want to stop at Mayreau Island, which has a couple of great anchorages at Saline and Salt Whistle bays. Saline has a more local feel, with families barbecuing, kids playing on the beach and fisherman drinking cold Hairoun (the local beer). Salt Whistle Bay, on the other hand, is more of a cruiser hang out, with yachty-themed beach bars and restaurants, like the “Last Bar Before The Jungle,” which serves a “kicking” rum punch.

While on Union Island, be sure and visit Happy Island near Clifton. It’s an “artificial” island (made entirely of discarded conch shells) that regularly hosts impromptu kite-surfing demonstrations at sunset. The show consists of locals showing off their high-flying acrobatics that they perform as close to the bar as possible. You sometimes literally have some kid hanging a few feet away above your head with saltwater dripping off his hair into your beer. The party and show went

on past dark, and my photographer managed to grab a “lift” to our boat on the back of one of the kite surfers, which made for the ride of her life and a pretty exciting end to the evening.

Returning to the Dream Yacht Charter base in Grenada and putting our boat back in its slip, we still had a few days left and set out to explore some of Grenada’s other attractions, like its lush, mountainous, rainforest interior dominated by Mount Saint Catherine, which soars 2,756ft above sea level—an area that is home to many species of rare hardwood trees, tropical birds and monkeys, as well as a number of refreshing rivers and waterfalls.

Most of the trails are poorly marked, so it’s a good idea to have a guide. One of the best is Simon Green, who runs a company called Hidden Treasures Hiking Tours. He is very knowledgeable about local flora and fauna, fun to spend the day with and also fully equipped. He even carries a climbing rope to get you through some of the steeper passages.

If you’re a beach person, Grand Anse is the largest and most famous with its beautiful, large, stretch of white sand. However, if you want some privacy, I recommend some of Grenada’s lesser-known spots. One of my favorites is Black Bay Beach, about half way up the island on the west side. The sand here is jet-black and sparkles like a bed of diamonds. Another nice spot is Levera Beach on the northeast corner of the island. If you’re there between March and August, you can see leatherback turtles crawling up the beach en masse to lay their eggs.

Other land-based attractions in Grenada include the Gouyave Nutmeg Processing Station (the only nutmeg processing operation that survived Hurricane Ivan in 2006) and the River Antoine Rum Distillery (the old-

est functioning water-propelled distillery in the Caribbean).

Grenada also has some great dive spots, including some amazing wrecks. One of these is the cruise ship *Bianca C*, which sank in 1961 in 165ft of water, about a mile from Grand Anse beach. A great operation called Aquanauts runs a well-equipped dive operation right out of True Blue Bay Resort on the southern tip of the island. The resort is a great place to stay on island, as it is pretty centrally located and has a great restaurant that regularly hosts local food events and live music. It also makes it real easy to head over to Aquanauts and sneak in a couple of dives.

In spite of our packed schedule, we did manage to have time to check out Grenada Sailing Week, a small but fun regatta. It was there that we met one of Grenada’s best-known sons, Danny Donelan, who owns a Carriacou-built schooner named *Savvy* that he charts out for skippered tours of the region.

Danny seems to know everyone and everything about the island, and was kind enough to introduce us to a couple of great local events. One of these was the Dinghy Concert at Petite Calivigny Bay, where a local band puts on daytime shows on a tiny barge with a bar and a dance floor. Yachts, dinghies and pretty much anything that floats gather round the barge and it turns into a big ol’ Grenadian party.

Danny also told us about the Work Boat Race, an annual race that coincides with Grenada Sailing Week, but consists solely of locally made wooden sailboats. The race is held on Grand Anse Beach, and Danny invited us to watch it with his friend Cal who skippers a wooden schooner named *Zemi* that his father built on Carriacou. Now that is what I call Grenadian hospitality. **S**

