

# Square Meal

AUTUMN 2011 £3.50

## LIFESTYLE

FEMALE  
CHEFS  
COOK  
UP A  
STORM

FRANCESCO  
MAZZEI

London is the best  
place for restaurants'

scarlett  
fever

*the seductive star talks men, Moët & Marilyn Monroe*

A LIFE LESS  
ORDINARY

Meet the City  
boys who gave  
it all up to  
make wine

WINTER  
WARMERS  
STAY SNUG IN  
A COSY PUB



★ PLUS THE LOUIS ROEDERER WINE LIST OF THE YEAR WINNERS

Lush vegetation, shimmering sand and the exotic scent of nutmeg are just a few of Grenada's many attractions, as **Betsey Wilkins** finds out

# sunshine and spice



MAIN PHOTO: VIEW FROM THE CARRIACOU JETTY. TOP ROW: MOUNT CINNAMON; FRESH LOBSTER; MOUNT CINNAMON HAS GREAT VIEWS OVER GRAND ANSE BEACH. BOTTOM ROW: SPICE ISLAND BEACH RESORT POOL; THE CARENAGE AREA OF THE CAPITAL, ST GEORGE'S; GINGER LILIES

Put a stick in the ground in Grenada and it'll start growing,' our guide Roger said of his improbably lush island home. Yes, it was probably an exaggeration, and yes, he'd probably said it hundreds of times before, but still, he had a point. The roadside vegetation alone – great clumps of spinachy callaloo leaves, ginger lilies, banana plants and tamarind trees – was worthy of its own spot at the Chelsea Flower Show; Grenada has, in fact, won nine gold medals there.

There's no denying that Grenada is a good-looking island, with handsome mountains, true-blue sky, cyan sea and shimmering pale sands. Villages cluster round bends in the road and over topographical humps, while the houses and churches of the capital, St George's, seem to cascade down the hillsides towards the harbour. And everywhere is that insistent, riotous greenery.

It's thanks to Grenada's fertile soil that the island grew rich and earned its fame as the Caribbean's Spice Island, supplying cinnamon, cloves, bay leaves, turmeric and above all, nutmeg and mace, to a world hungry for exotic flavours. Debating our options for an autumn Caribbean getaway, my husband and I had been seduced by Grenada's romantic-sounding nickname, the promise of history and fragrance, and the prospect of some seriously gorgeous beaches.

We wanted to learn something about the island first, though, and as Roger was helping us discover, much of Grenada's history is bound up with food. We'd driven away from the hotels and businesses of the south towards the less developed, rugged and

rainforested north-east. Here we found Belmont Estate, a historic plantation and thriving agritourism business. Planted in the 1600s as a coffee estate, it has since produced cotton and bananas and, until the devastating arrival of Hurricane Ivan in 2004, was one of the island's many nutmeg estates. Cocoa trees fared better than nutmeg in the storm, and this is now the estate's major crop – its cocoa goes into the award-winning organic dark chocolate made by the community-run Grenada Chocolate Company. We learned something of the process that takes cocoa

bean from tree to bar and rewarded our studiousness with some deliciously fruity-spicy chocolate.

Our history lesson continued as Roger took us on through sugar cane fields to River Antoine and its 19th-century, water-powered rum distillery. Medieval vats and a centuries-old process make for a

fearsome end product. 'In Grenada, we like our rum to have bite,' said Roger. He wasn't kidding – this eye-watering stuff is so strong that people aren't even allowed to take it on board a plane.

Grenada isn't a big island but it's got plenty to keep you from your sun lounger. Over the next few days, we plunged below sea level to explore the Underwater Sculpture Park; trekked through rainforest in the Grand Etang National Park; and dived into cool under-waterfall pools. In St George's, we dipped into the pint-sized National History Museum, haggled over spices in the market and learned to cook creamy, cheesy, spicy crab in the shell with extrovert chef Brian Benjamin at BB's Crabback.

Grenada dishes up some pretty fine dining, and during our

*Grenada grew rich supplying cinnamon, cloves, bay leaves, turmeric, nutmeg and mace to a world hungry for exotic flavours*



stay we spoiled ourselves with some smart dinners – at Gary Rhodes's restaurant at the Calabash Hotel (formal service and shrimp and callaloo tart); at Oliver's Restaurant in the Spice Island Beach Resort (impressively fancy food with a nod to local specialities); and at Le Phare Bleu hotel's Vastra Banken, a converted Swedish lighthouse ship serving contemporary Caribbean food with lashings of atmosphere.

