

# Caribbean EDENS

**Grenada and Barbados strikingly different vacation spots**

By **Gordon Leathers**  
 For the Free Press

**H**URRICANES WERE big news in the Caribbean this year starting with furious Georges and followed by big brother Mitch. But, at 12° north in Grenada and Barbados, hurricanes hardly ever happen. I spent a few days there in November, courtesy of Signature Vacations, and although the latitudes are similar, the islands are strikingly different.

The first stop was Grenada — rugged and mountainous, it was built by volcanoes. The capital, St. Georges, is nestled around two craters that make up the natural harbour. High above is Fort Georges, built by the French in 1765. After the Treaty of Versailles, the territory was ceded to the British and became a major producer of sugar and spice.

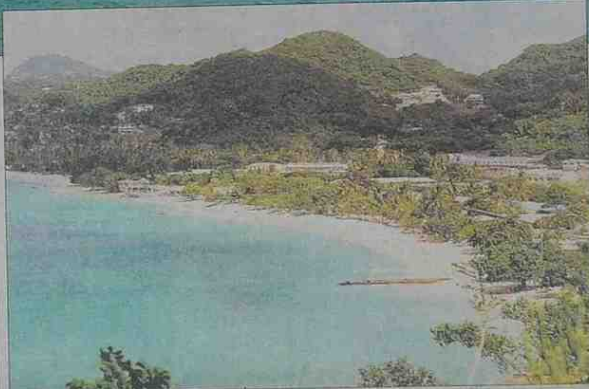
Unsweetened chocolate is a bitter disappointment to the unsuspecting nibbler but there's no harshness in the freshly cured cocoa melting on my tongue. According to the guide at the Dougaldston Plantation, Grenadan chocolate is among the world's best. Dougaldston is one of the many plantations that ran the West Indian economy starting in the 18th century. At its zenith there were 400 hectares feeding the sweating houses and drying racks where cocoa, bananas and sugar were prepared for export.

**Dutch apple pie**  
 Nutmeg is the most widely grown spice on the island. Native to Indonesia, the nutmeg tree was brought to the island by the British. Now the trees are everywhere, green and bushy and smelling pleasantly of Dutch apple pie.

The fruits are the size of an apricot and, when ripe, they're picked and the waxy meco is peeled off the inner kernel. The kernel is ground into the powdery nutmeg. Surrounding the plantation is the rain forest. There is a profound change in the ecology as we climb up the twisting road into the montane regions. The high country is dominated by bamboo, one of the two species of giant grass brought from Asia.

Up in the rain forests, graceful bamboo grows tall and sturdy, the leafy shoots radiating around the stalk and bushing out. When mature, the crown describes a graceful arc and looks toward the ground. Up at the summit of Grand Etang we overlook the lake that fills a dormant crater.

Wild monkeys from Africa live in the trees surrounding the lake but today they're quiet,



PHOTOS BY GORDON LEATHERS FOR THE FREE PRESS

Visitors can take yacht cruises at Secret Harbour in Grenada, top. Inset, Grand Anse Beach is one of the popular stretches of sand in Grenada. Above, a cannon over looks the Caribbean at Fort St. Georges, Grenada.

**DESTINATIONS:**  
 Canada lights up for Christmas / C4

huddling from the rain. On the far side of the mountains we drive through another plantation and see sugar cane. The Asian grass that changed the islands forever. Scruffy and unkempt, sugar cane slouches in the soil like a sullen teenage son. Plantation rows of cane look like the audience at a heavy metal concert. Gracious bamboo weeps.

Before leaving Grenada we go sailing. Captain Dennis pilots our little vessel out of the cove and we meet the swelling breakers. I'm standing on the bow like the figurehead of a tall ship, my fingers wrapped around the steel frame.

The waves strike and the little ship sits back in the trough, climbs the crest and then lunges forward dipping me up to my knees in the salt



Sambury Plantation House in Barbados

water. This may not be a good idea. Barbados, unlike volcanic Grenada, is coral limestone pushed straight up.

It's relatively flat with dramatic cliffs in the Scotland district to the north. The island was uninhabited when it was claimed by Britain in 1627. It was they who set up the extensive plantations and rum distilleries.

Our first visit is to the Mount Gay Distillery where they've been brewing rum since 1703. They use copper-pot stills which is one of the reasons for the exquisite smoothness of the Mount Gay Extra Old.

We're taken to the warehouse where racks of charred oak barrels hold the distillate. After 12 years, the blender takes the barrels and "marries the syrups" into a fine, smoky rum.

**I**T WAS a tradition of the British navy until 1970 to issue Her Majesty's sailors a daily tot, this was until the chief medical officer apparently issued the following statement.

"The British tar, lean tough and sinewed is getting so terribly thin you'd believe tot of rum did provoke rot of tum so the practice should be discontinued."

And so ended the last of the great British naval traditions.

And so begins a great Bajan naval tradition, the Harbour Master cruise from Bridgetown. I'm on the foredeck, looking down at the flying fish skipping before the bow wave. On the third deck, local band Jade pumps out its brand of soca, the Bajan variation of calypso.

