

P E 11. A41 ✓

Grenada Revisited

Grenada's 45 pristine, talcum-fine beaches, its picture-perfect capital and inner harbor, and its hospitable people are beckoning tourists once again

By Veronica Gould Stoddart

IT'S HARD TO SINGLE OUT what makes Grenada so special. Whether it's the Mediterranean-like capital, St. George's, with its captivating harbor, called the most scenic in the Caribbean. Or the 45 pristine, powder-fine beaches bordering a mountainous island etched with volcanic lakes, forests and waterfalls. Or whether it's just the Grenadians themselves, who have made hospitality a way of life. But special it is. And that is exactly what is bringing the tourists back in increasing numbers.

History and nature have joined hands to bless this most southerly of the Windward Islands with a bounty of attractions. Take, for example, the city of St. George's. A mere ten-minute drive from the new airport at Point Salines, it fits snugly over a cluster of hills that gently spill into the crescent-shaped inner harbor. Eighteenth-century French provincial houses, washed in crisp white or soft pastels, blend with classic exam-

ples of English Georgian architecture, both the legacy of the two colonial powers that alternately occupied the island since the mid-1600's. Their red tile or tin roofs harmonize with the intense green of the tropical foliage like some well-orchestrated musical score. Music may well come to mind, in fact. The town is so picturesque you might wonder if you've wandered onto the set of a lavish Neapolitan opera, complete with buxom soprano perched in one of the numerous hillside balconies and her sea-faring paramour at the water's edge.

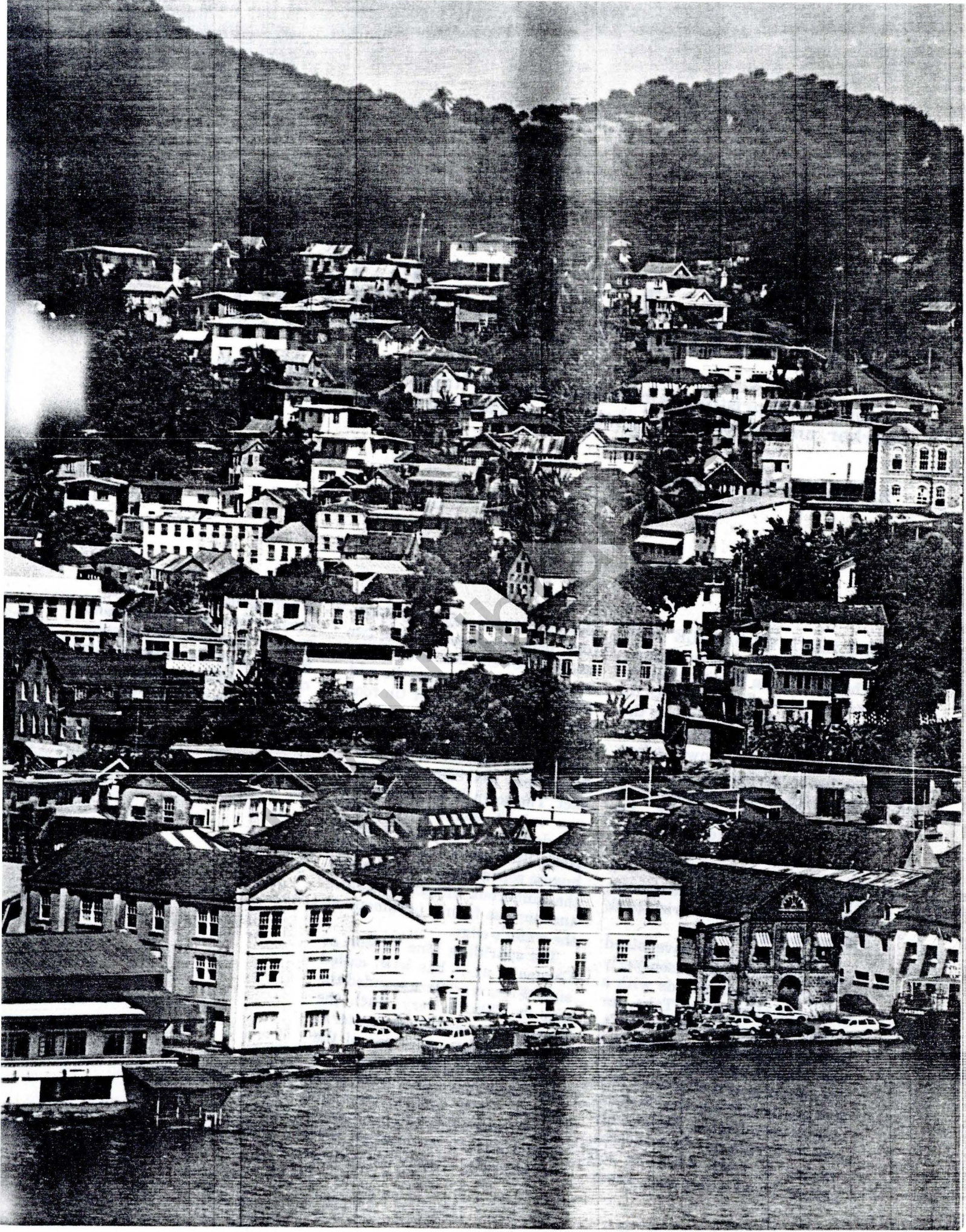
The sparkling blue harbor, or Carenage as it has been called since French settlers founded the city in 1705, is very much the focus of life. Actually the crater of a dead volcano, it is one of the most photographed harbors in the Caribbean—and with good reason. Gaily painted rowboats and fishing skiffs bob lazily in its placid waters. Increasingly, they are joined by creamy white cruise

