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## Islands on the edge Like

Some of the Caribbean's most beautiful treasures are well off the touristy track. Of course, that's part of what makes them so special.

BY DAVID SWANSON  
SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

Unfurling from the southern tip of St. Vincent like tassels ornamenting the tail of a kite, the Grenadines represent a Caribbean treasure trove of secret landings.

Shared by two countries, this 68-mile-long archipelago of 60-some islands peppers the junction of the Atlantic and the Caribbean, en route south to Grenada. Yachties have sailed these cerulean waters for years; royalty celebrities has bunked on these islands for extended periods. A few Grenadines have a population that swells to a four-digit girth; three are home to a single "private island" resort, while most are uninhabited.

These hideaway beaches and covert inns represent some of my favorite stomping grounds in the Caribbean, yet they remain relatively unknown to most travelers -- a fact that only increases their appeal. There are no large cruise ships hogging the view, no all-inclusive resorts where the vibe is defined by a swim-up pool bar.

So why do the best parts of the Grenadines feel a bit like the back of beyond? In a word: access. No jets fly in from America (or anywhere) -- you won't find yourself in these waters by accident.

You can get here on puddle-jumper flights from Barbados and other nearby islands. But if it takes a bit of hassle to reach them, come along for the ride and see why these islands are worth the effort. Starting from the north, here's an island-by-island primer of the Grenadines.

### YOUNG ISLAND

Positioned a mere 600 feet from St. Vincent, Young Island is a 35-acre rock outcrop with a small white-sand beach. It feels a bit Tahitian, overgrown as it is with towering almond trees and creaking bamboo.

- **Stay:** The 29-cottage Young Island Resort is a Caribbean classic, with outdoor vine-draped showers and hibiscus-laced cocktails from the Coconut Bar, an over-water swim-up bar with four stools rising from the sea. Stay here and the hiking, diving and other diversions of the "mainland" are easily arranged. But you'll be hard-pressed to tear yourself away from this fantasyland. From \$448 in low season modified American plan (MAP)\* (\$646 high); reservations, 800-223-1108; <http://youngisland.com>.

### BEQUIA

Often introduced with the prefix sweet, Bequia (pronounced beck-wee) is a spindly island flush with quirky personality. It is scalloped by sandy bays, set six miles south of St. Vincent. The island can be explored on foot, but thumbing a ride is another good way to get to know the seven-

### Going to St. Vincent & the Grenadines

- **Geography:** The Grenadines are anchored by the larger islands of St. Vincent on the north and Grenada to the south. The international border lies in the water between Union and Carriacou islands -- crossing it means clearing customs and immigration.

- **Getting there:** Primary access for the northern Grenadines is via Barbados, 100 miles east. LIAT, Mustique Air and SVG Air fly to Bequia, Mustique, Canouan and Union, plus St. Vincent and Grenada. To reach Carriacou, SVG Air flies from Grenada twice daily.

- **Getting around:** It's possible (and enjoyable) to island-hop through the chain by ferry.

Ferries link St. Vincent with Bequia (1 hour) up to eight times a day. Four days a week the M/V Endeavor sails between St. Vincent and Mustique (2 hours). Five times a week, ferries travel from St. Vincent to Canouan, Mayreau and Union Island (4 to 5 hours to Union). One-way tickets are under \$20.

There is a twice-daily ferry from Grenada to Carriacou (90 minutes) and Petite Martinique; one-way fare is \$30.

Scheduled access to Mayreau and Petite Martinique is by ferry only. Access to Young, Palm and PSV is only via private resort launch.

- **Info:** St. Vincent and the Grenadines tourism: 800-729-1726 or 212-687-4981; <http://discoversvg.com>.

- **Bequia tourism:** 784-458-3286; [bequiatourism.com](http://bequiatourism.com).

- **Carriacou and Petite Martinique tourism:** 473-443-7948; <http://carriacoupetitemartinique.com>.

- **Grenada tourism:** 877-708-9554; <http://grenadagrenadines.com>.

square-mile outpost. The 5,000 islanders are good-natured and friendly -- descended from Scots, Africans and Caribs -- and visitors and locals mix easily.

