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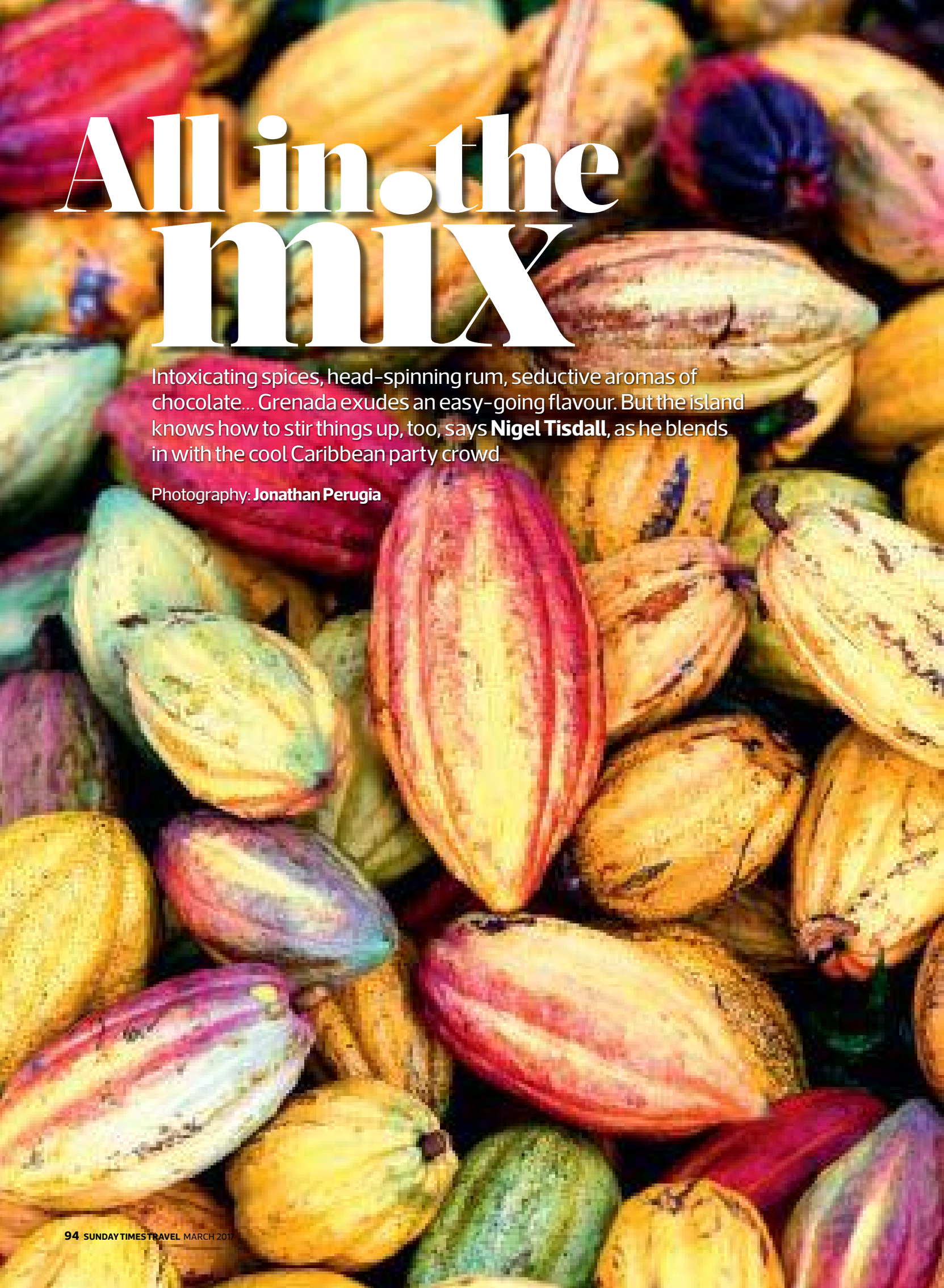
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# FAQs

We answer your **64** burning questions

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# All in the mix

Intoxicating spices, head-spinning rum, seductive aromas of chocolate... Grenada exudes an easy-going flavour. But the island knows how to stir things up, too, says **Nigel Tisdall**, as he blends in with the cool Caribbean party crowd

Photography: **Jonathan Perugia**

## GRENADA

Sweet and good: opposite, cocoa pods at Grenada's Chocolate Company. This page, the island's stunning northwest coastline





**i**f the Caribbean is famous for its slow, laid-back lifestyle, why is it so good at producing extremely fast people? Jamaica's Usain Bolt is the obvious example, but even little ol' Grenada, just 12 degrees north of the Equator, has its pace-setters. F1 ace Lewis Hamilton has roots here, while the ramshackle fishing village of Gouyave gained a second unofficial name – 'Kirani Town' – when local boy Kirani James

struck gold in the 400m at London's 2012 Olympics.

