

# Grenada

Text by Kelly LaClaire  
Photos and captions by Kate Clark

— *Spicy Diving on the Spice Isle*





Grenada's countryside (above). PREVIOUS PAGE: Seated atop the *Shakem* wreck lays an old crane adorned with red coral fans

**The island of Grenada is affectionately known as the Spice Isle for its exotic spices of nutmeg, clove and cinnamon. Indeed, as we stepped off the plane, its warm, fragrant breezes welcomed us. Just a few hours earlier we were shivering in the drizzle and cold, wrapped in several layers of clothing dreaming of this exact moment. Kate, my cousin and photographer on this trip, laughed, “Oh my gosh, I think I’ll tear up my return ticket and violate my visa. I’m not leaving!”**

The King Elvis taxi service took us the short drive to True Blue Bay Resort, a family-owned tropical haven perched above a small, lush inlet on the Atlantic side of the island. This would be our home for the next few days while we explored the island, reefs and, of course, the wrecks of Grenada.

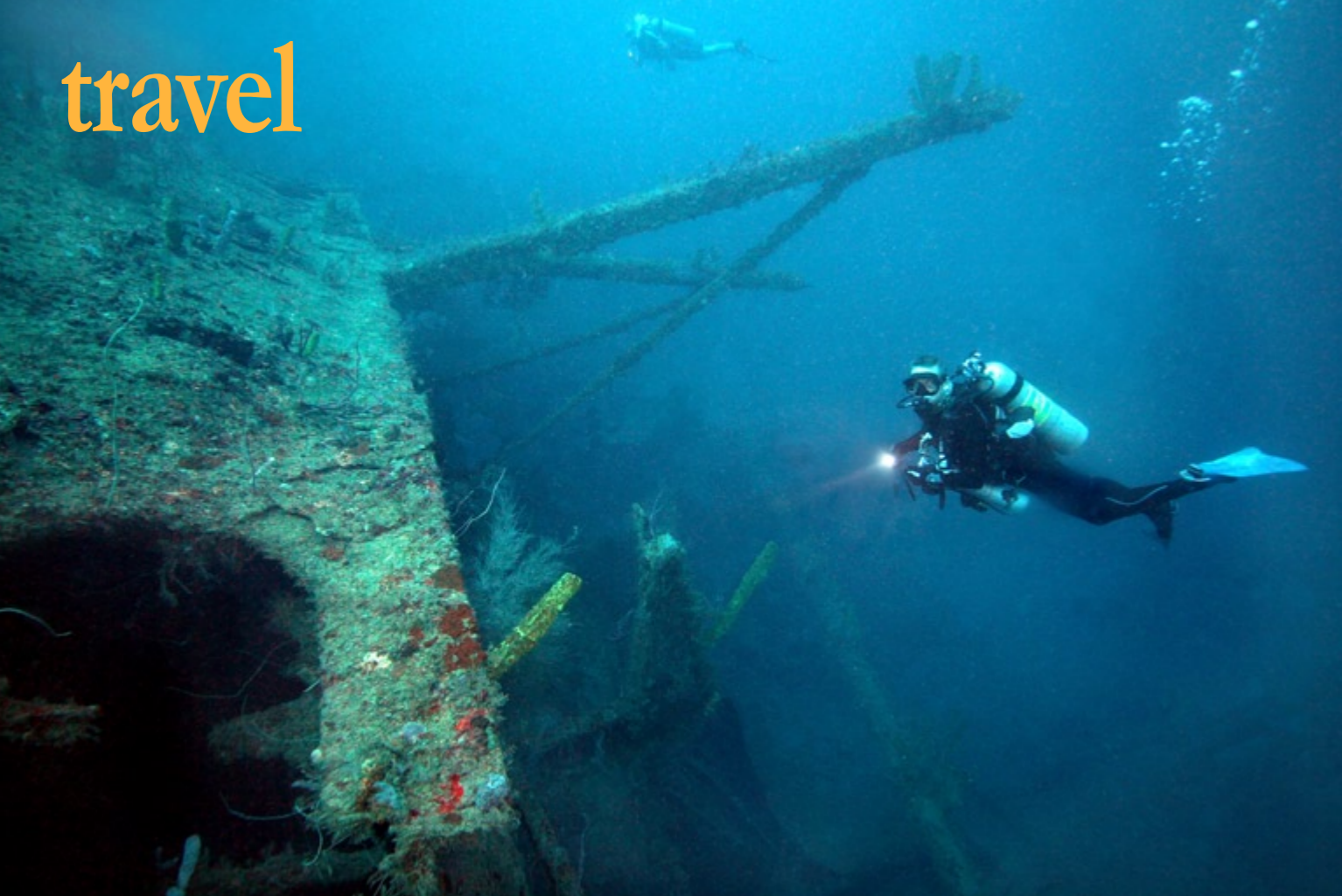
Binca, the hotel's concierge, had everything prepared and our rooms were gorgeous. Set just above the resort's white sand pool, our spacious suite came replete with a full kitchen, private balcony, large flat screen and fresh flowers. We made ourselves comfortable and headed down through the palms and manicured lawns to the dive shop.

Our hosts, Peter and Gerlinde Seupel—owners of Aquanauts Grenada—greeted us as their crew took our gear and readied the boat. We talked briefly on the deck over-

looking the bay, getting a short briefing on our upcoming dives. The more they described our schedule, the more excited Kate and I got. I heard a motor turn over and Peter smiled, “Ok, go get wet!”



Seemingly glowing in the blue waters, the azure vase sponge (above) is one of the most brilliant in the reefs of Grenada; Freshly harvested nutmeg with red outer venous portion, often used in pharmaceuticals (left)



Owner and operator of Aquanauts Grenada, Peter Seupel, shines his light on the side of the largest wreck in the Caribbean, the *Bianca C*

everything was all right.

His briefing on the boat a few minutes before gave me an idea of what to expect once we reached the largest shipwreck in the Caribbean, but when I first saw her misty outline, growing more definite and vast with each meter we dropped, I skipped a few breaths—breaking PADI's golden rule.

Just below us Kate turned on her back and spreads her arms as wide as they would go. She was smiling behind her regulator, and I knew what she was thinking

—*This thing is HUGE!*

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the sinking of the *Bianca-C*, an Italian cruise liner that caught fire from an engine room explosion while she rested in the harbor of Grenada's capital city, St. George. The ship burned for nearly three days but, fortunately, due to the heroic efforts of her crew, numerous local fisherman and selfless townsfolk, only two people perished and over 670 passengers were saved.

Hearing the distress calls, a British warship, *Londonderry*, arrived to offer assistance. They were able to sever the anchor chain and secure a tow line, removing her from shipping lanes and local boat traffic with the intent of beaching her in a safer location. Damage to the cruise liner's rudder made the tow difficult, and after a squall arose, the job became impossible. The line was severed, and the *Bianca-C* sank, coming to rest on her keel at a depth of 55 meters (165 ft).

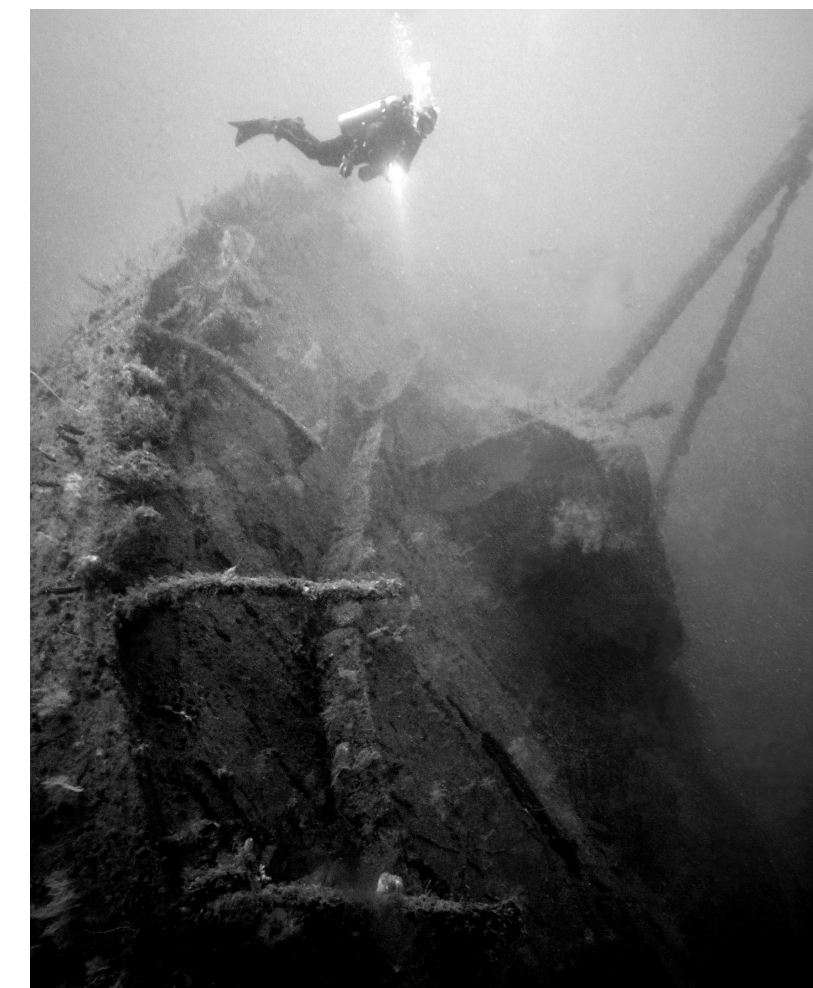
### Italian Titanic

Our dive boat, *Salsa*, bobbed up and down in the turquoise swells just off the white sands of Pink Gin Beach at the southern tip of Grenada. I was the last of the group to take a giant stride off the stern and begin my descent into the empty blue below.