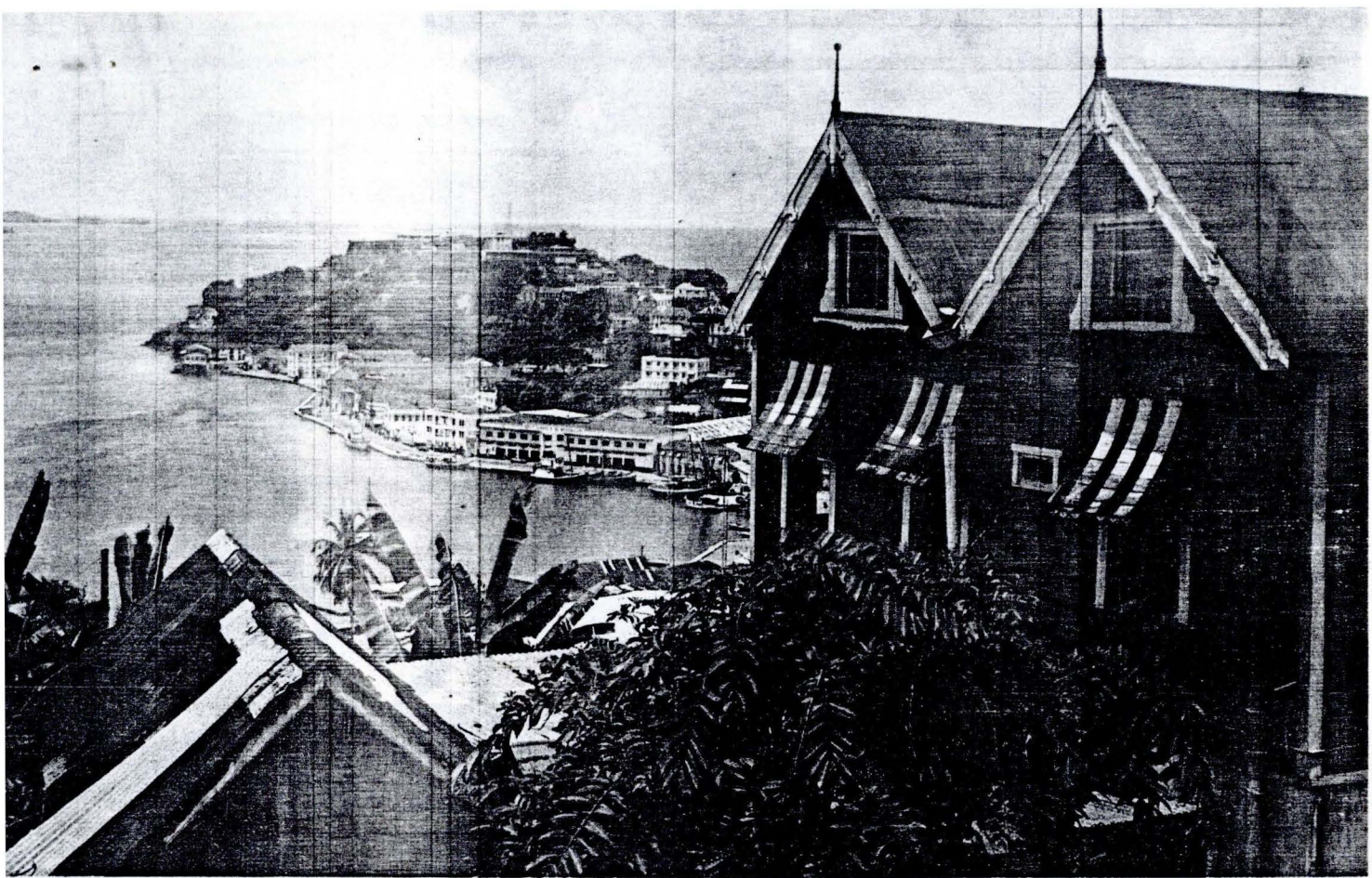
A harmonious blend of 18th-century French Provincial and English Georgian architecture, St. George's fits snugly over a cluster of hills that gently spill into the crescent-shaped inner harbor

