



A FREE GRENADA HISTORY AND HERITAGE GUIDE

THE STORY OF GRENADA

History, heritage and folklore of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

Free to read and to share. Written by Grenada Concierge Inc., Petit Valley Road, Lance Aux Epines, St George's, Grenada. October 2026.

Cover: St George's harbour, watercolour, 1849, by Captain Henry A. Turner, Royal Artillery. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.

BEFORE YOU READ

Grenada is a small island with a long memory. This guide tells its story in order, from the first people who crossed the water to the island you are standing on today.

It is written to be read slowly, on a veranda or a flight. Where historians agree, the guide simply says so. Where they do not, it tells you, because a guest deserves to know the difference between what is documented and what is told. The folklore chapter is marked the same way.

The island has three parts. **Grenada** is the main island, about 34 kilometres long and 18 wide. **Carriacou** and **Petite Martinique** lie to the north in the Grenadines and share most of the history, with a culture of their own. Together they are one country, often called the Spice Isle.

A note on names. The guide uses **Kalinago** for the island's last Indigenous people, as the Grenada National Museum does. Older books call them Caribs, a label Europeans gave to a mixed group of peoples.

GRENADA AT A GLANCE

Before 1498	Indigenous peoples live on the island for thousands of years.
1498	Columbus sights the island on his third voyage.
1649 to 1650	The French settle, purchase the island, and fight the Kalinago. Sauteurs, 1650.
1763	Britain takes Grenada under the Treaty of Paris.
1779 to 1783	France recaptures the island, then returns it.
1795 to 1796	Julien Fédon leads the great uprising.
1834 and 1838	Slavery ends; full freedom follows after apprenticeship.
1843	Nutmeg arrives, and the Spice Isle begins.
1857	The first Indian indentured workers land.
1951	A general strike and the first vote for all adults.
Nov 1970	Jennifer Hosten of Grenada is crowned Miss World in London.
7 Feb 1974	Independence.
13 Mar 1979	The revolution.
Oct 1983	The killings at Fort George and the US-led intervention.
2004 and 2005	Hurricanes Ivan and Emily.
1 Jul 2024	Hurricane Beryl devastates Carriacou and Petite Martinique.

BEFORE 1498

THE FIRST PEOPLES

People were visiting Grenada more than five thousand years ago. For most of that time, the island's story was written by them.

The earliest traces are faint. Sediment cores taken at Meadow Beach and Lake Antoine show charcoal, cleared forest and arrowroot from about 3500 BC, which suggests visits, not villages. Cut conch shells found near the present airport are dated to roughly 1700 to 1400 BC, though storms and a rising sea have moved them from where they were first left.

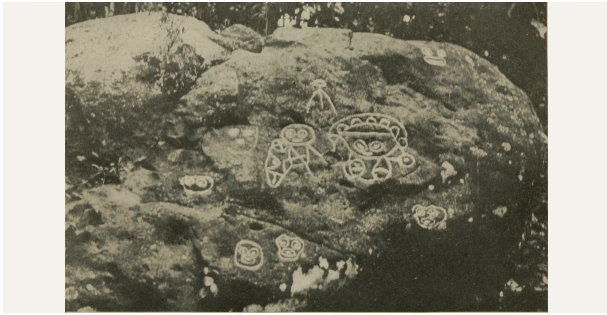
The first settled villages appear around **AD 200**. Their makers shaped fine pottery, the style archaeologists call Saladoid, and are popularly, if loosely, called Arawaks. Grenada has relatively few early sites. Most of its recorded Indigenous sites, about 87 in the museum's count, date from after AD 750, when the population grew and new communities spread inland and along the coast.

PEARLS AND MOUNT RICH

At **Pearls**, in St Andrew, archaeologists found an amethyst bead workshop. It shows that Grenada belonged to trading networks reaching as far as South America. Much of the site was levelled in the 1940s when the first airport was built, and archaeologist Jonathan Hanna has reported that about a fifth of the known Indigenous sites on the island have been destroyed.

At **Mount Rich**, in St Patrick, a large boulder beside the river carries more than sixty carved faces and figures. Researchers generally place Grenada's rock carvings after about AD 750, in the later Ceramic Age, and many read them as sacred places where ancestors were believed to gather. At Duquesne Bay, two carved faces sit side by side. The bay takes its name from a chief the French recorded.

The carvings were already being photographed and studied a century ago. In 1921 Thomas Huckerby published a paper on the petroglyphs of Grenada, and a plate from it, on the left, shows part of the great rock with the carved faces picked out in white. The photograph on the right shows the main stone today, taken by Jonathan Hanna, curator of the Grenada National Museum.



