

## Getting to know Grenada, 35 years after the U.S. invasion



Beach lovers can find both white- and black-sand beaches rimming the rocky coastline of Grenada.

Katherine Rodeghier/for the Chicago Tribune



Katherine Rodeghier/for the Chicago

An array of spices is offered for sale at the market in St. George's, capital of Grenada, "The Spice Island."



Katherine Rodeghier/for the Chicago

Workers at Dougalston Estate walk through beds of cocoa beans, shuffling their feet to turn and aerate them.



Katherine Rodeghier/for the Chicago

Nutmeg is the “black gold” of Grenada, which produces 20 percent of the world’s supply. Visitors see bags of raw nutmeg on tours of a processing cooperative.



Katherine Rodeghier/for the Chicago

At the Dougalston Estate spice plantation, guides crack open nutmeg pods to reveal the nut inside wrapped in red plant material that becomes processed as mace.



Katherine Rodeghier/for the Chicago

The first of three tiers of Concord Falls plunges over black volcanic rock.



Grenada Tourism Authority

Grand Anse beach often is ranked among the best in the Caribbean.



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Lake Etang in Grand Etang National Park fills the crater of an extinct volcano.



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Luxury resorts such as Laluna line the coastline of Grenada located in the Caribbean's Lesser Antilles.

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## **Katherine Rodeghier** Chicago Tribune

Where?

That question lingered on the lips of Americans in October 1983 when news broke that President [Ronald Reagan](#) had sent U.S. troops to invade this tiny Caribbean nation. Grenada, population 110,000, didn't register on the radar of many folks, and certainly not as enemy territory.

By Christmas, the conflict had ended and peace was restored. Now, 35 years after Grenada grabbed headlines, more Americans are getting to know it. Overnight visits by U.S. residents increased 18 percent in the first half of 2018 over the same period last year, according to tourism officials, and the number of cruise passengers rose more than 26 percent.

Whether they come for day trips on cruise shore excursions or vacations at luxury resorts, visitors stroll some of the Caribbean's best beaches, tour plantations and explore tropical rainforests laced with lakes and waterfalls.

### **'Spice Island'**

Twenty percent of the world's nutmeg grows in Grenada, but this "black gold" isn't the only flavor found here. Long known as "The Spice Island," it also supplies home pantries with cinnamon, allspice, turmeric, mace and bay leaves. Spice plantations open their doors to visitors to show how it's done.

At Dougaldston Estate, guides crack open nutmeg pods to reveal a seed inside laced in red, affectionately known as the "lady in the boat with the red petticoat." The red covering becomes processed as mace. The nutmeg seed is used for flavoring, in medicine and, in some parts of the

world, as a natural aphrodisiac. Inside a wooden shed, benches hold an array of other bits of plant material — leaves, branches, seeds — scraped and pummeled into spices until the room fills with the fragrance of Christmas.

Outside, the hot sun shines down on cocoa beans filling shallow wooden platforms where women walk slowly back and forth, shuffling their feet through the beans to aerate and dry them so they can be shipped to a chocolate factory. Grenada chocolate earns high praise as some of the world's best and, unlike in some developing countries, no child labor is involved in its production.

The Grenada Chocolate Co. welcomes tours, as does a nutmeg-processing cooperative in the fishing village of Gouyave. Bags of spices and bars of chocolate always can be found among the goods vendors sell at the outdoor market in the old town section of St. George's, Grenada's capital city.

### **Beaches and rainforests**

An underwater volcano created the main island of Grenada and its six smaller islands about 2 million years ago. It formed the rich volcanic soil responsible for the high quality of Grenadian nutmeg, and — perhaps more of interest to vacationers — nine black-sand beaches. These, along with more than 40 stretches of white sand, allow beachgoers to choose from simple, secluded hideaways to long seafront arcs lined with luxury resorts. Grand Anse Beach, lying along the southwest coast, often has appeared on lists of the best Caribbean beaches. For nearly 2 miles, its white sand fringes a cobalt sea.

Hills and mountains rising from these sandy coastlines lead into rainforests. A driving tour up the west coast on winding roads, often narrowing to one lane, passes bamboo forests and nutmeg trees. Cocoa pods hang heavy on their branches, and bunches of bananas dangle along the roadside. Farmers wielding machetes dodge vehicles as they walk to their fields, drivers raising their hands in greeting.

At Concord Falls, the three-tier waterfall cuts through black, volcanic rock dressed in the lush greenery of the rainforest. Children play in the pool at the base of the falls, and young men may offer to stage a spectacle by jumping from the top of the cataract in exchange for tips.

Another route through the rainforest travels up to 1,900 feet above sea level through Grand Etang National Park. Hiking paths lead around Lake Etang, formed from the crater of an extinct volcano. Seven Sisters Falls is nearby. Annandale Falls, the most easily accessible in Grenada, can be visited on the way to or from St. George's.

Driving through the countryside and villages, visitors are sure to see the colors of the national flag — green, yellow, red — painted on rocks, curbs, bridges and old tires framing flower beds. The patriotic display is at its best in the weeks leading up to Grenada's Independence Day, Feb. 7.

### **War and peace**

France claimed Grenada as a colony in 1650, ceded it to the British in 1763, then took it back during the American Revolution. Britain ruled it again after the war until it granted islanders independence in 1974. Grenada remains a parliamentary democracy.

As Caribbean islands go, the crime rate is low. When Hurricane Ivan roared through in 2004, it damaged the prison, and the incarcerated left to check on their families. Once the emergency was over, a public service announcement ordered prisoners to return to serve out their sentences. All did.

The U.S. got involved in Grenada politics a few years after a coup put a government in power with a Marxist philosophy and ties to Cuba and other communist countries. But some hard-liners thought the prime minister too moderate, so another coup in 1983 put him under house arrest. Grenadians protested, the prime minister was freed, then recaptured and executed. That's when the U.S., along with a small military contingent from other Caribbean islands, invaded.

So-called Operation Urgent Fury meant to prevent communists from gaining another foothold in the region. The United Nations, along with the governments of Britain, Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, protested. The U.S. rationalized it had an interest in rescuing roughly 600 U.S. medical students on the island to avoid another Iran hostage crisis.

Less than two months later, it was all over, and elections the following year restored democracy. The date of the invasion, Oct. 25, became a national holiday known as Thanksgiving Day.

*Katherine Rodeghier is a freelance writer.*

### **If you go**

**Information:** Grenada Tourism Authority, [puregrenada.com](http://puregrenada.com)

**Where to stay:** Laluna, 16-cottage beachfront hotel and adjacent luxury villas; Asian spa and Italian restaurant with Balinese and Caribbean influences; winter rates from \$580, [laluna.com](http://laluna.com).

**Cruises:** Among the cruise lines calling at Grenada are Princess, Carnival, Crystal, Oceania, Celebrity, Wind Star, MSC, Silversea, [Royal Caribbean](http://RoyalCaribbean.com), Holland America, Seabourn, Norwegian and Costa.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/travel/sc-trav-grenada-spice-island-1009-story.html>