Américas
Vol. 37,

Sept-Oct 1985
no. 5

p. 8-15





photos © Carl Purcell

The best way to explore St. George's is on foot, following the steep, narrow streets that snake up to vantage points with picture-perfect views of the harbor below

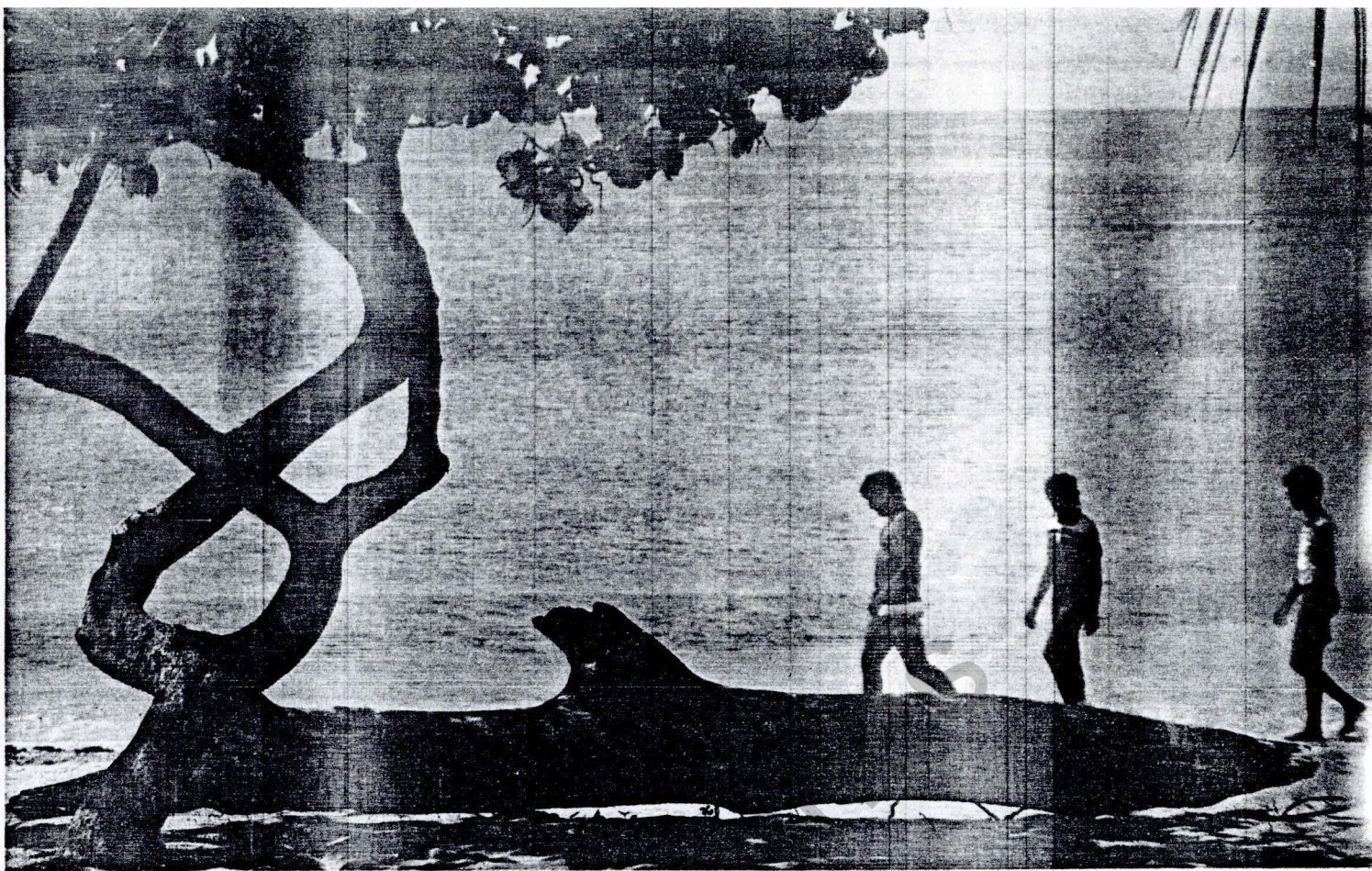
ships that anchor nearby. Every Tuesday, cargo boats transform it into a floating commodity exchange as bananas, cacao and other produce is loaded for market in nearby Trinidad.