There's clearly an abundance of energy on this island, as you'll notice if you hop aboard one of the dollar-a-ride minibuses that tear around its twisting highways. Driven to a pounding soca beat, emblazoned with flamboyant names (ON DE MOVE, I AINT DY'N), they travel at an outrageous speed and are not short of incident. The first time I take one, it gets diverted to a police station, where the young conductor is hauled out and given a clip round the ear, apparently for non-payment of fines...

Grenada is refreshingly free of the mega-resorts, casinos and 'Luxury for \$10' shops that blight other Caribbean islands. It is dramatic, rising hundreds of metres to a mountainous core, and blessed, in the southwest, with the finest sands, as well as St George's,

the capital, a town ever so picturesquely falling apart. Be sure to buckle up for the intoxicating drive, all intense and uplifting colours deluging the senses. One moment you're enveloped in lush forest greens, the next you round a corner and behold the brilliant blues of sea and sky. What's more, the deeper you explore, the more it feels as if the clock is being turned back.

First stop on my first day? 1983... Out on the wild Atlantic coast I find the site of Grenada's former airport, Pearls, where the runway is now used for drag-racing. But looking closer, you can spot them: the vine-entwined carcasses of two planes, Russian and Cuban, destroyed in the early '80s, when US forces invaded to end a four-year Marxist-Leninist revolutionary phase that turned sour. Violent coups... US Navy Seals dropping from the skies... Grenada is so much more than a sleepy Caribbean cliché.

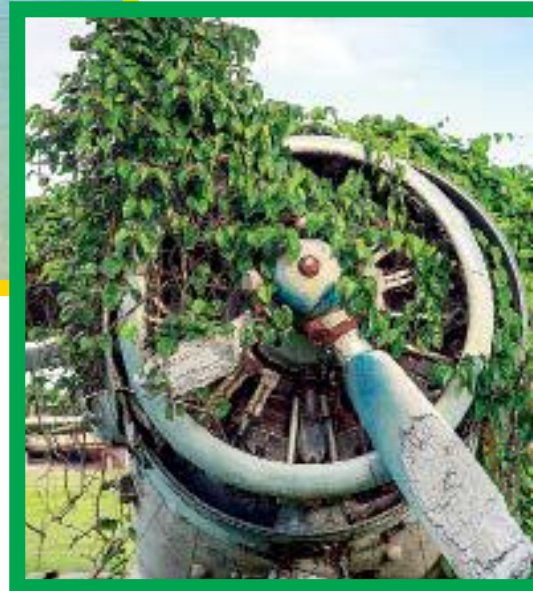
Later, in Gouyave village, another three decades fall away at the Nutmeg Processing Station, a wooden building by the sea, apparently unchanged since it opened in 1952. Headscarved ladies sit clustered around the sorting racks, while others stencil sacks of the lucrative spice, bound for Hamburg, Toronto or Brazil. Mace, which covers the kernel, is itself profitable and exported once it's been dried and graded. There's an admission charge (81p) and a gift shop that leaves you well and truly nutmegged.

Next morning, decades unravel to centuries at the Belmont Estate, up in the rainforested hills of St Patrick, ➤

Red sky at night: the beach at Hillsborough on the tiny island of Carriacou, where Grenadians go to chill. Opposite, fish seller in Gouyave; chocolate-roasted chicken as served at the Belmont Estate; Off D Hook on Carriacou's Paradise Beach; rum-tasting at the Rumboat Retreat; Paradise Beach; the harbour at Grenada's capital St George's







Bay watch: clockwise from top left, wi-fi signs at Tyrell Bay; tiny bar in Gouyave serving the local beer; fine dining at the Belmont Estate; ladies at work at the Nutmeg Processing Station in Gouyave; Grand Anse Beach; remains of a Russian plane at the former airport, Pearls; Scotch Bonnet chilli truffles at Belmont Estate; painting of Olympic gold sprinter, Kirani James, in Gouyave village; liming at Hillsborough on Carriacou

as I wind back to the days of plantations and the stain of slavery. Coffee, sugar cane, cotton, cocoa, nutmeg, bananas – all have been grown on its fertile slopes. Founded in the late 1600s, today it's home to an excellent restaurant serving spice-laced dishes, and it's impossible to leave without a few bars of Salty-Licious from the Grenada Chocolate Company, which champions the 'tree to bar' philosophy, where organic chocolate is produced on a small scale from cocoa grown on-site.