Part of the great rock at Mount Rich, from Plate V of Thomas Huckerby's 1921 paper on the petroglyphs of Grenada.

Thomas Huckerby, 1921. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.



The main stone at Mount Rich today.

Jonathan Hanna. CC BY-SA 4.0. Via Wikimedia Commons.

CARAIBE, GALIBI, KALINAGO

French writers of the 1600s named two groups on Grenada, the Caraibe and the Galibi. The Grenada National Museum notes that the people later called Caribs were not recent invaders but were probably descended from the island's earlier settlers, joined by later arrivals. The same source finds little archaeological evidence for the cannibalism, and none for the violence, that colonial writers attributed to them.

Their gifts are still in everyday English. The words *hammock*, *canoe* and *hurricane* all come from Taíno, an Indigenous Caribbean language, through Spanish. On Carriacou, the largest Indigenous sites lie at Sabazan and Grand Bay. Much of what remains is hard to study.

1498 TO 1649

SIGHTED, THEN LEFT ALONE

Columbus sighted the island in 1498. For another century and a half, Europeans tried to settle it and failed.

On his third voyage in **1498**, Christopher Columbus sighted the island and named it La Concepción. The name never appeared on a map. By the 1520s Europeans called it La Granada, possibly after the Spanish city. The French made it *la Grenade*, and Britain later wrote it Grenada.

In **1609** an English expedition of about 204 colonists tried to plant tobacco on the island, though where they landed is not known. It failed within months, and survivors reached England that December. French attempts in the mid-1640s also failed.

1649 TO 1763

FRENCH GRENADA

The French stayed. They brought enslaved Africans, named the villages, and left a language that survives on the northern islands.

THE SETTLEMENT

On 17 or 18 March **1649**, Jacques Dyel du Parquet, governor of Martinique, landed at what is now St George's with a small party of colonists, 45 in the museum's account, and built a palisade fort. In **1650** he bought the island from the company that held the French claim to it. Conflict with the Kalinago followed, and fighting continued off and on for about a decade.

SAUTEURS, 1650

The north coast town of Sauteurs takes its name from *Le Morne des Sauteurs*, the Hill of the Jumpers, known as Leapers' Hill. The Grenada National Museum dates the event to **30 May 1650**. On the governor's orders, French soldiers made a night attack on a gathering of Kalinago, and the museum says that 40 to 50 men went over the cliff to their deaths. A teaching kit from the Grenada archaeology project gives the figure as around 40.

The fullest account is an anonymous French manuscript, the *Histoire de l'isle de Grenade en Amérique*, 1649 to 1659, believed to be by Father Bénigne Bresson, a missionary on the island from 1656 to 1659. A French librarian found it in 1872, the original was later lost, and a copy turned up in a Paris bookshop in 1972. Historians regard it as more reliable than later retellings. The same teaching kit reports that a Kalinago named Thomas revealed where the men had gathered, which is part of the traditional account and not independently confirmed. It also asks exactly where the cliff was, since an Indigenous village site found in 1994 just west of the hill may be the village that was attacked. It notes too that a 1613 account describes Spanish sailors trading with Indigenous people at the same place. Some popular books give 1651, and the museum gives 1650.

It was not the end of the fighting. The museum describes the Kalinago war of resistance as continuing off and on for about a decade. The Grenada National Trust has said it wants to commemorate the site more fully.

If you stand at Sauteurs, you are looking at a place where the surviving documents are French and the people described did not write their side. Both facts belong to the story.

PLANTATIONS AND ENSLAVEMENT

The first census in **1669** counted 506 people, not including the Indigenous population. Of these, 222 were enslaved. Under the French, estates grew indigo, cocoa, coffee, cotton and some sugar. By 1763 about **15,200 enslaved people** lived on the island, outnumbering the free. The Grenada National Museum estimates that 129,000 or more enslaved Africans were brought to Grenada between 1669 and 1808, and that the true figure is probably higher, since French records are incomplete.

WHAT THE FRENCH LEFT BEHIND

The French built **Fort Royal** at the harbour around 1705 to 1710, now Fort George, and the town was called Ville de Fort Royal. The British later renamed it St George's. French names remain across the map: Beauséjour, Mon Repos, La Sagesse, Piedmontemps and Lance aux Épines, where Grenada Concierge is based.

The French also left a language. Grenadian Creole French, known as *patois* or Kwéyòl, grew from French mixed with African languages, and is still spoken in Carriacou and Petite Martinique. It is said to have declined from the 1940s, but it is remembered in songs, sayings and place names.