The capital's steep, narrow streets snake up and down the hillsides like a haphazardly laid out maze. Bustling with activity, they quickly dispel the notion of a sleepy Caribbean town languishing in tropical oblivion. Craft boutiques and a smattering of fine restaurants cater to "guests," as the Grenadians call visitors. The best way to explore is on foot, which not only affords picture-perfect views of the sweeping panorama, but also an opportunity to meet one of Grenada's greatest assets—its people.

As friendly and hospitable as you'll ever find, they are quietly disarming with their gentle openness and genuine warmth. The streets hum with chattering uniformed schoolchildren,

mothers with toddlers in tow, and shopkeepers and merchants who are never too busy to share a smile or the latest piece of news. Even beach vendors would just as readily engage you in conversation as make you a sale. A subtle yet graceful sensuousness, coursing just beneath the surface, tempers the strict sense of British propriety left by the colonial era. Grenadian society is delightfully unstructured, and its 90,000 inhabitants are as much at ease with themselves as they are with strangers.

A good place to rub shoulders with the locals is at Market Square. You won't have any trouble finding it—just follow your nose. A pungent blend of cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, ginger and other spices perfumes the sea breezes that blow over the open-air market on the bay side of town. Spices were introduced to the island a century ago to free it from the limitations of the sugar



economy. They took hold with a vengeance. How ironic that in his quest for the spices of the East, Columbus never set foot on this "Isle of Spice" when he discovered it in 1498. Today, 21-mile-long Grenada is one of the world's principal exporters of nutmeg.

Wedged between two wrought-iron warehouses on an entire city block, the market is a gaggle of sturdy farm women, brilliantly colored parasols and a cornucopia of country-fresh tropical fruits and vegetables: plantains, sugar apples, mangoes, papayas, citrus fruits, coconuts, yams, breadfruit, avocados, peppers, tomatoes and, of course, spices neatly bundled or bagged. The market is a hard-sell place. "Buy some fresh spices, lady? Or how about a papaw [papaya]?" is a constant refrain. You'll be taken to task if you simply nod your reply and go on your way. They may be market women, but they expect a proper response.

The abundance of produce is

ample proof that Grenada's rich volcanic soil can grow almost anything. In fact, with its 28 varieties of fruit, 22 kinds of fish and 12 home-grown spices, a culinary heritage steeped in French, English and East Indian traditions, and some of the most creative cooks anywhere, Grenadian cuisine is considered the best in the Caribbean. After all, where else can you find curried conch, avocado ice cream or mango mousse?

The island's cooks, in fact, are in a class by themselves. Audrey Hopkin is perhaps singlehandedly responsible for the creation of Grenada's unique cuisine. Her secret is substituting local produce for international ingredients—breadfruit for potatoes, callaloo (a wide-leafed wild green vegetable) for spinach, or christophene (a pear-shaped squash) for apples. Scented with the island's heady bouquet of spices, her tasty dishes are even finding their way into

Grand Anse, the island's finest beach, is a two-mile stretch of confectionary sand just a short drive from town



The scent of spices hangs heavy in the air on Grenada. In the spice factory at the Dougaldston Estate, aromatic condiments such as mace, *above*, are painstakingly sorted as they begin their long journey to kitchens around the world

specialty cookbooks. They can be sampled at La Belle Creole restaurant at the Blue Horizons Inn run by her two sons.

Betty Mascoll, on the other hand, serves her mouth-watering fare family style in her 70-year-old plantation house-cum-inn at the island's northern end. A typical lunch features callaloo soup, savory pepper pot stew, pumpkin casserole, fried bread-

fruit and plantains, and stewed guava with coconut ice cream for dessert. For an earthier setting and all-you-can-eat quantities of food, try Mama's open-air restaurant near St. George's marina. Mrs. Inslay (Mama) Wordally won't let you leave without over-indulging in her spicy fare topped off with a pineapple flambé smothered in nutmeg sugar. Quite clearly, Grenada is not a place for a diet.