It was the first dive of our trip and as I floated down, fingers looped around the reference line already set by the dive team, I checked my gauges and computer knowing that at 20 meters (60 ft) the mythical *Bianca-C* would start to appear from the depths.

The water was 80°F (27°C)—both exhilarating and soothing at once—and a welcome change from the frigid temperatures of Puget Sound where I do most of my diving back home in the Pacific Northwest.

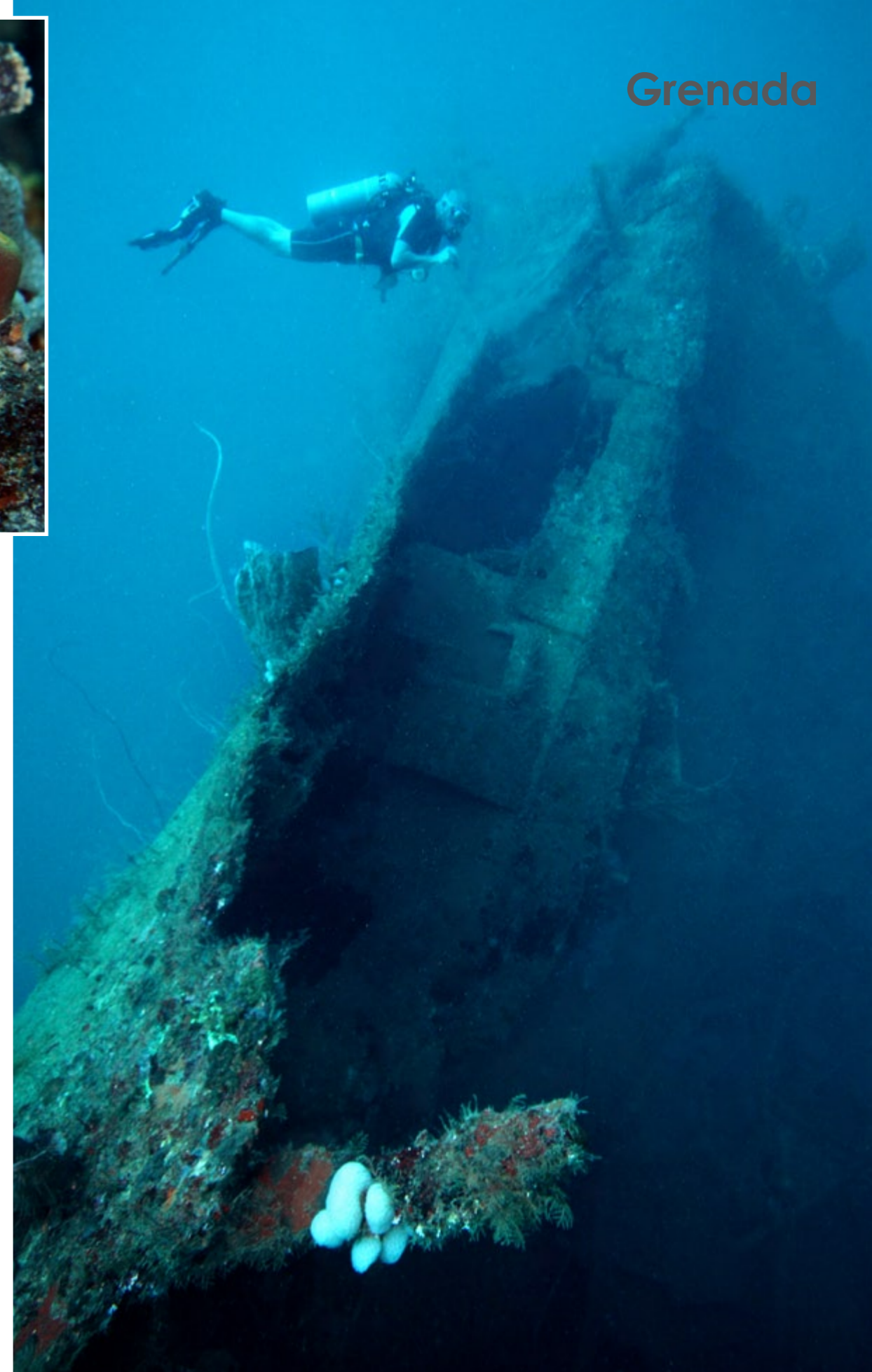
Paul Ward, instructor with Aquanauts Grenada, stayed close, flashing me the "OK?" sign, making sure I was equalizing properly and



Looming huge in the blue waters, the *Bianca C* (above) dwarfs divers Peter Seupel and Kelly LaClaire with her massive 200-meter long body; Diver explores the bow of the *Bianca* (left)



Seupel (left) swims by a few smaller masts on the stern of the *Bianca C*; Master of disguise, a scorpionfish (above) lies motionless among some coral on a reef just beyond the *Bianca C*



We slowed our descent as the famous swimming pool on the deck of the ship came into view, and we leveled off just above the rear quarter. I looked around the impressive ship for a few seconds to get my bearings.

Kate was right, the *Bianca* was massive—roughly 200 meters (600 ft) long—and I realized one visit wasn't going to let us explore the wreck fully. I let go of the dive

this site) this was my first wreck dive past 33 meters (100 ft), and I admit I was a bit overwhelmed by the sheer size and scope of the twisted and listing goliath. My inexperience became all too obvious when, after only a few seconds of wide-eyed gawking, I heard Paul clinking a metal carabiner on his tank to get my attention. He motioned for me to ascend a bit. I was shocked when I looked at my depth

line and a mild current swept us gently towards the bow.

Large black tree corals rooted along the hull swayed back and forth amidst multi-colored whip corals, and a group of curious but cautious jacks came to investigate our bubbles.

Even though I am an advanced card holder (recommended for

gauge reading 44m (132 ft) and realized that I was so enthralled with my surroundings, I'd completely forgotten the depth warnings he'd given us topside.

The visibility is deceptively good here—33 meters (100 ft) plus—so it's imperative you keep a close eye on your computer. If you're not careful, you'll find yourself in a deco situation before you know it.

I finned slowly up a few meters, drifting past giant coral encrusted davits—cargo and life boat hoists—that curved like metallic alien claws over the ship's side and above the twisted and crumbling mid-section. The bow started to take shape below a school of fish so thick they looked like an underwater cloud swarming the foremast. For years the towering flagstaff remained vertical and reached proudly towards the surface, but just recently, it fell and now sits at a 30 degree angle toward the starboard rails.

I quickly scanned the foredeck for the nurse and reef sharks that like to congregate here, but I didn't see any. Instead, a giant barracuda nearly two meters long stared me down, brandishing his fangs. This was his territory, and he wasn't shy about letting me know it.

Paul tapped his tank and then his computer, indicating our bottom time for this

So large a wreck is she, exploring *Bianca C* takes a wide gaze. Nurse shark, barracuda, and spotted eagle rays can often be seen cruising by or finding shelter in her deep hull



The *Shakem*, originally a cargo vessel, now lies in 25 meters of water just off the Grenada coast. Her hull and frame teem with life as sergeant majors dart about the coral encrusted railings (above and left); A sharp zigzag in the walkway on the edge of the *Shakem* wreck (left) exists as evidence of the hard landing she experienced upon settling to the sea floor

depth was reaching its limit. We were diving air, so we only had a few minutes with the “Titanic of the Caribbean”. As we slowly ascended along a nearby reef, I looked back, and though it had only been a few moments, I already wanted to spend more time with the *Bianca-C*.

