

traveller

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A photograph of two skiers on a snowy mountain peak. The skier on the left is standing upright, wearing a light blue and red jacket and dark pants. The skier on the right is in a crouched position, wearing a red jacket and dark pants. The background features a range of snow-capped mountains under a clear blue sky with a bright sun in the center, creating a starburst effect. The foreground is a smooth, snow-covered slope.

Make tracks

Get set for some late-season snow

Caribbean

Seduced by the fragrance of Grenada

The pace is slow on this spice island, but you can still pack a lot into a day, says **Cass Chapman**

If you're running late, you're moving too fast." So instructs my Grenadian tour guide, Mandoo Seales. An imposing ex-naval officer, he now executes daily tours of the "Island of Spice", as the Caribbean island of Grenada is known. His rapid-fire delivery is the antithesis of the laid-back lifestyle he preaches. Clearly in love with the place, he talks hurriedly of how important tourism has become since the island was devastated by Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

Most of Grenada's infrastructure has since been repaired; the waters are today calm and tranquil. Ivan left more than half of the islanders homeless, but they have bounced back with gusto. This is mostly due to the determination of the Grenadians, and partly due to the British entrepreneur turned Grenadian resident, Peter de Savary. He is considered a local, having bought properties across the island (as well as others the

destroyed 80 per cent of the crop, though the exotic fragrance is still part of island life.

Once picked, the nuts are placed in water: if they sink, they are dried and used for spice; if they float, they are considered imperfect and used instead for soap and mosquito repellent. In Gouyave the spice is dried on rows of cedar wood racks.

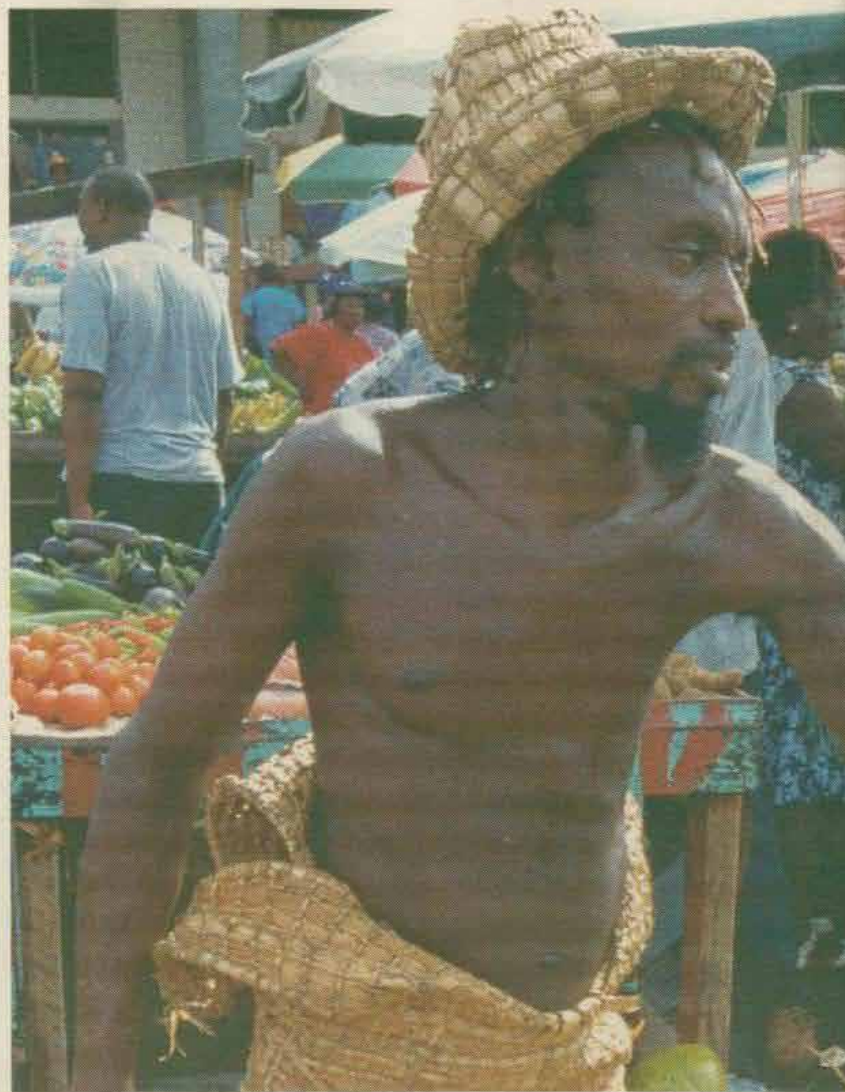
The island is slowly replenishing its stock but the government estimates it will take 10 years to reach the pre-hurricane production levels. The lightly scented oil, also produced on site here, is the only thing that seems to prevent the mosquitoes from attacking me at night.