Of the few historic sites in town, the National Museum is one of the most interesting. Housed in an old French army barracks and prison built in 1704, it is one of the oldest buildings on the island. The collection documents its colorful political and natural history and features, among other oddities, Josephine Bonaparte's marble bathtub! Two hilltop stone buildings, the French-built Fort George (temporarily closed to tourists) and the British-built Fort Frederick command outstanding views of the city, the gentle hills and the cobalt Caribbean beyond. If those vistas won't suffice, there are hand-rowed "water taxis" to ferry you back and forth across the harbor for yet another perspective.

Although the island is ringed with beaches, many are conveniently close to St. George's. The finest, world-famous Grand Anse, is a two-mile stretch of confectionary sand a short drive from town. Some of the best hotels—and paradoxically, the U.S. medical school—line its wide expanse. Stretched out on Grand Anse beach with the sea gently tickling your toes, you can lose yourself in the view of St. George's shimmering in the sunlight across the bay. Other beaches are set in the jagged southern coast like a handful of casually scattered pearls. All along its shore, long, lushly vegetated fingers of land reach out into the sea with guest-houses and inns tucked securely on secluded crystalline bays. You can't get any more private.



Only a drive around the island can match St. George's appeal. The narrow western road out of town follows the undulating coast through a Rousseau-like world of tropical verdure. It winds past tiny pastel-hued houses, rocky coves and bays, and sleepy fishing villages bathed in Caribbean sunlight. You easily could be caught in a primitive painting. And everywhere the scent of spices hangs heavy in the air. Near Gouyave, Grenada's spice capital, is the Dougaldston Estate and spice factory. Here you can watch weathered women painstakingly sort and dry these aromatic condiments before they make their way to the kitchens of the world.

Farther up the coast, ancient petroglyphs carved by the Carib Indians are visible on boulders along the water's edge. At Sauteurs, on the northernmost tip of the island, you can peer over the great cliff where 17th-century Caribs leapt to their death rather



than be captured by the French. Or swim at nearby Levera Beach—where the Caribbean and Atlantic meet—with only the sea grapes and palm trees to keep you company.

Corkscrewing its way down the center of the island, the road slices through the deep green stillness of the forested mountains. The feeling is primeval and pristine. Canopied with lacy fern fronds,

St. George's market is a gaggle of sturdy farm women and brilliantly colored parasols, a cornucopia of country-fresh tropical fruits and vegetables spread over an entire city block. Spices neatly bundled and bagged add their pungent perfume to the sea breezes that blow across the square