Meanwhile, over at the River Antoine distillery, they're making fiery rums like it was still 1785. Here, a mighty water-driven wheel, stamped 'G Fletcher of London & Derby', resolutely crushes locally grown sugar cane, while wood fires heat huge cast-iron pots and copper stills. You feel drunk just breathing the air – and the tableau of sweating labourers, blazing fires, wandering goats and huge stacks of *bagasse* (leftover cane) is like a fantastic Hieronymus Bosch painting. One of the rums for sale is so strong – 75% ABV – you're not allowed to take it on a plane. 'That's like rum concentrate,' explains Lisette Davis, who used to be an optician in Shepherd's Bush, but is now a 'West London returnee' who gives expert tours and talks at her Rumboat Retreat bar, near Gouyave. Spending the afternoon sipping the raw, un-aged, single-source spirit feels again like time travel as I edge slowly closer to the original rumbullion produced in the Caribbean 350 years ago.

The rum has me ready to party. Luckily, Grenadians – unlike their nostalgia-rinsed foreign guests – are mad for the joys of the 21st century. Which takes me this evening to the Pure Grenada Music Festival, an annual extravaganza of concerts known for big names of the Joss Stone, Steel Pulse and Estelle order, as well as local-band nights – these are a real blast, as we discover, having snapped up tickets for one of the events in Port Louis. Everyone's astonished to find the acts starting on time. Everyone also knows the lyrics, went to church with the lead singer, and remembers the wild times at last summer's Spicemas carnival.

Up on stage, homegrown performers, including Ajamu, Keturah George and the calypso maestro Scholar, are by turns slick, sexy and witty, while two brothers, Luni Spark and Electrify, leap around to a frenetic soca that's a workout just to watch. 'The music here's even faster than in Trinidad,' yells Rootsman Kelly, a farmer by day and performer by night. Dressed like a slimline Fidel Castro, Kelly puts Grenada's upbeat tempo down to its tradition of jab-jab – a high-intensity drum-based music originating in West Africa that gets its name from *diable*, the French for 'devil'. The star of the night, Mr Killa, in a white hoodie and Ray-Bans, is clearly in touch with his wicked side. If I tell you his hits have titles like 'Panty Dropper', 'Cock It Up' and 'Pump up the Pipe', you'll understand why he makes such a raw and electrifying finale as he jumps into the frenzied crowd.

For the next couple of days I need a lie-down, and where do Grenadians go when they want a proper break from their frenetic home island? Carriacou, its little sister, 30km to the northeast: the ➤



You feel drunk just breathing the air – and the tableau of sweating labourers is straight out of a fantastic painting by Bosch



Smile, you're on camera: chef serving up grilled lobster at the Mermaid Beach Hotel's Callaloo restaurant. Opposite, Grenada knows how to party; the Grenadian flag, cocktail style at the Mermaid Beach Hotel