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In contrast to Young, Bequia is just rough enough at the edges to feel like a real place -- after repeat visits I find it still perpetually on the cusp of discovery. The island clings proudly to its maritime heritage, starting with the bucolic sailing hub of Port Elizabeth, where pace of life is largely dictated by the ebb and flow of ferries. The harbor is a compulsory stop for yachts touring the Grenadines -- a tradition of elegant model boat-building thrives at several craft shops. The Easter Regatta is an annual international sailing event, and you don't need to know a jib from a jibe to indulge in the festivities.

• **Stay:** Bequia boasts the Grenadines' best array of inexpensive and moderately priced accommodations, led by Frangipani, a West Indian guesthouse and island social hub. Five original waterfront rooms have creaking floorboards, shared bathrooms and mahogany antiques. Too rustic? There are 10 handsome cut-stone bungalows on the hillside behind. The Frangi bustles Thursday nights when the Elites, a steel pan band, ferries over from St. Vincent for barbecue and jump-up. From \$60 (\$75 high season). <http://frangipanibequia.com> .

• **Play:** Friendship Rose, an elegant 100-foot mail-boat schooner built on Bequia, has dedicated her retirement years to day sails. Trips departing from Port Elizabeth to Mustique or the Tobago Cays are \$125, including snorkeling, breakfast, lunch and drinks. 784- 495-0886; [www.friendshiprose.com](http://www.friendshiprose.com) .

### MUSTIQUE

Although it is today undoubtedly the most famous of the Grenadines, Mustique was once home to a hundred or so inhabitants, who eeked a hardscrabble living from sea and soil. It is said that when Scotsman Collin Tennant (aka Lord Glenconner) purchased the 1,400-acre island in 1958, he paid a mere 45,000. His master stroke was to present a 10-acre parcel to Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowden on the occasion of her wedding two years later, a gift that put Mustique on the map.

The Lord created an infrastructure and the Princess built a home, establishing the Grenadines as safe for royalty. In her wake came Mick Jagger, Tommy Hilfiger and others who built villas and made Mustique the Caribbean's most exclusive landing. Today the colony of staffed villas, plus a small hotel and inn, is overseen by the Mustique Company.

Residents are not accustomed to receiving daytrippers, but you can visit on a charter yacht or via the Friendship Rose. Day visitors steer to Britannia Bay, where Mustique's main jetty is located. It's the only real beach with food and drink services, and if you follow the shore just past Basil's the swimming is free of marina distractions.

• **Stay:** Seventy-some fully-staffed villas are rented by the Mustique Company. Rates for a two- or three-bedroom home start at \$5,000 per week (\$7,000 high season) but can range up to nine bedrooms and \$50,000 per week. 800-747-9214; <http://mustique-island.com> .

• **Play:** Idyllic beaches are on the east coast, including Pasture Bay -- sometimes a little rough for swimming but ideal for flying a kite -- while Macaroni Bay spreads out like vanilla frosting. Amazingly, despite being the island's finest beach, it's often empty (ask your villa staff to reserve one of the thatched picnic huts for a barbecue lunch).

### CANOUAN

As recently as the mid-1990s, three-square-mile Canouan was little more than a tumble-down village of 739 islanders -- there was barely a bed for rent. But with idyllic, undeveloped hills and a half-dozen picture-perfect beaches, the island couldn't escape notice for long. A group of Italian and Swiss investors bought the northern two-thirds of the island and began a wholesale remaking of Canouan with visions of Mustique in their minds. A luxury resort opened in 1999, followed by a golf course, marina, casino and jaw-dropping spa.

But if Mustique has evolved to embrace a comfortable, lived-in style of luxury, Canouan aimed for something glitzier, defined by the cover of Sports Illustrated's 2009 swimsuit issue: Bar Refaeli in all her glory, photographed here when the 156-room resort was managed by Raffles. The hotel -- by far the largest in the Grenadines -- has opened and closed under different management companies, but is scheduled to re-emerge this winter.