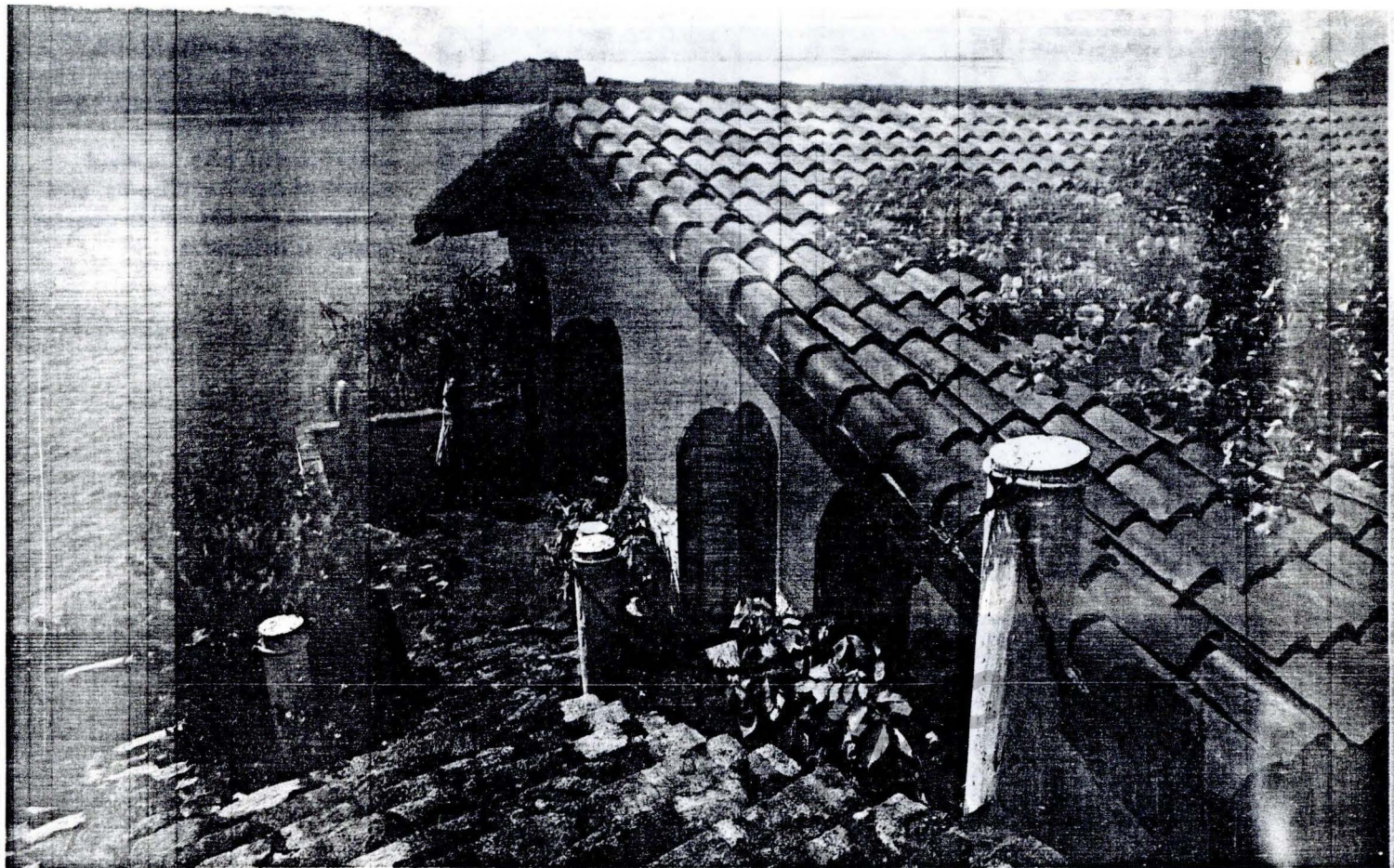


Outside the capital, in the deep green stillness of the forested mountains, houses peek from behind thick foliage embroidered with the vivid colors of tropical blooms, and residents use the roller-coaster roads as footpaths



the intense green tapestry is embroidered by the rich orange tones of the flamboyant tree and the jewel-like magentas, pinks and yellows of the bougainvillea, the national flower. Bamboo, banana and coconut palms add their bold strokes. Woven throughout like so many silver ribbons are sparkling waterfalls and streams. And occasional wood-frame houses play peek-a-boo with the thick foliage. It would all be tropically mesmerizing were it not for the heart-in-your-throat road. With a will of its own, it follows a roller coaster path of turns, dips and switchbacks that can humble the hardest.

Of the interior's volcanic mountains, Mount Saint Catherine, the tallest at 2,750 feet, reigns over the landscape in quiet splendor. It can be climbed in a day and affords rewarding views of the north central part of the island. Grand Etang Lake and the Grand



Etang Forest Reserve offer swimming, hiking, waterfall bathing and wildlife watching at its rugged best.

Grenada's raw beauty is there for the taking. But as tourism increases, the island is grappling with how best to develop its potential. Grenada has fewer than 650 hotel rooms, for example, hardly enough to accommodate the passengers of three of the jumbo jets landing at the new 9,000-foot airport runway. But Grenadian hoteliers and innkeepers, 90 percent of whom own their businesses, are determined to preserve their island's uncluttered, unspoiled quality. They take pride in their small cozy establishments and personalized service. And Grenadians are quick to say they don't want to repeat the mistakes of other islands.

Grenada's tourism director, Richard Cherman, echoes this thought. "We're not interested in mass tourism. No high volume

tourism. We're very careful about that. We're going to plan very carefully with OAS assistance," referring to an OAS study of tourism attractions, infrastructure development, land use management and beach conservation, which emphasizes the need to develop on a small scale. One thing is certain. Although plans are underway for two new 150-room hotels, they will not rise any higher than a royal palm in obedience to an unwritten Grenadian law.

Dodd Gorman, manager of Grenada Yacht Services, the only full-service marina in the West Indies south of Puerto Rico, expresses the sentiments best. "We will always be a bit off the beaten path. That's part of the appeal. We hope to remain somewhat exclusive in that regard."

For the moment, at least, that exclusivity is still very much intact on one of the loveliest islands in the Caribbean. **G**

Exclusive privacy is the hallmark of the guesthouses and inns tucked along Grenada's secluded crystalline bays