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# travel

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# GOLD FOR GRENADA

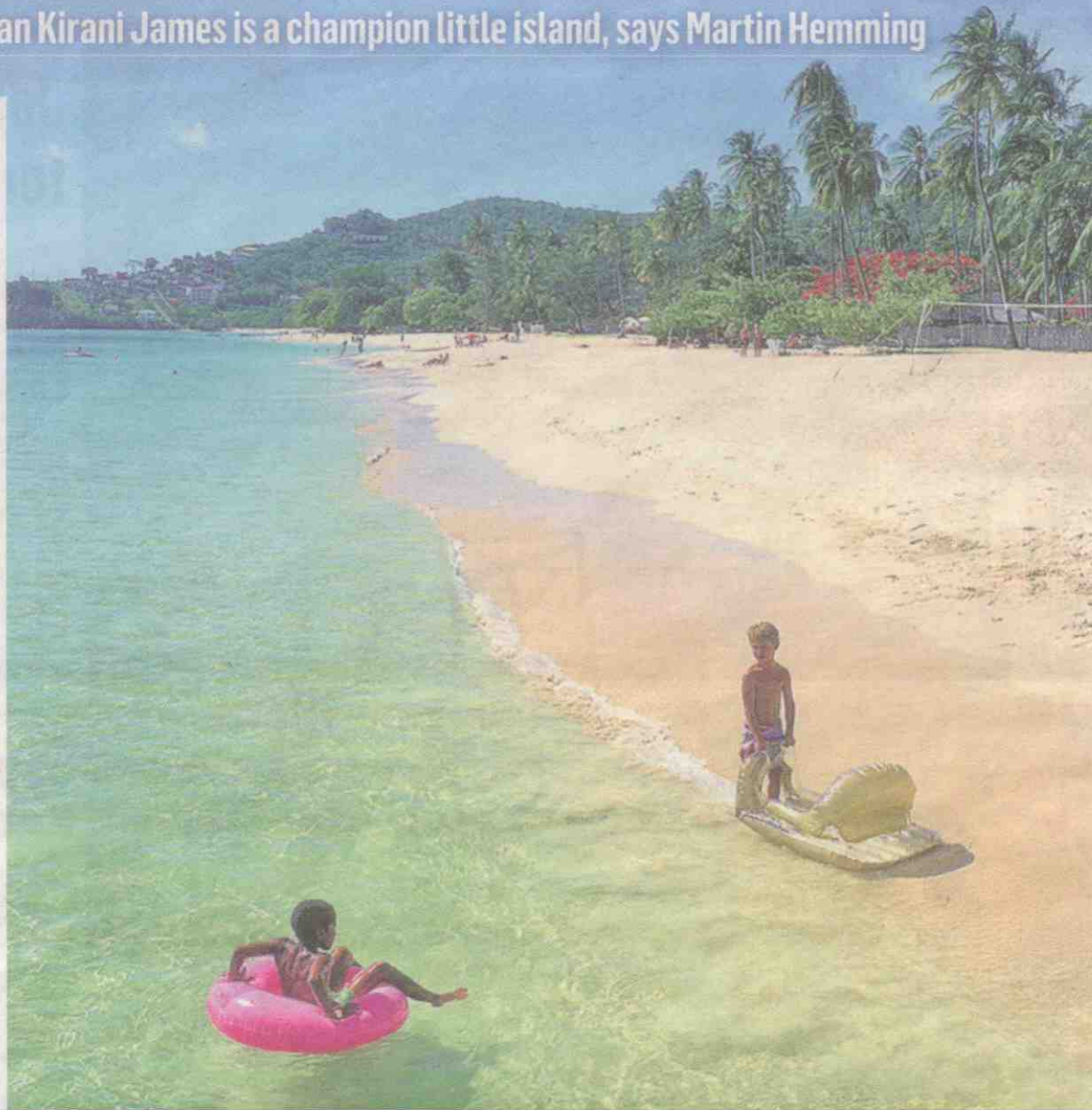
The home of the Olympian Kirani James is a champion little island, says Martin Hemming

If you were under the impression that the sinking of the Costa Concordia cruise liner in January 2012 was a one-off, you obviously haven't been to the eastern Caribbean island of Grenada. Or else you have, but you didn't quite manage to haul yourself from the beach and get up to the island's pretty capital, St George's, where rum shops line the quay and fishermen sell barracuda from their painted boats.

