

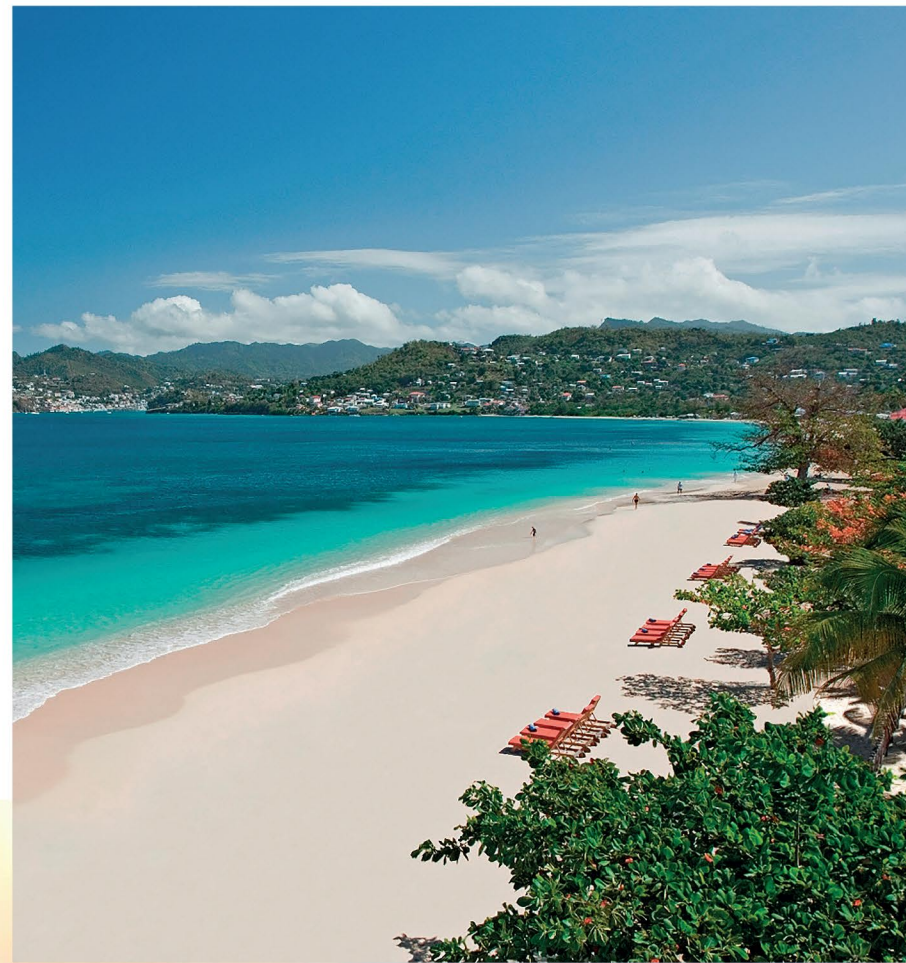
WHY GRENADA SHOULD BE ON YOUR 2024 GO-TO LIST

Life is sweet, and so is the air on the Caribbean island of Grenada, which has so much to offer travellers all year round. We pick out the highlights from January to December

Clockwise from below: St George's port; the view from Grenada's famous Welcome Stone; Coyaba Beach Resort sits on Grand Anse Beach; colourful corals



Words: Ally Wybrew



In Grenada, aka 'The Spice Island', pristine sands and hypnotic blue seas are a staple, as is a sensory backdrop of fragrant spices, rich rum, succulent chocolate and mind-blowing dive sites. In a Grenadian bar – such as Friday's in Calliste – you could be drinking an eye-watering 'Under the Counter' (aged rum infused with lemongrass, nutmeg and, quite possibly, a centipede) and snacking on fried jackfish and curried plantain.

What's more, with 2024 marking the 50th anniversary of Grenada's independence, more festivities than ever are taking place, making it the perfect time to discover this unassuming yet glorious isle.

SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND SARAKAS December-May

In 1974, Grenada gained independence from British rule, and the country is celebrating the 50 years in style. In the run up to the official anniversary on 7 February 2024, January is packed with festivities – an inviting proposition for those looking to dodge the post-Christmas blues.

This month is an ideal time to look seaward, where trimarans, superyachts and monohulls roll and yaw in the oceans around Grenada and its two smaller islands, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. The RORC Transatlantic Race, Grenada Sailing Week and the Viking Explorers 'Friendly' Rally transform Port Louis Marina into a nest of ivory masts and furled sails. Be there when participants clink glasses and wind down after days of competition off the sunny shores of the islands.

Then, also at the end of January, seafaring of a different kind is in action during the Spice Island Billfish Tournament, which sees professional anglers haul in sailfish and blue marlin to a supporting act of boat parades and mouthwatering food stalls.

