

Extraordinary GRENADA

TEXT AND PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY *by* MICHELE PETERSON



Grenada

WHERE ON EARTH

GRENADA



...Rivers Rum is not
for the faint of heart...

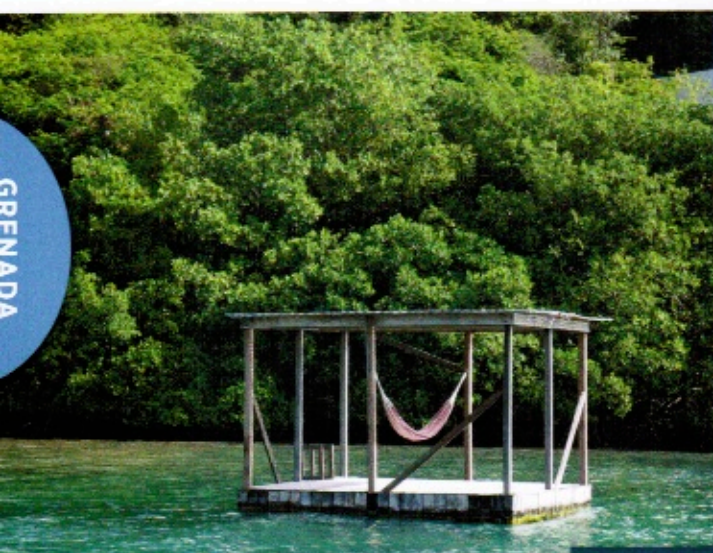
I'M SQUEEZED IN THE BACKSEAT OF a pick-up truck following a cow down a mountainous trail looking for *Oxyura dominical*, an elusive masked duck. A duck safari isn't a typical experience for a rum plantation tour, but as I'm fast discovering, Grenada isn't your ordinary Caribbean island.

"Although our distillery was established in 1785, we're still learning about the estate's eco-system," explains Simon Greene, General Manager of River Antoine Estate & Rum Distillery as we peer into Lake Antoine, a deep teardrop-shaped lake formed by the crater of an extinct volcano.

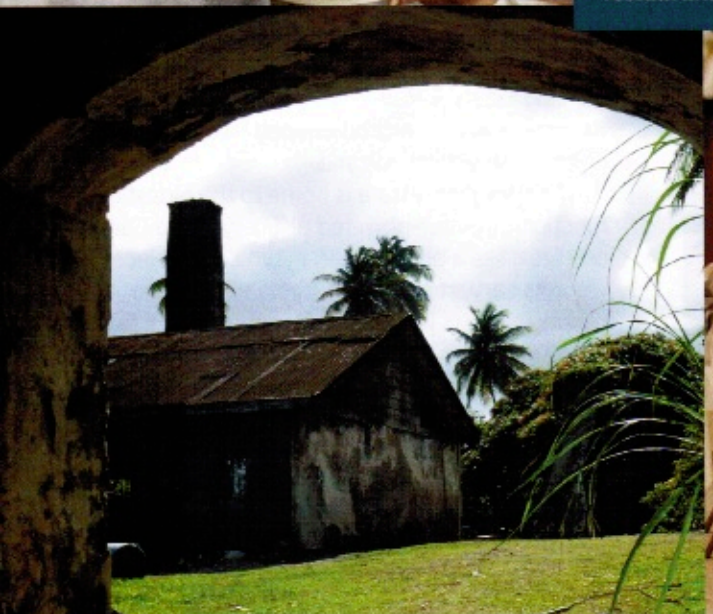
The sprawling estate is home to the oldest functioning water-powered distillery in the Caribbean and feels like a place locked in time. It's a place where workers harvest sugarcane by hand and the rum-making process is powered by nature. Much like the plantation's terrain, Rivers Rum, produced in strengths up to 150-proof, is not for the faint of heart.

Grenada's rawness is part of its appeal. Located at the southern tip of the Windward Islands in the eastern Caribbean, Grenada and its sister islands of Carriacou and Petite Martinique are best known for their 40 beaches, lush landscape and spice production. But as I discover Grenada's unsung scene is its culinary landscape. »

THIS PHOTO Grenada is best known for its 40 beaches.



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT Sustainable
low-impact development
is a focus at Le Phare Blue
Marina and Resort;
Grenada Belmont Estate;
Grenada's unspoiled
appeal; Meet the goats at
Goat Dairy; Organic
chèvre; Fine dining at
Rhodes Restaurant; River
Antoine Estate and Rum
Distillery was founded in
1785; Esther and Omega
host Grenadian cooking
classes at True Blue Bay
Resort; Callaloo soup at
Patrick's Homestyle
restaurant.



