

Variety of the Isle of Spice

Jill Hartley offers an insider's guide to making the most of Grenada

land at Grenada's Pointe Salines airport after a downpour and the hot, moist air gives you a top-toe aromatherapy treatment. That scent is of nutmeg – the essence of this tiny country (21 miles by 12 that's known as the Isle of Spice).

Small it might be, but it's big enough for Mick Jagger and Bill Gates, two regulars, to wander about unbothered and, often, unrecognized. The island's greatest charm lies in its essence: there are no shopping malls, no hamburger joints, no heritage trails. Grenada has its share of stunning beaches, but what makes it spectacular is the dense tropical rainforest of its mountainous interior. Head inland and within an hour you can be swimming under a waterfall or enjoying a strenuous hike.

What to see

Stop for spice baskets at the market in the capital, St George's, justly described as the prettiest town in the Caribbean.

Betty Mascoff's House at Morne Fenille (001 473 442 9330), an old plantation house with fascinating family memorabilia and a health Robinson bathrock. Good for lunch – coucou soup and pepper-pork stew.

Douglasdon Spice Estate near Gouyave on the east coast. Little changed since the 1800s when workers danced on the cocoa beans to the sound of violins, turning them over with their feet to help them dry evenly.

Swimming in Concord Falls and hiking in the Grand Tangi Forest in search of rarer monkeys and elusive parrots. Pea's

Mystique Tours (001 473 440 161, www.grenadaexplorer.com) offers island safaris to the falls and Douglasdon, from 197 to two. Adventure Jeep Tours (001 473



444 5307, www.grenadajeep.com) offers

rainforest treks and snorkelling from secluded beaches, about £105 per person.

Belmont Estate near Grenville (001 473 442 9524, www.belmontestate.net), a 300-year-old former sugar plantation that now produces organic chocolate using solar power. Observe the progression from raw cocoa bean to silky dark bars and sample cocoa tea in the charming garden.

Bathway Bay, a gem of a white-sand beach in the far north-east with a natural bathing lagoon. Friendly vendors sell barbecued chicken for a picnic under the trees.

Where to eat

The **Nutmeg Cafe** on the Carriacou, St George's, is the perfect spot for an authentic lunch of roti (floury-stuffed parcels) followed by nutmeg ice cream.



On call: policemen in St George's

Picture: Getty

Coconuts (001 473 444 4644), at the town end of Grand Anse Beach, is an island institution. Book a table on the beach (best by moonlight when the phosphorescent water laps up to your toes).

La Belle Creole at Blue Herons Cottage Hotel (001 473 444 4316), behind Spice Island, serves West Indian food with a gourmet twist: lobster mousse, green banana soup and Creole veal roll.

Everyone's talking about the **Rhodes Restaurant** at the Calabash Hotel (001 473 444 4334), which opens next month. Gary Rhodes, who owns a villa on the island, will have his characteristic imprint on the menu. Look out for his Caribbean take on steak and kidney pie.

Where to stay

For two, for a week in January 2004/ May 2004. They are for room only and include return flights, unless stated otherwise.

Where to stay

Prices are per person sharing a room

The Calabash (see above) has a loyal clientele. Including half the House of Lords, who return for the food and the privacy of well-spaced rooms with a patio or balcony overlooking tropical gardens. £1,655/£1,240 b & b in a whirlpool suite. Elegant Resorts (01244 897999, www.elegantresorts.co.uk).

Just round the bay, **La Luna**, a retreat of a dozen hillside cottages for two, attracts the throngs: sand-springs set. Repeat guests include Jerry Hall, Frank Sinatra and Dave Stewart. £2,454/£1,746, JTC Classics (01244 355527, www.jtcclassics.co.uk).

Bel Air Plantation, opening this winter, is a five-star property with 24 villas overlooking St David's Harbour. Rooms are

in pretty cottages with verandas and kitchens. £1,749/£1,554 for two sharing a one-bedroom villa. Harlequin Worldwide (01708 650300, www.harlequinworldwide.com).

La Source, on a quiet powder-sand beach, is the pick of the island's few all-inclusives, best known for its spa treatments and classes, which come as part of the package. £1,615/£1,505. Sovereign Holidays (08710 407 0770, www.sovereignholidays.com).

Petit Batacay is a stylish beachfront inn of five palm-thatched cottages with mahogany four-posters on a dreamscape beach. The barnum, Ernest, is renowned for his rum punches. £235/£610. Just Grenada (01373 814214, www.justgrenada.co.uk).

Further information

Grenada Board of Tourism (020 7771 7016, www.grenadaboard.com).