The Harbour Master drops anchor at Hole-town and a buffet dinner is served at sea.

After dinner, the show begins with The Dance Machine exploding forth in a glorious soca-driven chaos. Following them are the Phoenix Limbo Dancers, two stunning women in tight spandex bending themselves backward under the bar.

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# Caribbean band has tourists hopping

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Then, in comes Daredevil Judy. Lean and wiry, hips rocking, she eyes the crowd as the bar is set aflame and lowered to mere inches off the floor. She puts a cigarette in her mouth and begins pulsing to the beat as she bends back, her knees and shoulders barely off the floor and inches under the flames using her toes. As she stands, both her cigarette and the crowd are smoking.

We weighed anchor and head back to Bridgetown with Jade driving while the crew navigates. They have the crowd hopping. The drummer, sweat beading on his forehead, directs the dance.

"Move it to the left," and the people shuffle to the left. "Move it to the right," and they step a shuffle to the right. Jade winds down just as the gangway lowers and another boatload of passengers pours forth, still dancing.

There's quite a view from the lion monument below Gun Hill.

Up to the north is the old look-out which served as a communications point and as a convalescent station for ailing soldiers. There's a full size lion carved out of the surrounding limestone by Henry Wilkinson of the British Ninth Regiment of Foot. The Latin inscription translates: "It shall rule from the river to the sea, and from the sea, to the end of the world." The British are gone but the lion remembers the Empire.

I got here in the back of a Land Rover, driven by Philip for Island Safari Tours. They take us into the

wild north east where I look down from Hackleton's Cliff and watch the waves on the choppy blue sea near the fabled mushroom rocks of Bathsbeba.

Off in the distance is the Morgan Lewis sugar mill, the last wind mill to grind cane. It's being restored so tourists will hear the ghostly creaking of the rollers and wonder of the African labourers who shoved armfuls of cane into the insatiable maw of the European machine.

It's a full moon tonight and we're at the Oistens fish fry just east of the St. Lawrence Gap. The sun has set, enveloping Oistens in smoky darkness. Crowds of people are milling about in jovial bonhomie.

"You want fish?" asks Frutee Crystal. She's in a small wooden shack standing over a big iron skillet. I'm served a glistening slab of blue marlin on a bed of Caribbean rice with a touch of lemon in the batter that makes your tastebuds stand up and cheer.

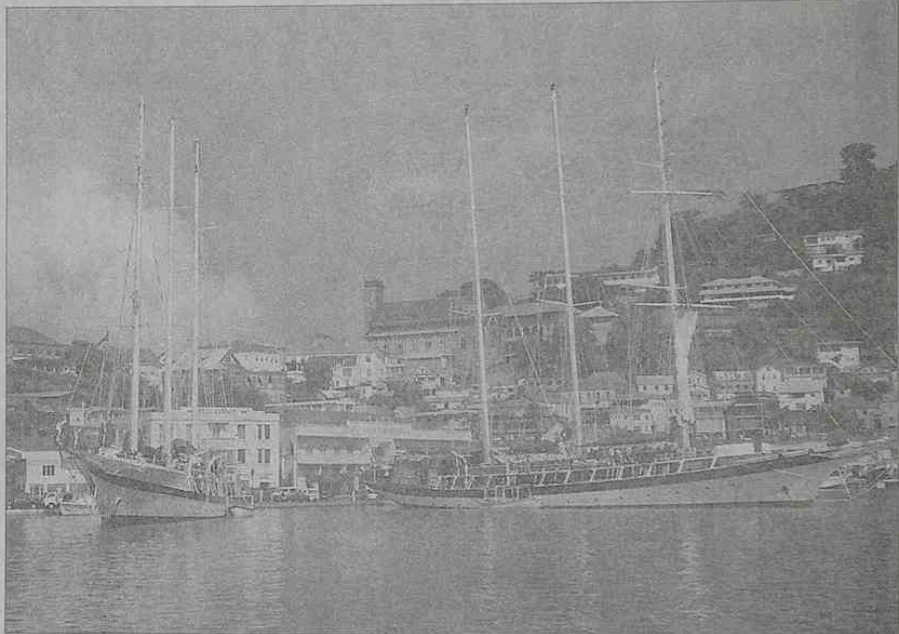
I'm looking once again toward the ocean as it rolls in, gently rocking the fishing boats into slumber. On shore the carnival continues.

Over at Lexies people sway to Stand By Me by Ben E. King and I hear the snapping patois over the crack of dominoes.

Tonight it's Oistens. Tomorrow it's home.

Signature Vacations offers several packages to Grenada and Barbados. Contact a travel agent for information and reservations.

Gordon Leathers is a Winnipeg freelance writer, actor and musician.



Clipper ships at anchor in Grenada's St. Georges Harbour at the southern tip of the island.

**Depression:**  
Don't Wait, Get the Best!  
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**Discover World Class Golf**