**Shakem**

While not as imposing and ominous as *Bianca*, the cargo vessel, *Shakem*, is a fantastic wreck for most any level of certification and should not be missed when diving the Spice Isle—provided your skills

aren't rusty and the currents mild.

Our first visit began with a rapid descent down to 20 meters (60 ft) to the uppermost deck. She's a large ship—60 meters (180 ft) of coral encrusted metal sitting perfectly straight on her keel. We descended a bit around the stern, scaring a few jacks and two large mackerel that bolted at the sound of our bubbles.

White ribbons of snowy telesto (soft coral) clung to the metal rails lining the bridge. We swam through the open promenade wrapping around the first two levels of the freighter. A school of

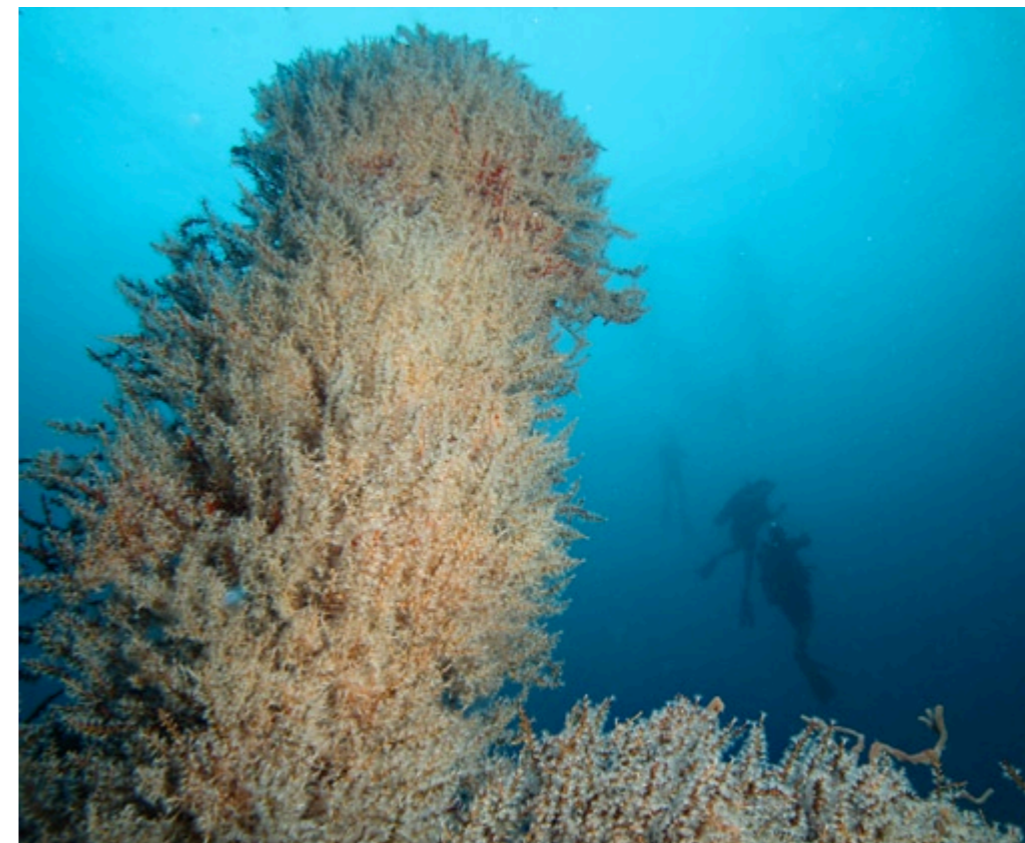
playful sergeant majors, striped and shifty, joined us as we glided over the large open hull, still fully loaded with enormous pallets of stacked concrete bags. This particular sight is one of the things that made this wreck so unique.

In 2001, a skeleton crew of four were bringing a load of concrete and baby diapers (yes, I said diapers—you can still see a few if you know where to look) to Grenada when the cargo, improperly loaded, shifted from the large swells near St. George. The ship began listing badly. She continued taking on water, and a final wave



A large puffer fish on a reef near the *Shakem*





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CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Sitting perfectly on its keel, divers can explore the prop of the *Shakem* wreck that sits still amidst wire and fan coral; The top of *Shakem's* mast, covered in telesto, frames divers rising up the ascent line after exploring the wreck; Sergeant majors fill the waters surrounding *Shakem* with movement as the bright coral offset the brilliant white and pink of the telesto, which cling to its frame



pitched her to the port side. The *Shakem* sank just off shore down to the coral beds 33 meters (100 ft) below.

Sponges and enormous black sea fans soon took root and now dominate the outer hull giving refuge to the ubiquitous squirrel, trumpet and parrot fish hiding in its nooks and crannies. Many divers report octopus and squid sightings here, but if they were around, they were staying well hidden.

Kate's camera strobes illuminated the enormous crane running the length of the cargo hold and the corals momentarily lit up in rich, vivid color. The sergeant majors moved in closer, swimming more frenetically than ever as we drifted toward the bow, still fitted with a good size hoist, its ropes twisting with

the current.

