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As you read this, I'll be warming up for the biggest game of my life. I'll be in Perth, Western Australia, ready to face the Springboks— a million miles away from the idyllic beaches of Grenada.

After a long and arduous season, I felt I deserved a short break before preparations for the Rugby World Cup began. I also had a niggling thigh injury to sort out with some deep rest and tropical heat. It was imperative that I came back to the England camp feeling fully refreshed and ready for the ultimate

challenge— six weeks of international competition, assuming we make it to the final.

Because my girlfriend, Joanne, is a teacher, we waited for the schools to break up before packing our suitcases (with the appropriate ratio of bikinis to boxer shorts) and heading for Grenada. It was pitch dark when we arrived at the Spice Island Beach Resort, on the south-west coast, perched closer to the clear waters of the Caribbean than the length of a Steve Thompson throw-in. The soothing sound of tree frogs and crickets greeted us.

Next day the greeting came from Kennedy, our tour guide from the

Grenada Board of Tourism. "I hear you play rugby," he said. "Is that the sport where you ride horses and hit a ball with a stick?"

With this point clarified, we drove through the harbour of the capital, St George's, with its sprawling fruit and vegetable markets and stalls selling everything from green coconuts and freshly butchered goat to the morning's catch of parrotfish; red snapper and tuna. It was here, incongruously, that we had our first lesson in the island's turbulent history.

Though I vaguely remembered the US invasion of the early 1980s, I misunderstood the background to it. In 1979, the prime minister Eric Gairy (renowned for his thuggish private army, the Mongoose Gang) was ousted in a coup led by Maurice Bishop of the neo-Marxist New Jewel Movement. Then, in 1983, Bishop was executed in an uprising led by Bernard Coard, his left-wing minister of finance.

This political instability was used by President Reagan as a pretext for sending in the US Marines, who landed at Point Salines and secured the airfield and the university campus. An interim advisory council was put in place until democratic elections were held the following year.

As our tour continued, no hint remained of the island's murderous past. It couldn't have been more tranquil. The tropical rainforests are home to some magical flora and fauna as well as two natural waterfalls— Concord and Seven Sisters— each with its own tiny eco-system. Joanne couldn't resist dipping her toe in the crystal-clear water.

Returning via the capital, we visited the Queen's Park National Stadium. Sport is increasingly important to Grenada— and here, a cricket revival is under way. With a coaching programme, four turf nets, two artificial ones and just about every other first-class training facility you can imagine, the island looks likely to produce the next Curtly Ambrose.

With the clock ticking away and Kennedy sounding the horn, our whistlestop tour

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