Remember access?

A long reef parallels Canouan's east coast, protecting lovely beaches from heavy seas and offering shelter for snorkelers. The south end of the island is dominated by the recently extended airport, but tucked away just past the terminal is Glossy Bay. It's the place to be at sunset, when the horizon ripples with the summits of the central Grenadines, waves bob gently, and children play in the steep rake of sand.

• **Stay:** The 40-room Tamarind Beach Hotel on Grand Bay is pricey but nicely positioned fronting a long beach. Downstairs units are whitewashed and fresh, upper rooms leave the Brazilian wood exposed, with wicker furnishings and louvered jalousie windows; next door is the Moorings' charter yacht base for the Grenadines. From \$450 full American plan (FAP)\* (\$550 high season). 784-458-8044; [tamarindbeachhotel.com](http://tamarindbeachhotel.com) .

• **Play:** One of the most spectacular golf courses in the Caribbean is the Trump International Golf Club, a par-72 facility designed by Jim Fazio that snakes over the steep ridges of Mount Royal, revealing hidden beaches below and Grenadines on the horizon fore and aft.

### AP VIDEO

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## UNION ISLAND

Gifted with the lion's share of topographical personality, the silhouette of Union Island appears on the horizon like a South Pacific fantasy, with 999-foot Mount Tobai -- the Grenadines highest peak -- piercing the clouds. As a transportation hub for the Grenadines, the island is a quirky backwater that quite a few travelers stop at en route to other places, but few people actually stay on. Two villages share a population of about 2,000. Visitors will find most services concentrated in Clifton, next to the small international airport.

Despite a dire shortage of well-run hotels, beach-lovers might give Union a longer look. One of the Grenadines' most beautiful, Chatham Bay is a broad arc of sand that faces the sunset. Vendors sell snacks and yachts bob in the bay, though sunbathers are surprisingly few.

- **Stay:** Pickings are slim, but the 17-room Kings Landing Hotel sits behind the shoreline and offers decent motel-like accommodations with a pool. From \$105 including breakfast, year-round. 784-485-8823; <http://kingslandinghotel.com> .
- **Play:** Captain Yannis is the largest charter operator out of Union, with seven-hour day trips by catamaran to Mayreau, Tobago Cays and Palm Island.

## MAYREAU

Just a half-dozen cars trundle once or twice a day along a road barely a mile in length, and electricity arrived only eight years ago. A ferry stops by several times a week -- a good thing since there's no airport (the population is just 250 or so). If the island of Mayreau (my-row) feels more remote than your typical Caribbean outpost, I wouldn't have it any other way.

Mayreau is off the grid, even as defined by the Grenadines. It's most frequented by yachties who tie up for a night at Salt-whistle Bay, a perfect quarter-moon of creamy sand that coils around a beautifully protected lagoon as passive as bathwater. Make the trek up the hill to Robert Righteous & de Youths, where island food and beer are served in a cheery setting overlooking the town. And don't miss the charming little Anglican Church.

- **Stay:** While Saltwhistle Bay Club boasts one of the most idyllic settings in the Caribbean, it's an uneven operation. Instead, in the village at the top of the hill between the beaches, Dennis' Hideaway is a five-room guesthouse with simply appointed but all air-conditioned rooms, a pool and restaurant. \$85 including continental breakfast, year-round. 784-458-8594; <http://dennis-hideaway.com> .
- **Play:** Follow the loose trail off to the right (west) of the ferry dock to clandestine Troissant, a glorious ribbon of auburn sand that provides perfect sunning, swimming and sunsets.

## TOBAGO CAYS

If the Grenadines were a necklace, the Tobago Cays would be the jeweled pendant, a quintet of uninhabited outcrops featured in a perfect postcard shot of a yacht lolling next to a diminutive, beach-girdled island. When producers of *Pirates of the Caribbean* needed a shot of Captain Jack Sparrow abandoned on a meager finger of sand, it was here that they filmed.