CALABASH HOTEL



...It's a good thing
callaloo is good for you...



«I begin my orientation into Grenada's food roots — a fascinating mix of African, Arawak, Indian and British influences — at Laura's Herb & Spice Garden, an educational botanical project located at the southern tip of the island.

“We lost 80 percent of our nutmeg trees during Hurricane Ivan,” explains our guide, who leads this tour of Grenada's spices, trees and plants. “So now we have a real interest in diversification.”

Grenada's rich volcanic soil is fertile ground for plants such as mauby, soursop and shadow beni, a pungent leafy herb somewhat similar to cilantro. All do their part to contribute to the unique flavours of Grenadian cuisine.

Next up is a visit to the Grenada Goat Dairy, another project born from the devastation of Hurricane Ivan. This not-for-profit organization partnered with Belmont Estate, a fully functioning 17th-century plantation located an hour from the capital city of St George. Proceeds from the sale of organic Grenada Goat Dairy cheese support education and training on husbandry, production and marketing within the community.

We explore the new (and storm-proof) barns where the herd of dairy goats — a mix of local, pure bred Alpine and floppy-eared Nubian — happily chow down on organic ‘goat greens’ that look much like a mesclun salad you might find on a resort buffet. Inside the modern facility, the goat milk is filtered, refrigerated and pasteurized to the highest international food safety standards.

I'm surprised to discover that the cheese's delightfully smooth texture offers just a touch of milky tartness.»



JENNIFER ALEXIS, GO PURE GRENADA

GRENADA CHOCOLATE COMPANY

“The combination of quality facilities and the goat’s healthy diet results in a delicate tasting chèvre,” explains Christine Curry, the project’s director and co-founder.

Also located at Belmont Estate is the Grenada Chocolate Company, a solar-powered, tree-to-bar cooperative at the edge of the Mt Hope rainforest. Surrounded by lofty *Madre de Cacao*, a tangerine-blossomed tree that provides protective shade for the cacao trees, red and yellow cocoa pods grow in wild abandon.

“Take a bite,” offers the tour guide cracking open a pod and scooping out some beans so I can sample its citrusy, white pulp.

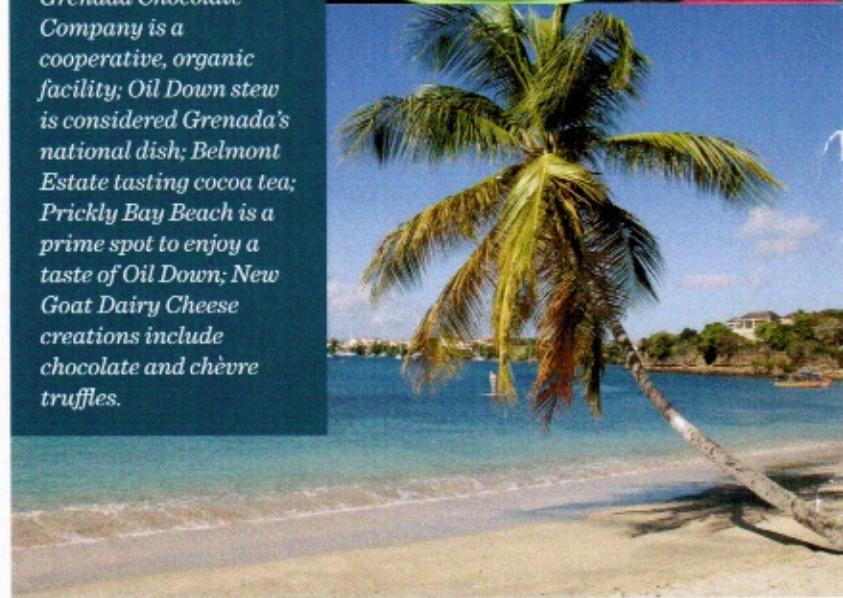
The Grenada Chocolate Company cultivates almost exclusively *Trinitario* cocoa bean, a variety prized for its intense and complex flavour. Within the processing area, the cacao beans are hand harvested, fermented and sun-



JENNIFER ALEXIS, GO PURE GRENADA



PHOTOS THIS PAGE
FROM TOP LEFT
Grenada Chocolate
Company is a
cooperative, organic
facility; Oil Down stew
is considered Grenada's
national dish; Belmont
Estate tasting cocoa tea;
Prickly Bay Beach is a
prime spot to enjoy a
taste of Oil Down; New
Goat Dairy Cheese
creations include
chocolate and chèvre
truffles.



dried naturally. The beans are then polished traditionally by workers who 'dance the cocoa' by turning the beans with their feet in a giant copper bowl or in drying trays. After drying, the cocoa beans are roasted, winnowed, churned, tempered and pressed into chocolate of exceptionally intense flavour.