1763 TO 1834

BRITISH GRENADA

Britain gained the island on paper in 1763, lost it for four years, and then held it until independence. Its plantation economy made fortunes for owners and misery for those they enslaved.

France lost Grenada to Britain during the Seven Years' War. It was formally ceded under the **Treaty of Paris on 10 February 1763**. Britain expanded sugar production, and the enslaved population grew. In July 1779, during the American War of Independence, French forces captured the island. Britain regained it under the Treaty of Versailles on 3 September 1783.



St George's harbour, watercolour, 1849.

Captain Henry A. Turner, Royal Artillery. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.

FÉDON'S REBELLION, 1795 TO 1796

The largest uprising in Grenada's history began on the night of **2 to 3 March 1795**. Its leader was **Julien Fédon**, a free man of colour and planter, who bought Belvedere estate in St John parish in 1791. The historian Curtis Jacobs, working from the records of the Grenada Supreme Court, found that he was born in the parish of St Mark around 1752, the son of a French jeweller from Bordeaux, Pierre Fédon, and Brigitte, a free Black woman from Martinique. Inspired by the French Revolution, he took a commission as a general from the French commander Victor Hugues, and made Belvedere the rebels' headquarters. His wife, Marie Rose Cavelan, is also remembered in the story.

Rebels shot about twenty white residents at Grenville and took Gouyave. At dawn on 3 March, Lieutenant-Governor Ninian Home was captured at his estate, Paraclete. Large numbers of enslaved people joined the rising, and the rebels held most of the island for much of its course, though they never took St George's.

After a British attack on Belvedere failed in April, Fédon had most of his prisoners shot on 8 April, Home among them. Counts range from about 40 to 48 killed out of 47 to 53 held, and the figure most often repeated is 44 of 47. In 1796 a British expedition under Sir Ralph

Abercromby arrived, and the rising ended in June of that year. Jacobs puts the force needed to end the rising at about 10,000 troops, including a corps of enslaved soldiers and a German mercenary unit. Many rebels were tried for treason and hanged, and the island's estates had suffered heavy damage.

The rising changed how the colony was defended. Grenada raised a Black Corps in the mid-1790s, made up mostly of enslaved men, and it is described as one of the forerunners of the British Army's West India Regiments. The plate below shows a soldier of the 2nd West India Regiment, about 1813, in a uniform that a Commons note says resembles those of Grenada's St George's Coloured Militia and Black Corps.



A soldier of the 2nd West India Regiment, about 1813, in a plate by Richard Knötel. The date printed on the plate is hard to read. A Commons note says the uniform is similar to that of Grenada's St George's Coloured Militia and Black Corps.

Richard Knötel. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.

Fédon himself was never captured. A canoe was later found overturned at sea, and many believed he had drowned. In 1814 the colony's Council heard a report that he had escaped to Cuba, but no one ever proved it. Historians also still debate what he wanted: Jacobs argues that he fought to end slavery and British rule and to place Grenada under the French Republic, which had abolished slavery in its colonies in 1794. Other scholars doubt that freeing the enslaved was his main aim.

1834 TO 1951

FREEDOM AND A NEW ISLAND

Emancipation did not make the island simple. It made the next hundred years about land, labour and who would own either.

EMANCIPATION AND APPRENTICESHIP

Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807. Slavery itself ended on **1 August 1834**, when, by the Grenada National Museum's count, about 23,600 people were freed. The Grenada National Museum records that owners were paid £616,255 in compensation. The people who had been enslaved received nothing.

Freedom came in two steps. From 1834 the formerly enslaved were bound as apprentices to their old owners for about 40 to 45 unpaid hours a week. Apprenticeship ended early, and on **1 August 1838** everyone was fully free. Emancipation Day is still marked each August.

NEW ARRIVALS

From the 1830s planters looked for labour from Africa, Malta and Portugal, with little success. About 2,700 recaptured Africans were brought to Grenada between 1836 and 1863, among them roughly a thousand Yoruba in **1849**. The Shango community, still active in Grenada and Carriacou, traces part of its heritage to them, though a 2025 Cambridge study argues that Orisha worship in the island grew from many sources, not only these arrivals.

On **1 May 1857**, the ship *Maidstone* brought the first Indian indentured workers to Irwin's Bay in St Patrick. Roughly 3,000 to 3,200 Indians came in all, and only a small minority, perhaps one in eight to one in seven, ever returned. The first voyage carried between 287 and 375 people, depending on the source, and dozens died at sea. Indian Arrival Day is marked each year on 1 May, the same day as Labour Day.