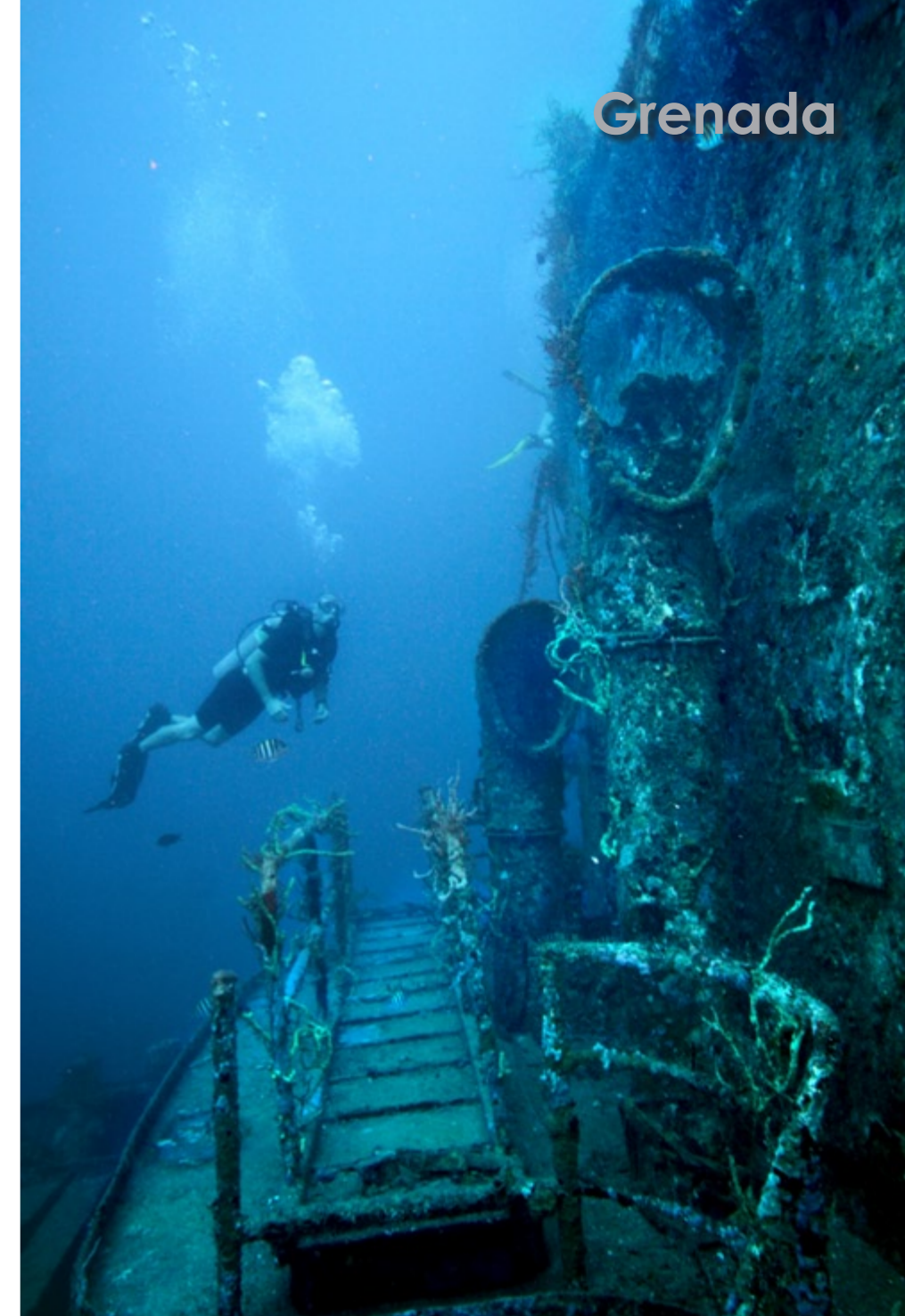
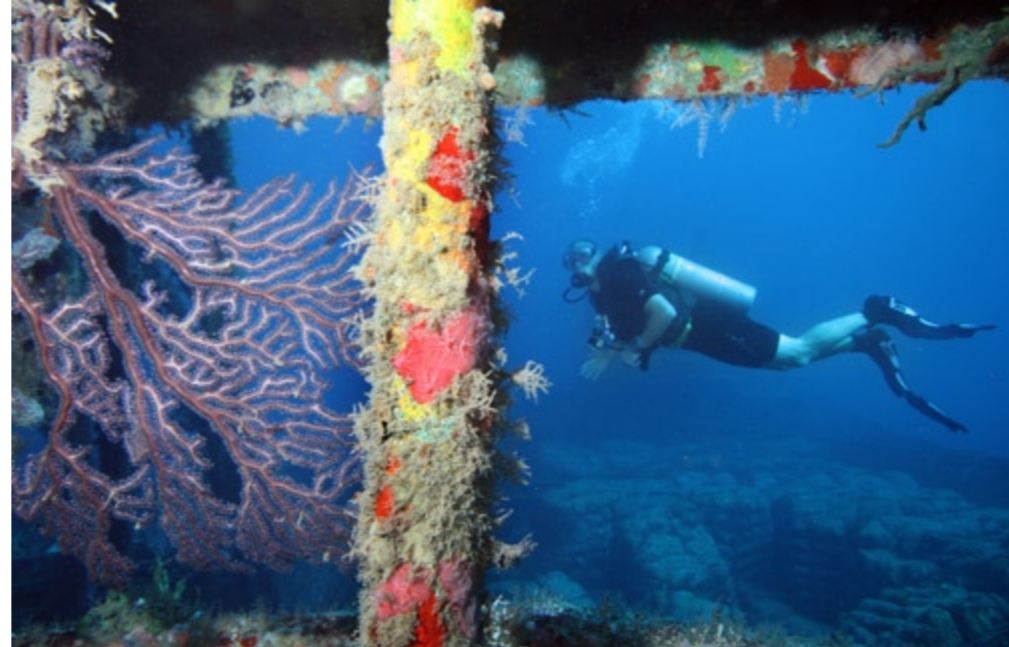
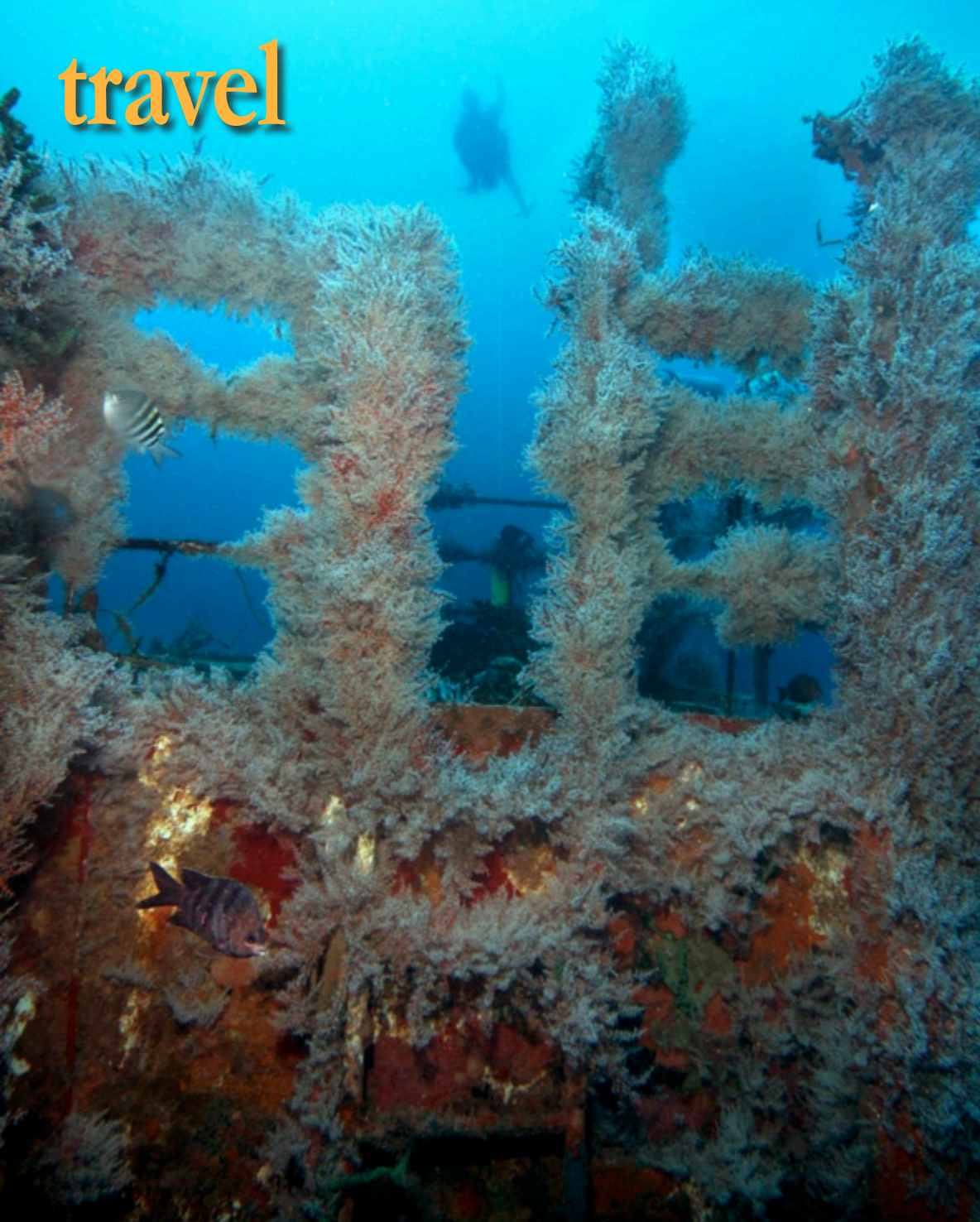
I frightened a large silver fish away from its nest on the bow and finally came to understand why the little striped school seemed so eager. Apparently, they've developed a unique behavior at this site—using people to hunt for food. As soon as a diver frightens away local fish guarding their nests, the sergeant majors swoop in, frantic and frenzied, eating every last egg they can get to before the larger fish returns, and then hurriedly catch up to the diver they have chosen, waiting for another opportunity.

They followed us over the starboard side as we swam back to take a look at the prop, relatively unharmed and surrounded by red and green wire corals. A large grey

angelfish joined us, but after a moment seemed bored and disappeared into the labyrinth of fans and sponges below.

Again our computers started to squawk and I momentarily had an urge to ignore it. Twenty minutes just wasn't enough, and I wanted to stay a while longer. Kate, a PADI instructor, sensed my reluctance and raised her thumb towards the surface—more of a command than a suggestion. I shrugged in acquiescence and reluctantly drifted upward.

The sergeant majors stayed with us for several meters as we rose toward the surface, darting and slashing through our bubbles and then, realizing we were no longer of any use to them, started down and faded into the blue.



Divers (left) rise on ascent line behind *Shakem's* top deck railing covered in telesto; The concrete bags (top center) that led to the sinking of *Shakem* can still be seen from the numerous swim-throughs the wreck offers; Diver (right) explores the port side of the captain's tower; Tanks and barracks (above)

**Nitrox**

After the first two wrecks, sunning ourselves on the bow of the *Salsa* as we cruised back to True Blue Bay, I expressed to Paul my disappointment at the short length of time that we were able to explore each ship; I wanted more time to take in the scope and grandeur of them. In short, I was getting addicted to the thrill of seeing these coral covered iron giants, and I wanted to squeeze every ounce of bottom time I could out each dive.

nitrox certified," he said. "Diving on air is extremely limiting when visiting the wrecks in Grenada. With nitrox, you can stay down longer and take all the time you want. Plus, our nitrox mixes are included free in your dive packages, so you have no excuse."

If you're unfamiliar with nitrox, also called enriched air, it is a mixed diving gas that has a larger percentage of oxygen, making the chances of nitrogen narcosis fall markedly. Many divers say they think clearer at depths when diving with nitrox, and it allows one to stay

deeper far longer without the risks of nitrogen toxicity.

Twenty minutes later we had the manuals in our hands, and the next morning, instead of air tanks attached to our gear, two green and yellow banded cylinders stood ready for testing.