Later that evening at the Calabash Hotel's esteemed Rhodes restaurant, headed by London celebrity chef Gary Rhodes, I look for Goat Dairy's chèvre on the farm-to-table menu and discover it in a ruby-toned beetroot tart. Enjoying its velvety taste while being serenaded by a chorus of tiny peeping tree frogs is the ultimate eco-dining experience.

It's a good thing callaloo is good for you — the leafy greens are packed with iron — because I'm eating my weight in it each day. Tucked inside tender cannelloni at beachfront Aquarium restaurant, puréed in soup at Patrick's Local Homestyle Restaurant, and sprinkled on top of thin crust wood-fired pizza at Le Phare Bleu Marina & Resort.

Originally brought from West Africa in the 17th century the mineral-rich vegetable has become a staple of Caribbean cuisine. It thrives in Grenada's fertile soil with leaves the size of yoga mats growing freely by the side of the road.

On Thursday afternoons, True Blue Bay Resort popular cooks Esther and Omega offer cooking classes for hotel guests and visitors so I head there to learn how to cook with it.

The first thing I learn is that no matter how tempting it might be, you can't just grab a handful of callaloo from a ditch and chow down.

"Its prickles can scratch your stomach if you eat it raw," explains Omega, who has a smile as big as her enthusiasm for cooking. "Instead, you got to remove the stems, chop the leaves fine and cook it long."

The duo sautées the callaloo with onions, garlic and thyme, stuffs the mixture inside a chicken breast, grills it and then tops it with a heavenly sauce of coconut milk, cream, white wine and freshly grated nutmeg. The spice-infused creation is simple but bursts with flavour.

I wrap up my culinary tour with a big platter of Oil Down, Grenada's national dish. For the past several days, I'd noticed locals walking to beaches, toting gigantic steel pots. It's an all-day affair, cooking this one-pot stew packed chock full of plantain, breadfruit, salted meat, chicken or fish, spices and coconut. Mixed in a large pot, it's set over a burner to simmer for the day during a beach party.

"You got to cook it slow," says chef at Le Petit Anse Hotel, a beach hideaway overlooking the Caribbean Sea towards the Grenadines. "And enjoy it with friends and family."

As I dive into my platter of Oil Down, I discover tender dumplings hidden within the smoky curry broth. Steamed dumplings might seem more suited to Tyrolean ski slope than a beach cookout but the filling stew is somehow a perfect complement to the cooling trade winds.

Surprising and satisfying — much like the island of Grenada itself. **TST**



Cook

GRENADA

SERVES 6

A Very Chocolatey Mousse

THIS RECIPE comes from Annie Clift at Petite Anse Hotel.

60% Chocolate
2 x 85 g bars,
broken into
pieces

Warm Water
125 ml

Eggs 3 large,
separated

Castor Sugar
1 ½ Tbs

Rum or Brandy
a splash

Whipped Cream
for serving

- 1 PLACE** the chocolate and warm water in a large heatproof bowl sitting over a saucepan of barely simmering water. Keep the heat at the lowest to allow the chocolate to melt slowly.
- 2 REMOVE** from the heat and stir well until glossy and smooth. Cool for two minutes and then stir in the egg yolks and rum or brandy. Give it a good mix with a wooden spoon.
- 3 WHISK** the egg whites and sugar in a separate bowl and then fold into the chocolate mixture carefully keeping the mixture as light as you can.
- 4 DIVIDE** the mousse into ramekins and cool. Serve with whipped cream.

River Antoine Estate & Rum Distillery

River Antoine, St. Patrick

Laura's Herb & Spice Garden
Perdmonemps, St. George's

Grenada Goat Dairy
www.thegoatdairy.org

Grenada Chocolate Company
www.grenadachocolate.com

Calabash Hotel
www.calabashhotel.com

Aquarium Restaurant
www.aquarium-grenada.com

Patrick's Local Homestyle Restaurant
www.patricklocalgrenada.wix.com/eat

Le Phare Bleu Marina & Resort
www.lepharebleu.com

True Blue Bay Resort
www.truebluebay.com

Le Petit Anse Hotel
www.petitanse.com

Click

MICHELE PETERSON is a Toronto-based culinary and travel writer specializing in food, drink and sun destinations. Contact her at www.michelepeterson.com