In St George's, there's a ragtag museum of local history, where Liz, an expat from Hertfordshire, gave me the tour. Downstairs is Joséphine Bonaparte's marble bath, from the empress's childhood on Martinique. And upstairs are black-and-white photographs from October 1961, when the 600ft Bianca C cruise ship caught fire and sank just outside the harbour. Who owned the liner? Sorry, Costa — that was one of yours, too. It's now one of the world's great wreck dives, 170ft down.

Just one passenger died, with the 672 survivors spending a week in the homes of locals. A bronze statue of Christ of the Abyss stands on the St George's waterfront, given by Costa to the people of Grenada as a thank-you for their hospitality. And you, too, will be made to feel more than welcome in this hilly former British colony, 100 miles from Venezuela and a 60th of the size of Wales.

Whereas some Caribbean islands court only the beautiful and the loaded, Grenada's invitation is open to anyone with an airline ticket. Take Grand Anse beach. Set just back from the sand is the low-rise Spice Island Beach Resort. Very smart it is, too, with plunge-pool villas.



returned, to an appalled hotel front desk, decorated in sludge and scratches.

Telfor was sent a medal by the Queen on her diamond jubilee, but as far as local heroes go, only one name matters on Grenada right now. A huge banner on the side of the airport terminal building said it all: "Welcome to Kirani country." Last summer, at the age of 19, Kirani James became the island's first Olympic medallist, winning the 400-metre gold in London in 43.94 seconds.

Show me a Grenadian and they'll show you a picture on their phone of the time they last met Kirani. (He lives in Alabama now.) The main Lagoon Road has been renamed Kirani James Boulevard. His home town, Gouyave, on the west coast, is known for its nutmeg factory and weekly Fish Friday cookouts. Now added to the list of attractions is the grass track where Kirani's coaches first realised the gangly teenager was going places fast.

He's the one man who would probably be allowed to have a roped-off slice of prime Grenadian beach all to himself, and he can run the length of Grand Anse a lot quicker than I can.

✦ *Martin Hemming travelled as a guest of the Grenada Board of Tourism (grenadagrenadines.com), McIntyre Bros Car Rentals and British Airways*

## TRAVEL BRIEF

Getting there and around: British Air-

...the survivors spending a week in the homes of locals. A bronze statue of Christ of the Abyss stands on the St George's waterfront, given by Costa to the people of Grenada as a thank-you for their hospitality. And you, too, will be made to feel more than welcome in this hilly former British colony, 100 miles from Venezuela and a 60th of the size of Wales.

Whereas some Caribbean islands court only the beautiful and the loaded, Grenada's invitation is open to anyone with an airline ticket. Take Grand Anse beach. Set just back from the sand is the low-rise Spice Island Beach Resort. Very smart it is, too, with plunge-pool villas, gourmet meals and all-you-can-drink house wine. Doubles in March start at £665 a night. At the other end of Grand Anse is Jenny's Place, where ensuite rooms can be had for just £48.

The point is, whichever one you're staying at, and however much you're paying, you're sharing the same stretch of sand. You're sharing with the locals, too, from hand-holding pensioners to toddlers in rubber rings. Democracy in Grenada reaches all the way to the shore — something America, which invaded in 1983 to "liberate" the island from Cuban-sponsored communism, would probably like to take credit for.

Most guidebooks boast that Grand Anse is two miles long. It is a boast, because it took me 10 minutes to jog from one end to the other, and I wasn't on anything performance-enhancing, unless nutmeg-topped rum punch counts. It's definitely gorgeous, with white sand, palms and a gentle slope into the sea, but on Grenada you can collect beaches like they're Panini football stickers. I spent a week beach-hopping and failed miserably to amass the full album's worth, just as Sheffield Wednesday's Paul Warhurst eluded me throughout the 1992-93 season.