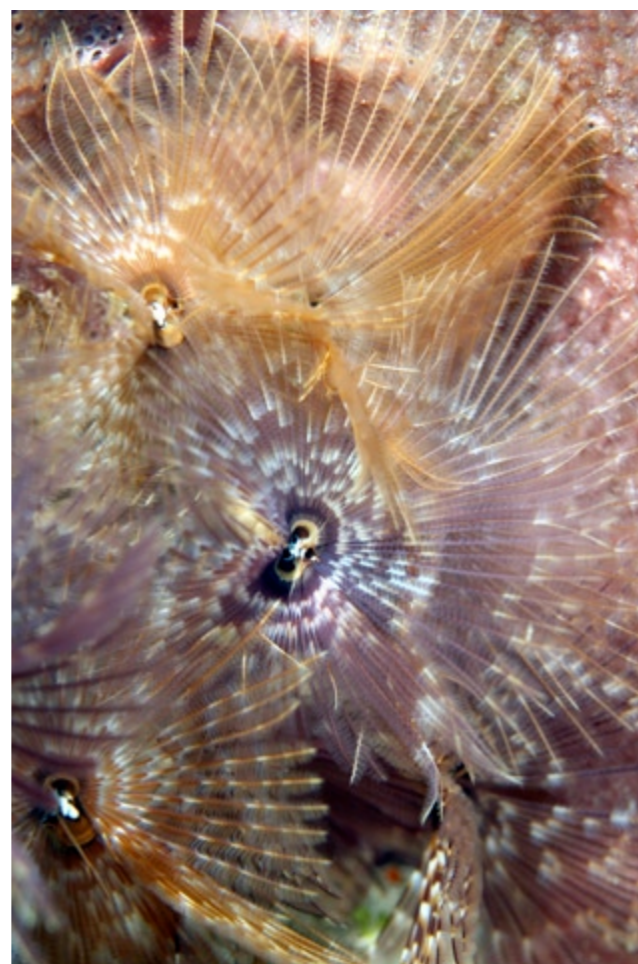
Paul went over the procedures and precautions before we headed out that morning. We were diving a downed catamaran called, *Rhum Runner*, followed by a reef drift to look for turtles, sharks and smaller critters hidden in the coral beds.

We reached the small wreck at right around 40 meters (120 ft), and I checked my computer. The bottom time read over 50 minutes, and I thought it was malfunctioning. Then I remembered the tank on my back was filled with enriched air, effectively giving me more time to remain safely at this depth than my tank would last. I got busy exploring the wreck, confident I'd have all the time I wanted.

A spotted eel was making his home among the red and purple corals taking hold along the ship's frame and a small

school of gray angelfish swam in lazy circles between the twin hulls. A swarm of blue chromis raced back and forth along the portside hull moving like a regimented flock of birds.

We circled the small wreck for more than ten minutes before moving on and, thanks to the nitrox, I didn't leave feeling cheated or hurried. We let the current sweep us up and over a nearby strip of reef where we found another spotted eel, this one over a meter in length (3 ft), protecting his turf by hissing at us. Kate pointed out two French angelfish, my



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Front rail of *Shaker* wreck covered with coral growth; Pair of four-eye butterfly fish; Curious and friendly spotted trunkfish swims among brightly patterned coral; Flamingo tongue snail; A long and cleverly disguised lizard fish disguises itself by lying incredibly still among the sand; Feather duster worms filter food from the sea



favorites, swimming close by. We followed them for a bit, mesmerized by their gleaming yellow spots and graceful profiles.

Nearby, a set of spiny lobsters were trying to hide beneath an outcropping of corals while a sour-looking scorpion fish eyed us suspiciously.

A metallic tink-tink-tink sounded, and we swam over to Paul and the rest of our group who were getting a look at a nurse shark

sleeping under a shelf of jagged coral. We had been under for nearly 60 minutes and my computer indicated I still had 40 minutes of remaining bottom time. I took another look at the shark, his beady white eyes almost glowing, and began my ascent.

As we surfaced, I wondered why I hadn't

taken the specialty enriched air class long ago and saved myself the heartache I had on my previous dive at *Bianca*. I knew I was going to get another shot at her before we left, but at that moment I vowed I would write this recommendation for you, the reader: do yourself a favor—if you book





Mandoo, the most sought-after tour guide in all of Grenada, feeds a bite of banana to a Mono monkey perched on his shoulder



a myriad of adventures for anyone visiting.

One of our favorite activities was a full island tour with Mandoo, a local guide known as

book a tour or nature walk, visit [www.grenada-tours.com](http://www.grenada-tours.com) or just type the name Mandoo into a Google search, and he'll pop right up.

**Fish Friday**  
– *Lobster, Breadfruit and Carib*

A few kilometers north of St. George lies the fishing village of Gouyave (pronounced, gwauv) where every Friday night a local food festival known as Fish Friday takes place. Here you will find two narrow streets lined with local vendors frying, boiling, stewing and Bar-B-Queing all kinds of seafood and native dishes. Kate and I splurged and each ordered a lobster tail brushed with lemon garlic butter with a side of fried breadfruit and hot sauce.



of Grenada." There isn't anything about his homeland he doesn't know, and he is the perennial winner of Grenada's "Tour Guide of the Year" award. Plan on taking a whole day, as Mandoo takes you in his clean and comfortable—as well as air conditioned!—van through the back streets, hillsides and forgotten neighborhoods of the Spice Island.

You'll tour a rum distillery, walk the cocoa and fruit trees of an authentic working nutmeg plantation as well as eat at a beachside café, feed a monkey or two and learn the impressive and enthralling history of Grenada's rich and turbulent past. The tour is slow and easy, just like Mandoo, whose motto is: "We're on Island time here. If you're walking too fast my friends, you're breaking the law!"

Mandoo also gives personal tours if you would like a more private experience and is available for taxi service. He also offers hiking and trekking tours through the rain forests where waterfalls abound, and the wildlife is never dangerous. As Mandoo puts it, "The only thing risky in Grenada is the rum punch!"

After taking his tour, I honestly can't imagine trying to use anyone else for these services. To

a trip to Grenada, get a hold of Aquanauts and ask to take their nitrox certification straight away. You won't regret it.

**Topside treats**

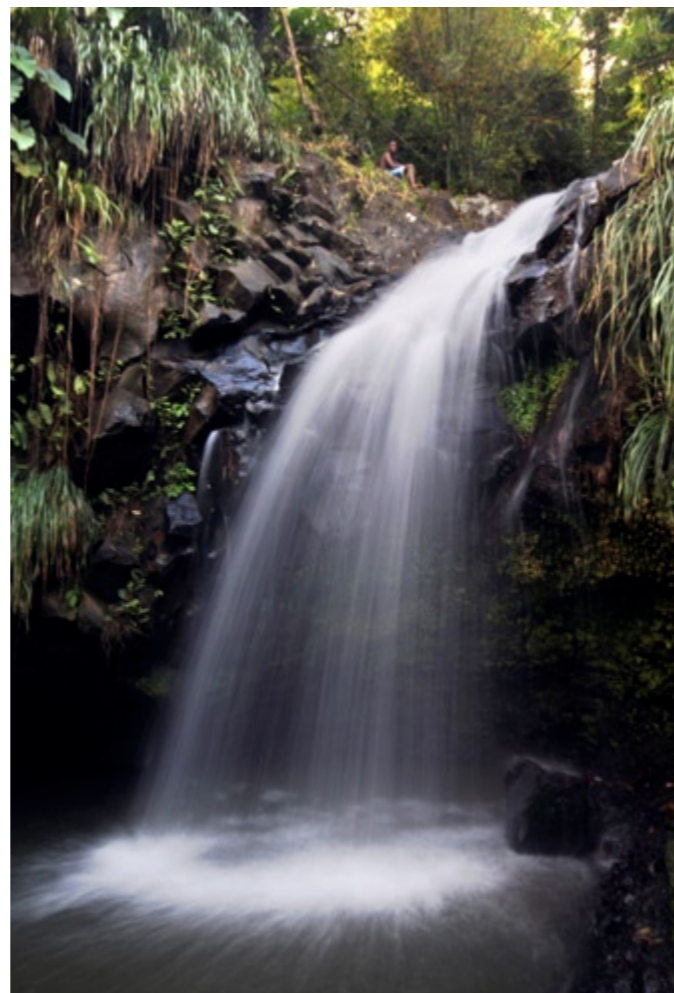
When visiting the Caribbean islands, you can't just dive all day and not explore the islands themselves. Well, okay, I suppose you could, but in Grenada that would be silly. There is far too much beauty and history to be found. We recommend the following excursions when you're not under the water.