As Easter approaches at the end of March, Grenada goes large. In addition to kite flying, family beach gatherings and saltfish consumption, Saraka food festivals abound. The name references the communal sharing of smoked food and sees locals gather to cook pork,

bluggoe bananas, dasheen and eggs in recognition of the blessings received from their ancestors. Listen for the conch shell blowing that announces the start of this thanksgiving period.

If you're captivated by Grenada's warm waters, January-April is a great time to go diving, as water temperatures usually settle at a balmy 26°C. In the 'wreck diving capital of the Caribbean', coves aren't only chock-full of coral-crusting vessels, but also replete with rays, dolphins, moray eels, turtles and sometimes even pilot and humpback whales. Add an artistic bent to your dive life by visiting Molinere, the world's first underwater sculpture park, which this year added 31 new installations to its collection.

With all the treasures of mainland Grenada, it's easy to forget about its bountiful neighbours. Just a 90-minute ferry ride away is Carriacou whose exuberant 2024 festivities aren't to be missed. In February, Kayak-Mas (Carriacou's answer to Grenada's Carnival) and, in April, the Maroon and String Band festival brings song and dance to all corners of the island, while later in the year the Carriacou Corn Festival welcomes a (frankly unbelievable) variety of grain-based meals to proceedings. Enjoy *coo-coo* (a polenta-style dish often flavoured with vegetables and seasoning), cornbread, *conkies* (corn blended with sweet potato and pumpkin), corn kebabs and much more. ●



A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

June–November

The second half of the year is a great time to explore Grenada’s rich foodie offerings. Home to five chocolate factories, the country’s output of smooth nutmeg, ginger and turmeric-infused cocoa bars is world famous. Belmont Estate has been producing chocolate from the bean for three centuries, and a tour here allows visitors to get ‘feet-on’ with the process. Shake off your sandals and help grind the beans underfoot, suck the fleshy white pulp from raw cocoa beans and absorb infinite facts in the process (did you know cocoa trees can grow to 25 feet tall?).

And no visit to Grenada is complete without a rum tasting. River Antoine is a local favourite – and for good reason. Firstly, it’s ‘burn-your-throat’ kind of strong (local bottles are at least 75 per cent ABV). Secondly, it’s not exported, making it truly exclusive. The secret sauce? River Antoine rum is still manufactured as it was when the distillery opened in 1785. Warped wooden funnels, concrete vats filled with frothing, fermenting sugarcane and a 200-year-old water wheel churn out this much-loved spirit. Take a bottle home to the rum lover in your life (a tourist-friendly 69 per cent ABV is available for flights) safe in the knowledge that they will never have tasted anything like it.

It’s never sensible to drink on an empty stomach, so fill yours with some of the Spice Isle’s unique flavours. Taste a bit of everything by signing up for a Spice Foodie Tour. From fresh, side-of-the-road coconut water and takeaway *buss up shut* (a layered roti served with curried meat or veg) to sweet potato puddings sold in a resident’s front yard, these all-day tours give visitors a solid introduction to Grenadian cuisine. What’s more, you’ll wend your way

across the island, often ending in stunning surrounds such as tumbling waterfalls (ideal for a refreshing dip in the rainy season heat).

Fantastic foodie experiences extend indoors, too. At Mount Cinnamon – a five-star hotel staggered across the hills abutting Grand Anse beach – guests can take a guided tour of the gardens then dig into its produce at a chef’s table. Think callaloo soup, tempura broccoli and pan-roasted shrimp.

This farm-to-table movement has reached beyond hotels to one of Grenada’s hidden hospitality gems: homesteads. At-home diners are blazing a trail in bringing authentic Grenadian eating experiences to guests. At Armadillo, in the heights of Mount Rodney, Swiss-born, half-Grenadian, Andrea Nyack and her husband Bernhard Huss create different dishes each week depending on what’s available that day. It’s all served at an eight-seater table on the veranda of their house. Out back, a two-acre garden works like a Mary Poppins’ bag of produce. Lemongrass, vanilla, tania root, black pepper, turmeric, nutmeg and soursop are just a small taste of the couple’s homegrown crop.

The highlight of the Grenadian year is Spicemas, a high-octane festival that runs throughout July and August. Its most spectacular event is Carnival, a week-long celebration of parades and parties. Here, visitors can witness the Grenadian Jab Jabs: dancing, oil-slicked men and women clad in devil horns and chains and grasping fish between their teeth in imitation of Jab Molassie, the ‘molasses devil’. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience, as is any trip to this magical Caribbean Isle.

For information on how to plan your trip to Grenada, visit puregrenada.com



Clockwise from top left: raw cocoa beans and their pods; dishes from Rhodes Restaurant at Calabash; Spicemas celebrations; Grenada has 19km of sandy coastline