Make it to wild Bathway Beach, right in the Atlantic northeast, if you can, stopping in Grenville for conch curry upstairs in the Ebony Restaurant (it's opposite the fire station and the KFC). Follow the island's sine-wave south coast at least as far as La Sagesse, where the grilled lobster (£19) comes with a side order of mangrove-backed black sand and waves worthy of the name.



**Grand Anse beach: it's long, but not two miles long. Below, Telfor Bedeau, local legend**

Robert Harding, Martin Hemming

The bays hide more than bathing opportunities. Down at Le Phare Bleu marina, you can have dinner on an old Swedish lighthouse ship. At Petit Bacaye, you can eat in a treehouse. True Blue Bay's Dodgy Dock bar was evidently the place to be on a Wednesday night if you're young, black or white, and into awful chart pop. And at Prickly Bay, I stumbled into one very serious game of bingo — hundreds of islanders and yachties sitting at picnic tables on the marina, silent, eyes down, hanging on every number read out by a man from

Northampton called Pete. Gambling is strictly illegal on Grenada. In this case, "strictly" means "except for bingo and the lottery".

A hire car is best for the itchy-footed Grenadian beach-crawler, but I figured a kayak would give me a different approach. I paddled round the small headland from Magazine beach, where the Aquarium Restaurant does potent £4.50 frozen margaritas and barbecued jerk chicken, to Portici beach, where the Laluna resort does a luxury line in Asian-influenced thatched cottages.



**"Now 73, Telfor guides treks through the forest, and he does so in a vest, shorts and jelly sandals"**

Sea conditions were on the placid side of completely still, yet when I made land at Morne Rouge beach — a favourite with students from the island's American medical university — I was aching and sun-beaten, with salt in my eyes. I'd left my wallet at the hotel. A nice lady at the clapboard Sur La Mer beach bar passed me two life-saving cups of iced water through the serving hatch.

Telfor Bedeau wouldn't have been such a wuss about it. Telfor was the first Grenadian to build his own boat and row it round the island. He has completed the circumnavigation twice. When he was 48, it took him 19 hours. When he was 58, it took him 20. He has climbed Mount St Catherine, Grenada's highest peak, 188 times. He lived in Ladbroke Grove, west London, for a year in the 1960s, and he reads *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* four times a year. Now 73, balding, and a tiny knot of grinning muscle, he guides treks through the Grand Etang forest, and he does so wearing a vest, shorts and jelly sandals.

I splashed pathetically and sweatily behind him. "Do you want to go on an adventure?" he asked after we'd reached the last of the Seven Sisters waterfalls. We plunged through the trees in search of a trail that had been lost in Hurricane Ivan in 2004. I was

...where Adam's coaches first realised the gangly teenager was going places fast.

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**Getting there and around:** British Airways (0844 493 0787, ba.com) and Virgin Atlantic (0844 209 7777, virgin-atlantic.com) fly from Gatwick, with a one-hour touchdown in St Lucia or Tobago; from £550 return. Car hire starts at £38 a day with McIntyre Bros Car Rentals (00 1 473 444 1550, caribbeanhorizons.com).

**Where to stay:** as well as Spice Island (spiceislandbeachresort.com), luxury options include the villas at Mount Cinnamon, on Grand Anse beach (from £275 a night in March; mountcinnamongrenadahotel.com); Maca Bana, on the slopes above the Aquarium Restaurant (from £395; macabana.com); and Laluna (from £315; laluna.com).

Along with Jenny's Place (jennysplacegrenada.com), good value is to be had at La Sagesse (doubles from £118, room-only; lasagesse.com); Le Phare Bleu (apartments from £115, B&B; lepharebleu.com); and, on Grand Anse, the Flamboyant (doubles from £125, room-only; flamboyant.com). Families should consider the Lanse aux Epines Cottages (cottage for four from £181; lae cottages.com). A Sandals resort opens in November, but don't let that put you off.

**Tour operators:** Just Grenada (01373 814214, justgrenada.co.uk) has a week at Mount Cinnamon in March from £1,795pp, B&B, including flights and transfers. The Grenada Collection (01202 703500, thegrenadacollection.co.uk) has a week at the Flamboyant from £1,092pp, room-only. Or try Kenwood Travel (020 7749 9245, kenwoodtravel.co.uk), or British Airways (0844 493 0772, ba.com/holidays).