**Mandoo can do!**

The island of Grenada is lush and fertile, offering a rich history and



THIS PAGE: Scenes from Fish Friday in Gouyave, including a delicious lobster and veggie dish (center); Grenada's famous rum (right); Festive drums (left); View of St. Georges (top center); Coconut seller in town (far right)



Every food tent had cold Carib on hand—Grenada's local brew—and observing Benjamin Franklin's sage pronouncement, "Beer is proof that God exists and wants us to be happy." We both drank several.

A few vendors were selling Lambie (conch meat) while all had various fried fish on the menu. Two or three stalls offered spices, jewelry and gifts for tourists. We stopped at one to try the homemade nutmeg ice cream.

On the night we attended, a local drumming group performed on benches along the road wearing Santa hats. It's a good time, and if you find yourself in the area, be sure to swing by and sample the dishes.

**Hashing with the Harriers**

— *A nice drinking club with a social problem*

Hashing is a British "sport" invented in the 1930s when a couple of bored expats in India needed to get outside but didn't know what to do. Of course, they went to the pub—where



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Peter Seupel, owner of Aquanauts Grenada, stands on his boat, *Salsa*, overlooking divers enjoying a pleasant surface interval while snorkeling a shallow reef; A picturesque waterfall streams into a placid pool in a mountain village in Grenada; Participants in Grenada's Hash group emerge from the wild and thick foliage that covers the hills of Grenada. Following a path marked only by piles of shredded paper, Hashers hike through varied terrains to get a unique feel for the wilds of Grenada; An antique, but

all great thinkers go—to come up with some ideas. Several pints and a few arguments later, the pastime known as hashing was born!

What is hashing you ask? Well...it's a bit difficult to explain. Think nature walks mixed with trekking, throw in a few piles of shredded paper, a

couple false trails and random shouts of "Are You?" followed by cold beer and fried fish. Confused? Yeah, so were we, but it's something you don't want to miss when you're in Grenada.

Peter and Gerlinde, owners of Aquanauts dive centers, are mem-

still utilized coco grinder awaits another batch of properly dried coco seeds that it will grind into a fine coco powder; Undersea murals decorate the walls of Aquanauts Dive Shop, which is welcoming and tidy with a professional staff ready to accommodate divers





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than ever, as over the last few dives she'd noticed that the headaches she normally got from diving deep had vanished and working the small buttons of her camera housing had been far easier on enriched air.

She mentioned this to Peter and his answer, like his nature, was direct and concise: "That's because of the added oxygen in your mix. Listen, everyone, and I mean everyone, who dives at 30 to 40 meters experiences some form of nitrogen narcosis. Whether they feel it or not, it's happening on some level. Obviously, you feel it more than others, but if you keep using nitrox, you won't have to continue to deal with those problems."

The boat ride was over before we knew it. Peter stepped off first, and I silently snickered at his old-school fins that looked like they were manufactured in the 60's.

We reached the *Bianca-C*, and the viz was outstanding—at least 40 meters (120 ft). I looked at my computer and was pleased to see we would have over 30 minutes to investigate.

A few giant barracuda aggressively showed us their teeth, as we started making our way forward. The current was mild, and I didn't feel hurried at all, taking time to study the enormous black and green fans making a coral forest on the outer hull. Purple wire coral spiraled out from the decks amidst great clusters of

bers of the Hash House Harriers and can help you set up a hash on your day off from diving. In fact, they will probably join in and run circles around you, as they are both in better shape than most!

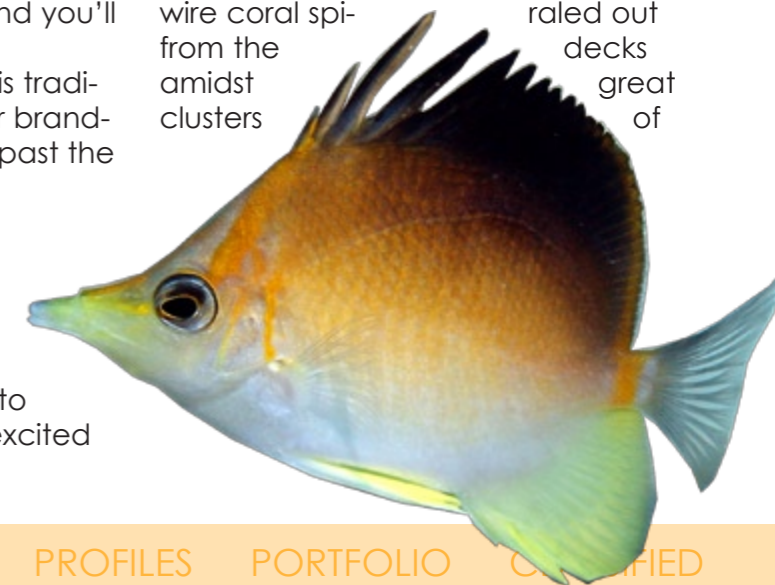
If you decide to go, and I HIGHLY recommend it, here is what you'll need: 1) clothes you don't mind getting dirty in and a good pair of running shoes—no flip-flops; 2) a towel; 3) a full change of clothes; 4) your sense of humor. Be sure to bring a few dollars for drinks and food after and don't forget to sign up with the mis-management when you get there.

All first timers get a signed certificate after the hash and a special gift from the Harriers. It's a riot, and you'll love it! We promise.

Oh, yes, one last thing... It is tradition that all newcomers wear brand-new, white socks that reach past the ankles, so bring those too.

### **Bianca-C —Take two**

Peter, a diving virtuoso and technical master known as "The King of *Bianca C*" joined us on our second visit to the *Bianca*. Kate was more excited



CLOCKWISE: A majestic eagle ray glides over the *Bianca C*; Pulling up his reel attached to the safety buoy above, Peter Seupel in his cool fins finishes up the first dive of the day at *Bianca C* amidst a school of blue chromis; Longsnout butterflyfish (inset) *Prognathodes aculeatus*



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gliding down into the deep.

We lingered at the giant leaning mast where circling jacks and large masses of creole wrasse and yellowtail congregated. Coral, sponges and fans covered the long pole completely, leaving not an inch of bare metal.

Kate took a few more shots frightening a group of small silver fish that came to have a look at us and then signaled me to check my gauges. She knows I use far more air than she does and, as an instructor, she tends to mother me in the water. I was at 700 PSI, so Peter pointed his thumb to the waves above.

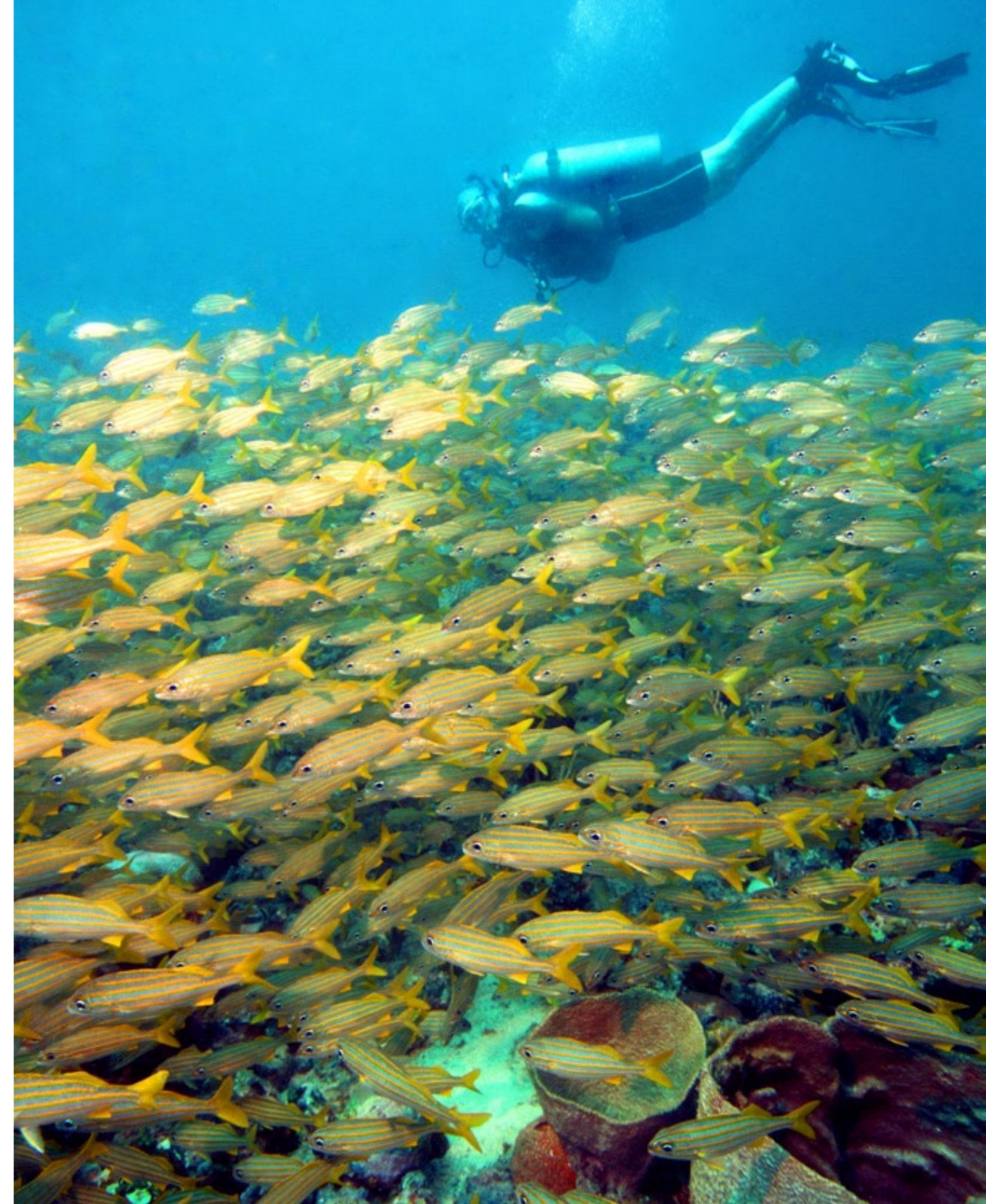
It had been a nice, slow dive, and after my second visit, I didn't feel cheated as I had before. But she's a big boat with lots of things left to discover, so I'm reserving the right to come back again. As they say, third time's a charm.