Moorings at the Tobago Cays are much in demand, but in a smart bit of environmental stewardship, the St. Vincent government got serious about protecting it, establishing a Marine Park and enlisting residents of Union Island to clean up and manage the cays. Today a maximum of 150 vessels is allowed at any given time and regulations have evolved to minimize stress on the delicate environment. The coral has bounced back and marine life flourishes -- spotted eagle rays and sea turtles are now more common, especially in the grass under the southwest shore of Baradel.

There are no facilities in the Tobago Cays. Most people visit on day trips from Union, but charters from other islands are common.

## PALM ISLAND

Something like an enormous sandbar, anchored by rocky outcrops that rise from its corners, 135-acre Palm Island has no year-round population, but has a couple of dozen homes and a low-key, 43-room all-inclusive resort, accessed from Union.

- **Stay:** Palm Island Resort is situated on the main beach and virtually all the rooms are either on the sand or have a view of it. Least-expensive rooms are positioned about a 15-second walk from the shoreline and encompass a generous 450 square feet (beachfront rooms are somewhat smaller). No TVs or phones, but there's a pool, tennis court and the resort is just big enough that the bar hums nicely before and after meals. From \$725, all-inclusive (\$855 high season) including tax/service. 866-237-2157; <http://palmislandresortgrenadines.com> .

## PETIT ST. VINCENT

Built in 1968 by the late Haze Richardson, the resort on this most southerly of St. Vincent's Grenadines provides one of the Caribbean's most pitch-perfect escapes. Better known simply as PSV, the 113-acre island has a velvety carpet of white sand wrapping almost unbroken for nearly two miles around an old volcanic cone that stands guard over the few guests who loll in relative privacy under thatch-roof palapas.

• **Stay:** There are just 22 stone cottages at Petit St. Vincent Resort. Each is made of hand-hewn stone quarried from the island, and all have a living area for lounging or dining and a patio for sunning. And this is key: Each cottage (and patio) is absolutely private, with a flag system to advise staff when seclusion is preferred. At night there are no TVs to distract you from the panoply of stars that floods the dark, dark sky, and no air conditioning interferes with a soundtrack of rippling surf that bathes your dreams. Rates are steep -- it's worth every penny. From \$709 FAP (\$903 high season). 800-654-9326; <http://psvresort.com>.

**CARRIACOU AND**

**PETITE MARTINIQUE**

Languid to a forgivable fault, 13-square-mile Carriacou (pronounced kerry-a-coo) is the largest and most populous of the Grenadines, but politically linked to Grenada to the south. Despite 9,000 residents, there is little industry here beyond boatbuilding and fishing. The economy snoozes while *obeah* -- an African form of sorcery -- still thrives behind closed doors.

Tourism is largely limited to daytrippers, mainly because the pastoral island lacks good lodging options. But Carriacou is a find for anyone in search of dream beaches. The great beauty is Anse La Roche, hidden away on the northwest tip, exquisitely free of development. A boat can pull into the cove easily, or it's a fun 20-minute hike down from the road through stands of cactus and cowpatties. Nearby on the northeast tip and easy to reach is Petit Carenage Bay. Just past the village of Windward an obvious trail leads down through the stand of mangroves to a long arc of glistening silica -- often people-free. Seashells are plentiful to the right (south) end.

Also part of the troika of inhabited islands flying the Grenada flag is Petite Martinique, a 486-acre volcanic cone with 1,000 enterprising residents of predominantly French descent. Locals know the island best as the unofficial smuggling capital of the Caribbean.

• **Stay:** Two miles outside Hillsborough, Green Roof Inn is a Swedish-owned five-room guest house and collection of cottages. The rooms are all compact and simply furnished, but well-kept. The restaurant, set on a breezy second-floor terrace, can be good. From \$70 in low season to \$80 in high season including continental breakfasts. 473-443-6399; <http://greenroofinn.com>.

\*All rates are per-room, double occupancy; an additional tax/service charge of up to 20 percent is levied. Where indicated, modified American plan (MAP) includes breakfast and dinner; full American plan (FAP) means three meals daily; all-inclusive adds in all drinks. High season is generally mid-December through mid-April.



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