A short drive from Gouyave is colonial Mount Edgecombe, the stunning weekend home of Peter

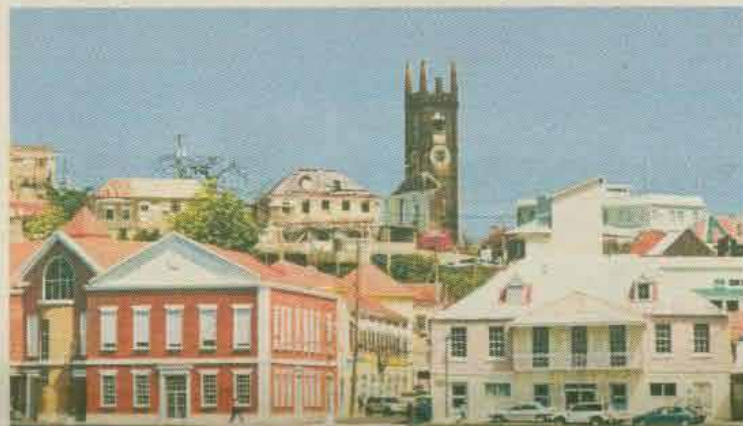
de Savary – also available for weddings and parties at \$2,500 (£1,670) a day. It's a glorious stop for lunch, with sweeping porches enveloping a towering mansion perched high on a cliff edge. The infinity pool is a seductive afternoon suntrap; the air is soaked with the scent of bougainvillea, which drapes in every stairwell and on every windowsill.

Back in the car, Mandoo whisks me onwards to the Belmonte estate, a cocoa plantation that emerges from nowhere as we slowly navigate a dusty, rocky track. Today, this vast plantation produces luscious Grenadian chocolate and is also a tribute to the island's colonial history. There's a clapboard museum inside a small outhouse filled with 19th-century furniture, and a series of haunting narratives by African slaves brought by force to the island.

Any day of the week you can take a tour of the estate. Visitors are invited to participate in some of the chocolate production. I



A man sells coconuts at the market St George's, Grenada's colonial-era capital, below. The Mount Cinnamon hotel, inset left ALAMY



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Back in Grenada, de Savary is putting the finishing touches to Port Louis, a maritime resort which he hopes will become a premier sailing hub in the West Indies. Post-Ivan, Grenadians have embraced tourism; de Savary is respected for encouraging it.

In a part of the world known – even celebrated – for taking its time, my perhaps unrealistic goal is to take in as much as possible of the island in a single day. It should be possible. After all, Grenada is just 21 miles long, about the size of the Isle of Wight, and with a population of 110,000. Mandoo's hyperactivity and enthusiasm for guidance will be vital in my quest.

After braving the winding, climbing coastal roads, the first stop on our drive is Gouyave, a small town on the west coast – and in particular the nutmeg factory here.

Before Hurricane Ivan, nutmeg was Grenada's key export (not counting tourism). The hurricane

destroyed 80 per cent of the crop, though the exotic fragrance is still part of island life.

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From this taste of colonial Grenada we head around the south-west corner of the island for a touch of the tropical. The Bay Botanical Garden is a stunning 20-acre forest of ferns (and nutmeg, of course). Set in St Paul's, a small suburb of the island's capital, St George's, it is a temple to Grenada's natural flora and fauna.

A gravel pathway leads visitors up a tiny road canopied with gigantic, fan-shaped palm trees. From a small wooden welcome hut at the path's end, a man called Albert St Bernard takes visitors through gardens which feel more like jungle. He has worked on the property for decades and tells me that his flowers won an award at the Chelsea Flower Show when he ventured to London some years back.

The space is breathtaking, a natural pause on our hectic route around the island. Everything is



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calm and serene; bird song and wind-blown palms are the only sounds to break the silence.

Then onwards, to the hubbub of St George's, 15 minutes' drive to the north. I'm staying at the Mount Cinnamon hotel, which is on the outskirts of town. It is also owned by Peter de Savary (the restaurant is called Savvy's).

Stark citrus interiors splash against the bright white villa exteriors, each zig-zagging along the side of a hill overlooking St George's and its bay below. Each villa is private, with a large living space that sits adjacent to a kitchen. The villas are large enough to feel like private apartments rather than boxy hotel rooms, and each has maid service. There is a beautiful pool and a small but delightful spa.

St George's is a tiny gem of a place. Despite its capital-city status, it seems more reminiscent of a Cornish fishing village than a me-

tropolis. Craft shops pepper crescent-shaped streets that fringe the blue waters of the bay; fisherman crowd the waters with tiny boats. Locals rave about the cuisine at island favourites such as Aquarium (which offers fresh whole fish and steaks) and LaLuna (set on a stunning private beach serving up Italian food and imported chianti). But today is "Fish Friday", so I head back to Gouyave, in search of authentic Caribbean cuisine.

Held each week, Fish Friday draws locals from every corner of the island. The streets are packed with stalls and makeshift kitchen equipment, all of which is overseen by Grenadian women who sell ice-cold Carib beer, thick fried wedges of mahi mahi and freshly squeezed lime juice (with daunting amounts of added sugar). Music thumps from nearby shops, and tourists flock to vendors selling grilled whole lobsters from sidewalk stands.