### Shark Reef

One of the most memorable dives, as far as sea life was concerned, had to be our trip to Shark Reef. Only a few minutes boat ride from True Blue Bay hiding behind Glover's Island in the Atlantic, this reef is known for the sharks, stingrays and abundant species of fish that spend their time here.

It's a shallow dive, ranging from 15–25 meters, so any diver at any level of certification can get lots of time to search the coral and rock shelves for pelagics and smaller fish. We weren't in the water more than a minute before we spotted two or three stingrays hiding in the coral breaks. We moved closer for a better look and one of them became nervous, wriggling out of its sandy bed and gliding off toward more secluded waters.

Paul tapped his tank and pointed out a rare spotted drum feeding among some red sponges. He didn't see it yet, but just below him, under a coral shelf, lay a juvenile nurse shark trying to hide its wide



green head; apparently under the delusion that if it couldn't see us, we wouldn't see him.

We let the current take us, and I saw another rarity—two hawksbill turtles playing among a growth of sea fans and tube sponges. We gathered around them, but they seemed oblivious to us, too wrapped up in their little sparring match. A dozen or so black durgons swam by, and, as I do

every time I see them, I marveled at the way their upper and lower fins glowed with electric blue lines that move in peristaltic waves.

We came to a large section of massive coral mounds, and Kate sank down swiftly. She was taking pictures of a nurse shark, easily three meters (9ft) in length. It was sleeping, and we were able to get very close. Its skin looked like tri-colored

sponges and trees, which a school of yellowtails were using for shelter.

Peter pointed emphatically toward the bow, and I looked up to see an eagle ray flying in slow motion across the mid-section. Fluid and elegant, they are an absolute delight to swim with. Peter knew we might miss a great photo-op, as the ray moved into more blue water, and he took off after it. Suddenly my misgivings about his fins vanished, and I watched in disbelief as he out-swam the spotted ray and turned it back toward the bow. It made one more slow pass, indulging us, before



THIS PAGE: Scenes from Shark Reef. CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Divers can get quite close to large nurse sharks sleeping in the coral farms; A hawksbill turtle glides slowly among the coral; Swarms of yellow French Grunt surround a diver; A stingray lies in wait buried in the sand



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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Diver in hull of the *Veronica*—a smaller wreck situated just over 20 meters deep, has a wide-open frame and is easy and safe to explore in and out of all her nooks. Divers can even find air pockets, trapped in her hull from when she went down; A goat fish swims in the coral reef near the wreck; A gorgeous queen angelfish is easily spotted due to its bright neon fin tips. This beauty was found swimming just under the *Veronica*; Side view of the wreck



### The *Veronica* wreck

If you have never been wreck diving before, the *Veronica* would be an easy and lovely introduction. Sitting in shallow, clear waters – her keel rests at around 16 meters (50 feet) – the small ship hosts numerous species of reef fish and has a wide open hull divers can enter with no danger. Large expanses of soft-pink cup coral, as well as brown and green sea fans, have rooted themselves along the outer skeleton providing shelter for large numbers of blue chromis and the creole wrasse are absolutely thick here. Surrounding the ship is a large coral bed that stays relatively shallow making a perfect environment for photography as the colors here absolutely sing and the mounds of diverse formations are filled with colorful critters and small fish. If possible try and dive this site twice—once with a macro lens and once with a wide angle. It is shallow enough that you can do this on one tank if necessary; just make sure you watch your air consumption carefully so you have ample time on both dives.

A macro image of telesto on *Veronica* shows the intricate detail of each single branch





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sunset is reflected in one of the two pools at the True Blue Bay Resort; Tiled dolphin motif decorates floor of pool in front of Indigo rooms; A sunset banquet at the Dodgy Dock restaurant; Diver and sleeping nurse shark in reef; Gerlinde and Peter Seupel (inset)

sandpaper, and the green flecks on its dorsal fin shimmered from the sunlight falling on its back. A black and white remora hovered near, obviously afraid of us but not wanting to leave the safety of the shark.

We backed off, and Kate took out her regulator, flashing me a big smile. It wasn't just the shark she was happy with. It was everything. Grenada is a magical place—a still unspoiled paradise of beauty, wonder and adventure for divers and non-divers alike. I feel lucky to have been able to share in all the island had to offer, and my sincerest wish is that you will give yourself the chance to experience it for yourself someday. You deserve it.

*Born and raised in the mountains of Montana, Kelly LaClaire, is a dive writer based in Portland, Oregon, where his cousin, underwater photographer and PADI instructor, Kate Clark, also resides. The team covers dive sites in the Pacific Northwest as well as various destinations abroad. At just 22, the already accomplished Clark aims to travel the world teaching others the joys of the underwater world, while LaClaire's dream is to become less of an air hog. ■*

**AQUANAUTS GRENADA — *The Spice Island's Premier Dive Operator***

Ask most any diver who has spent time in the waters of Grenada what operator they prefer to dive with and the answer, most definitely, will be Aquanauts owned and run by Peter and Gerlinde Seupel. With three centers on the island and three well-equipped, beautiful boats, you won't find a more qualified outfit.

"I've dived dozens and dozens of times here. I've even worked for many of the shops around the island, and I always go with Aquanauts," said a British PADI instructor who was on vacation and happened to be diving with us. As we sat in the sun on a surface interval, she told me why. "Of all the places I have been out with, Peter runs the safest—and hands down—the best dive shop in Grenada. No one else even comes close."

I asked Peter about this when he joined us a day or two later, and he instantly became serious. "It's not just all about fun. Of course, we do everything we can to provide that for our guests—that's why we're here—to give people a great and enjoyable dive experience they won't forget, but safety has to be a dive shop's first concern. I don't care if you've got a

five star PADI rating; if you're putting you're guests' lives in the hands of an 18-year-old kid just because he's certified a few people... well, that's just crazy—and very dangerous. There's far more to scuba diving than how many certs your instructors give out. How much do they know about their boats, the swells, the currents? How much do they really know about their equipment and do they maintain it properly? How often do they inspect it and buy new gear? How well do they know rescue procedures, and how often do they practice them? This is what makes a quality dive shop—nothing else—and we work hard to make sure our team is well qualified in all those areas. We have to. That's the only way to ensure our guests will be happy and want to



return." After spending a week with them, I believe it. Aquanauts' boats are brilliantly clean and superbly maintained. Our gear (BCD's, computers, regulators, suits) worked perfectly and looked new. Before every dive, we were given exact briefings with exact plans and exact safety procedures. Each instructor and dive master carried backup pony tanks while also making sure we all were given our own inflatable safety tubes. We didn't have a single problem on any of our dives, and it became obvious that Aquanauts puts every effort into ensuring things stay that way. And as Peter pointed out, once we knew everything was well taken care of, we had a blast. ■



Cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves



Trumpetfish of many different colors can be seen almost everywhere in Grenadian waters, from right off the boat dock in the harbor to darting in and out of coral formations in the reefs

## Grenada

will not give you one, or tell you they can't, then something is wrong! Usually this means they have oversold the flight (nearly all flights in December and February are oversold, so this is important). Even though you have paid for a ticket, if they do not give you a specific seat assignment, you will almost certainly be put on standby and may not be able to get a seat once at the airport. The airlines are often neglectful in explaining this so, again, demand a seat assignment or fly with another carrier

**Use a travel agent.** Sure you will have to pay a little extra for booking fees, but your agent will go to bat for you if any trouble occurs and, if needed, can do your re-booking faster and easier than you can when stuck at an airport due to weather delays, cancellations, missed connections or mechanical problems. Keep your agent's cell and office phone numbers with you in your carry-on so you can call them if you run into trouble. You paid for this service, so don't be afraid to use it.