## HOT STUFF

We also wanted to sample the authentic Caribbean in a shorts and bare feet kind of way. So one day we strolled the two-mile length of Grand Anse beach to lunch on lambie (conch) calypso at Coconut Beach restaurant, toes buried in the sand under the shade of a thatched parasol. Another day we dashed through a low-season downpour along St George's harbour front to reach the Hot Spot Roti Shop. Rotis, the curry-stuffed flatbreads introduced to Grenada by 19th-century indentured Indian plantation-labourers, have become something of an island speciality. Our survey of three taxi drivers, a waiter and two

## *Grenada's roadside vegetation alone is worthy of its own spot at the Chelsea Flower Show*

shopkeepers had revealed the Hot Spot to be the source of the island's finest. Sitting at a simple Formica table, lips tingling from the spicy goat stew, we agreed they were probably right.

For Grenadian food at its laidback finest, though, we were told to go to Gouyave, a fishing town half an hour up the west coast from St George's, for Fish Friday. We popped into the town's nutmeg processing plant (surely the world's finest-smelling factory tour), watched the world come and go over a couple of livers in Aaron Ferreira's rum shop, then wandered out to join the crowds. Dozens of stalls were grilling, baking, frying and steaming their seafood specials, to a backdrop of competing sound systems. We picked out shrimp kebabs, crab claws in callaloo and chunky breadfruit chips, dowsed the lot in hot pepper sauce and quenched the flames with ice-cold Carib beers.

We were unwinding nicely, but we needed to do the Caribbean relaxation thing properly, so we took our lead from the locals and boarded a ferry. A couple of hours away, Carriacou is Grenada's even smaller, sleepier sister island. Here, our day was filled only with palm trees, soft sand, a good book and the odd cooling swim. Sunny, idyllic peace – I could have stayed for months. Seems it's not just the plants here that find it easy to put down roots...

FROM LEFT: GRENADA'S LUSH VEGETATION; DISH BY GARY RHODES AT THE CALABASH HOTEL; THE ISLAND'S BLUE SEA

## FACT FILE



### GETTING THERE

#### British Airways

(ba.com) flies twice weekly to Grenada from the newly refurbished Gatwick North Terminal, from £539 return.



### WHERE TO STAY

#### • Spice Island Beach

**Resort** has luxuriously appointed villas, suites and rooms on Grand Anse Beach, and is home to fine dining at Oliver's Restaurant. Oceanview suite from £293.50pp per night, fully inclusive. [spicebeachresort.com](http://spicebeachresort.com)

• **Mount Cinnamon** is Peter de Savary's Grenadian outpost (he revitalised the island's marina, too) – its whitewashed buildings stack up on the hill with colourful decor and great views over Grand Anse Beach. Double rooms from £191pp per night (call 01245 459906 quoting 'Square Meal' for rates from £152pp per night.) [mountcinnamongrenada.com](http://mountcinnamongrenada.com)

• **Calabash Hotel** is a collection of 30 suites, each with their own whirlpool bath, set in tropical gardens, with a health and beauty spa overlooking the beach. There's also a fine dining restaurant set up by our very own Gary Rhodes. West Side Suite from £330pp per night, fully inclusive. [calabashhotel.com](http://calabashhotel.com)



### WHERE TO EAT

#### • Rhodes Restaurant:

Gary Rhodes's Caribbean place at The Calabash Hotel

offers smart dining in a breezy garden setting. [calabashhotel.com](http://calabashhotel.com)

• **Vastra Banken:** enjoy modern, Caribbean-focused food aboard this converted lighthouse ship moored at Le Phare Bleu, a beachside hotel offering apartments and villas. [lepharebleu.com](http://lepharebleu.com)

• **Coconut Beach:** French Creole specialities take advantage of all local seafood; relaxed diners take advantage of the beachside dining. [coconutbeachgrenada.com](http://coconutbeachgrenada.com)

• **Hot Spot Roti Shop:** get back to basics with the island's best curry-filled rotis at this cheap and super-cheerful restaurant in the capital. The Carenage, St George's; 001 473 440 6438

• **BB's Crabback:** with a waterside spot beneath St George's fort, this laidback restaurant is popular with visitors arriving by yacht and ferry, and does wonders with seafood and Grenadian specialities. [bbscrabback.co.uk](http://bbscrabback.co.uk)



### FIND OUT MORE

For more information on Grenada, Carriacou and little sister island Petite Martinique, see the tourist board website, [grenadagrenadines.com](http://grenadagrenadines.com) All of the hotels mentioned can be booked by visiting the following website: [ba.com/grenada](http://ba.com/grenada)