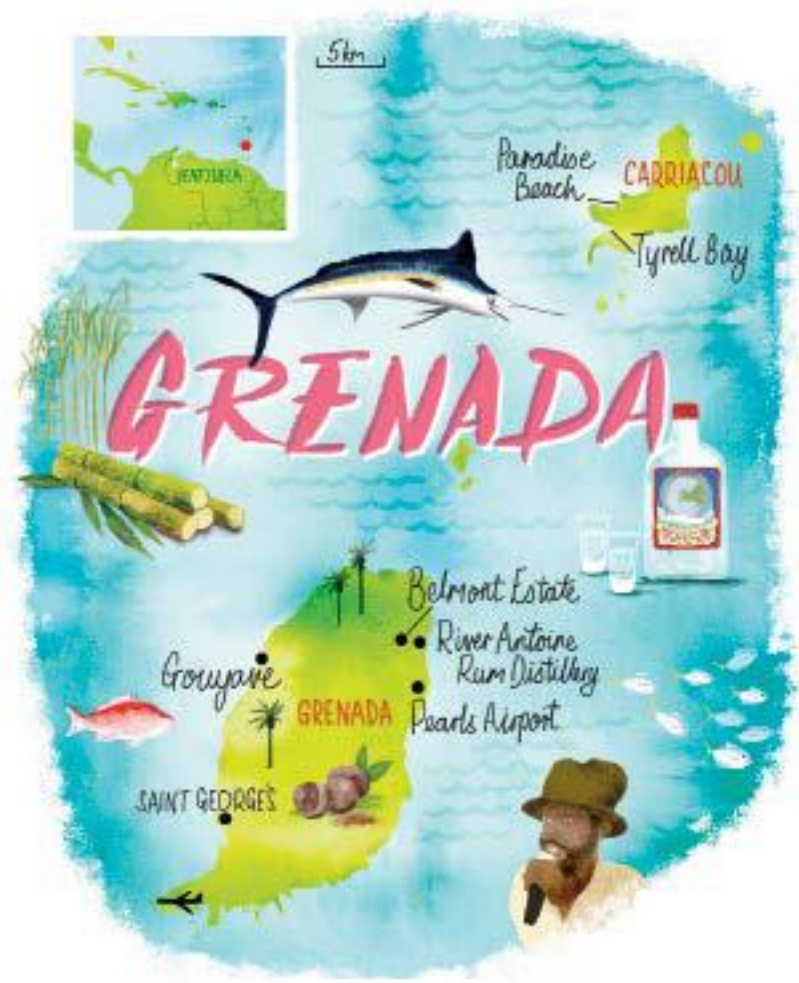


largest and southernmost island in the Grenadines chain of beachy hideaways. You can get there on a 90-minute ferry service from St George's, or fly in 20 minutes in a nine-seater turbo-prop plane, with terrific views of Grenada's ragged east coast. I can tell things will be different there when the check-in staff issue hand-written airline tickets (and as I prepare to fly back from the island's tiny Lauriston airport two days later, the security guard has her new-born baby sitting in a buggy next to the metal-detecting screen. Instead of shoes off and a brusque pat-down, here, it's all about homely congratulations and a smile for the wee one). Low-lying, drier and (at 34sq km) smaller than Grenada, Carriacou is little more than a sprinkling of villas, cottages and guesthouses, as well as the three-star Mermaid Beach Hotel in the heart of the capital, Hillsborough, which started life as a tavern in 1958, but recently re-opened as a boutique getaway. Set on the sands with a sunset view across to craggy Union Island, it's a friendly, straightforward place with a cheery chef in a Ronaldo shirt who cooks up local dishes such as pumpkin and callaloo soup and grilled marlin. There are several more rum bars and restaurants on the main

street, along with stalls selling barbecued chicken where they slap the sauce on with a paintbrush. What do people do here? 'We used to send cows, pigs and chickens to Grenada,' a resident explains. 'But now we just export the love of the people.' Relax, in other words. It's worth exploring by hire car or taxi – to admire the views over the east coast to Grenada's third island, Petite Martinique. Find time, too, to visit the minuscule Carriacou Museum, housed in an old cotton ginny. Among its exhibits are the naïve paintings of the late Canute Calliste, whose touching scenes of islanders – watching the whales that pass by in January, flying kites at Easter, and dancing codreals (quadrilles) – feel like a swansong for the old ways of the Caribbean. After that, the action extends to snorkelling on Sandy Island, joining the yachties partying at Tyrell Bay, or heading down to Joan's, a simple shack beside the aptly named Paradise Beach. Decked out in orange and purple with a string of fairy lights, its rum punch looks like pink mouthwash, while lunch is freshly caught crevalle jack fish, served with a mountain of sweet potatoes, okra, breadfruit, rice and peas. As the drinks and reggae beats kick in, it seems the ideal place for me to lie back in the sunshine and – finally – take things real slow. ■



ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY



## Get Me There

map: Scott Jessop

### Go independent

**BA** (ba.com) flies from Gatwick to Grenada once a week, from £479 return. **Virgin Atlantic** (virgin-atlantic.com) flies via St Lucia from Gatwick twice weekly, also from £479.

### Where to stay

On the south coast, five-star **Calabash Luxury Boutique Hotel & Spa** (00 1473 444 4334, calabashhotel.com; doubles from £387, B&B) has 30 suites and a Gary Rhodes restaurant set in tropical gardens with a sheltered beach. Four-star **Mount Cinnamon Resort & Beach Club** (00 1473 439 4400, mountcinnamongrenadahotel.com; doubles from £405, B&B) overlooks the island's best beach at Grande Anse. **Rumboat Retreat** (00 1473 437 1726, rumboatretreat.com; doubles from £81, B&B) has simple rooms in a hillside property near Gouyave. On Carriacou, **Mermaid Beach Hotel** (00 1473 443 8286, mermaidhotelcarriacou.com; from £87, room only) has 22 contemporary rooms.

### Get around

A half-day tour by taxi costs £81 for up to four people, excluding admission charges and tip. **Caribbean Horizons** (00 1473 444 1555, caribbeanhorizons.com) rents cars from £61 a day. **SVG Air** (svgair.com) flies to Carriacou, from £89 return. **Osprey Lines** (osprey lines.com) runs ferries from £48 return.

### Go packaged

**Motmot Travel** (01327 359622, motmottravel.com) has a seven-day trip with five nights at Mount Cinnamon (B&B) and two at Mermaid Beach (room only), from £2,245pp, including flights from Gatwick and transfers. Or try **Elegant Resorts** (01244 897516, elegantresorts.co.uk): seven nights in a five-star from £2,285pp, B&B, flying from Gatwick.

### Further information

Contact **Grenada Tourism** (020 8328 0644, puregrenada.com). The **Pure Grenada Music Festival** (grenadamusicfestival.com) runs May 5-7 in 2017. Footprint's **Grenada, St Vincent & the Grenadines** (£8.99) covers the islands.