**Get travel insurance.** Again, this will add a few dollars, but if you lose a day of travel, like we did, your insurance covers all expenses, meals, clothes and can even refund part or all of your flight costs. If you're working with a travel company, they can set this up for you.

**Be sure to pack your carry-on with extras**—two days of extra clothes, your toiletry bag, a swimsuit and any dive gear you deem essential like your computer, regulator, mask, shorty—things you don't want to borrow or rent from the dive center if you can help it—in case your checked luggage is lost. Nothing is worse than a couple days stranded in airports, waiting on planes and stuck in hotel rooms wearing the same underwear and socks. ■

### Flight Tips

Many divers plan their trips in the winter months, specifically December, so they can leave the cold and dreary weather behind and do some warm water diving in a tropical paradise. This is also

the busiest time of year for the airlines, and that means passengers are faced with possible delays, missed vacation days, lost baggage or equipment and extensive—hmm, how do I put this lightly—security probes and body searches.

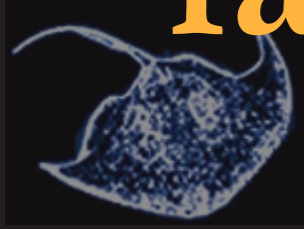
Unfortunately, my photographer, Kate, and I had to endure all of the above on the trip to do this story. Here are a few tips to avoid the same holiday hassles when flying to Grenada:

### Get a seat assignment right away.

Whether you book the flight with an agent, online or over the phone, be sure to ask for a seat assignment for each leg of the flight you will be on—especially with American and Continental. If they

# fact file

## Grenada



SOURCE: CIA.GOV WORLD FACTBOOK

**History** Carib Indians first inhabited Grenada when Columbus "discovered" the island in 1498, but it remained uncolonized by Europeans for more than a century. The first attempt to do so was by the British in 1609, but they were routed out by the native population. In 1650, Frenchmen tricked the local chiefs into selling them a portion of the Island for next to nothing and over the next year constant skirmishes had decimated the Caribs. Over the next 90 years the British and French fought constantly for ultimate possession of the island and today there are still several forts dotting the landscape. At that time sugar and tobacco were Grenada's main exports but cocoa, coffee and cotton crops were soon being cultivated as well. In 1783 the Island was ceded to Britain who began bringing huge numbers of African slaves to extend their sugarcane production. The plantation system reigned until the emancipation in 1834. A few years later nutmeg was introduced to the island; a commodity nearly as precious as gold at the time due to its healing, preservative and flavoring qualities. The local soil proved so perfect for the spice that Grenada is now the world's second largest nutmeg producer. The island gained independence from Britain in 1974 but only five years later was taken over by a communist group that had financial and political ties with Cuba and the Soviet Union. The United States, Jamaica and several Eastern Caribbean states jointly responded with the now famous "rescue mission" and restored order. In 1984 a general election was held, reestablishing

a democratic government and ensuring free elections for the future. Capital: St. George

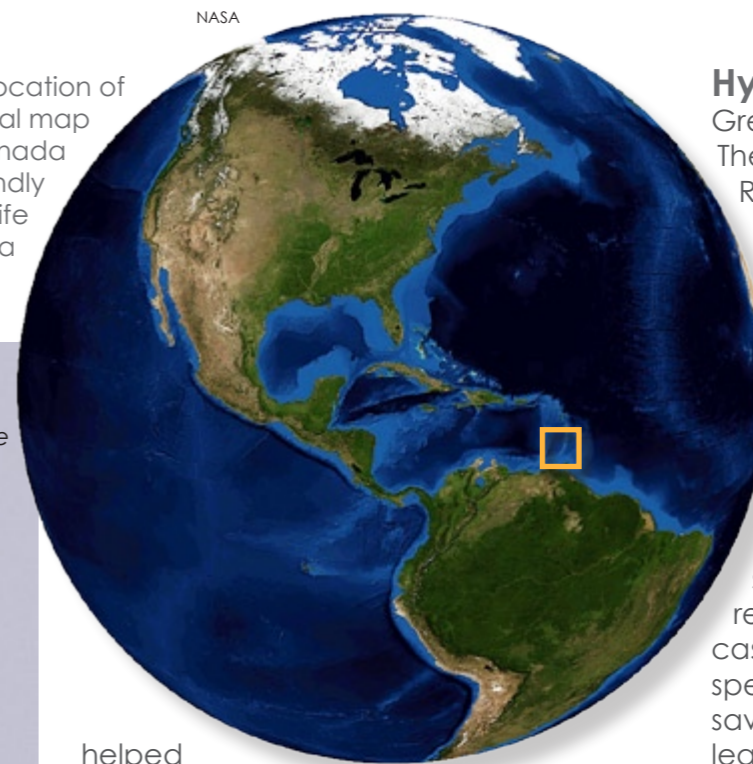
### Geography

Grenada is located a few hundred miles north of Venezuela where the Caribbean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean. The terrain is dominated by lush mountains densely covered in every conceivable variety of spices and fruit trees: nutmeg, cinnamon, cocoa, star fruit, orange, banana, breadfruit, mango, guava, clove, mango, cashew, almond, avocado, grapefruit, palm and bay trees. Coastline: 121 km of white sand beaches and small volcanic cliffs. Lowest point: Sea level. Highest point: Mt. Saint Catherine 840 meters (2520 ft).

**Climate** Of course, Grenada has a tropical climate with an average temperature in the low 80s F. The dry season runs from January to May and the rainy season from June to Dec. Natural hazards include hurricanes. Although Grenada lies on the edge of the hurricane belt and they occur less frequently than other Northern Caribbean islands, they do happen - witness Ivan in 2004 and Emily in 2005. The season lasts from June to November.



RIGHT: Location of Grenada on global map  
BELOW: Map of Grenada  
BOTTOM RIGHT: Friendly mono monkey in a wildlife reserve of Grenada



helped Grenada make a comeback but the world's economic problems over the last two years have stagnated that industry as well, making current growth difficult at best. Currently the unemployment rate is at 12.5% with 32% of its citizens struggling below the poverty line. One of the biggest challenges facing the agricultural economy is the strikingly few young adults working in that sector - 90% of all farmers are over 55 years of age and the number of young farmers has done nothing but decline over the last decade. Tourism, it seems, is Grenada's biggest hope for the future.

**Currency** East Caribbean Dollar (ECD). This currency is pegged to the U.S. dollar. USD1.00 = ECD2.70

**Population** 107,818 (July, 2010)  
Ethnic groups: black 82%, mixed black and European 13%, European and East Indian 5%, and trace of Arawak/Carib Amerindian. Religions: Roman Catholic 53%, Anglican 13.8%, Protestant sects 33.2%. Internet Users: 24,000 as of 2008.

**Language** English is the official language but some locals also speak French patois (French mixed with local slang, abbreviations and accented colloquialisms). The literacy rate is 96%.

**Environmental issues** All of Grenada power comes from diesel burning generators and currently there is no recycling program in place. Hurricane Ivan wiped out 83% of all agricultural crops and the soil is still recovering. The nation is party to several international agreements: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, Whaling

**Economy** Grenada relies on tourism as its main source of income followed by agricultural products - namely: nutmeg, cocoa and other spices. Hurricane Ivan caused massive economic problems and, while the island is recovering, the country is saddled with large debts from its rebuilding efforts. Tourism growth has

### Hyperbaric Chamber

Grenada does not have a chamber. The closest facility is: Roxborough Hyperbolic Facility, TLH Building, Milford Rd. Scarborough, Tabago 868-709-5655 (phone)

### Transportation

#### TO RENT OR NOT TO RENT?

Unless you're from the United Kingdom or a Commonwealth nation and you're comfortable driving on the left side of the road, I strongly recommend that you DO NOT rent a car here. Just bring some extra cash and hire taxis. Chances are you'll spend less money this way, and you'll save yourself the headache of trying to learn how to drive on the other side of the road while simultaneously trying to figure out Grenada's confused, hurried and seemingly lawless traffic system. If you choose to rent a vehicle, e-mail me and tell me if you survived.

### Websites

Grenada tourism  
[www.grenadagrenadines.com](http://www.grenadagrenadines.com)  
Grenada hotel and tourism association:  
[www.gogrenada.gd](http://www.gogrenada.gd) ■