NUTMEG, MACE AND COCOA

The island's best-known crop came late. Nutmeg seeds from the Banda Islands were planted in **1843**, with Frank Gurney named as the introducer in the Food and Agriculture Organization's account. Commercial planting began around the 1850s in St Andrew. By 1865 Grenadian nutmeg was influencing the world market. Smallholders, many of them formerly enslaved, grew tree crops alongside food crops, and in the nineteenth century cocoa overtook sugar as the main export.

Mace is the red web around the nutmeg seed, and it is a separate spice. Grenada's flag carries a nutmeg. In September 1955, **Hurricane Janet** destroyed most of the island's nutmeg trees. The FAO puts the loss at about 80 per cent, and a contemporary survey at 95.



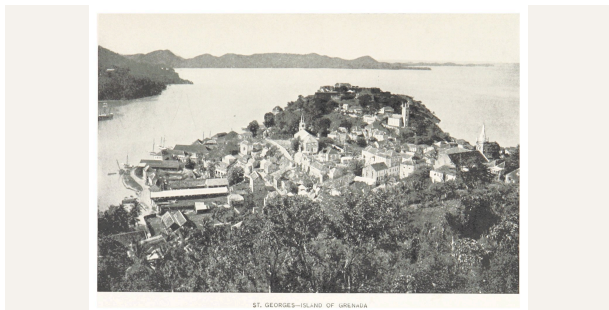
Nutmegs in sacks at a nutmeg collective, Grenada, 2009.
Paul Harrison. CC BY-SA 4.0. Via Wikimedia Commons.



A ripe nutmeg split open to show the red mace around the seed, beside a cocoa pod.
Photograph by Hugh Whyte, 2015, for Grenada Concierge.

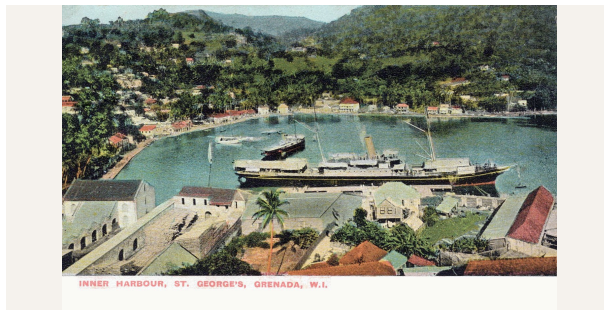
CROWN COLONY

Grenada joined the Windward Islands administration in the 1830s. In 1877 the elected assembly was replaced by Crown Colony rule, with nominated councils, and only a small fraction of adults could vote. In 1925 about 2,000 of 70,000 people were eligible.



St George's, an illustration from Charles Augustus Stoddard's *Cruising among the Caribbees*. Commons dates it to 1895, and the file is titled 1893.

Illustration in a book held by the British Library. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.



The Inner Harbour, St George's, hand-coloured postcard, 1905.

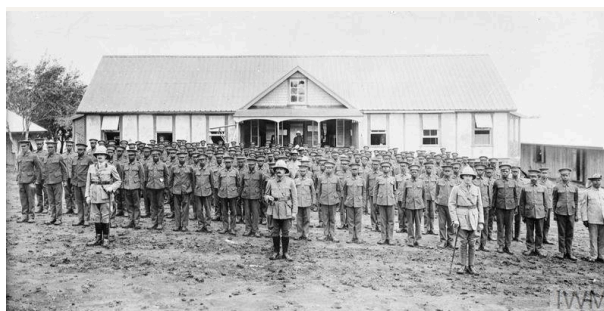
Unknown author. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.

A Grenadian volunteer force existed by 1880, and Grenadians later served in the British West Indies Regiment during the First World War.



Grenadian Volunteers and bandmen, 1880.

Unknown photographer, Royal Collection, National Archives. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.



Grenadian troops of the British West Indies Regiment, about 1915.

Unknown photographer. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.



Government House, St George's, 1892.

The National Archives, UK. No known restrictions. Via Wikimedia Commons.



One penny stamp, Grenada, 1887.

De la Rue. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.

THE GRENADINES

CARRIACOU AND PETITE MARTINIQUE

The two northern islands share Grenada's history and keep their own traditions, some of the best documented in the Caribbean.

French settlers reached the Grenadines in the mid-1700s, and the islands were divided between Britain and France in 1784. Carriacou and Petite Martinique are known today for two things above all: the wooden vessels built on their shores, and the Big Drum.

WOODEN BOATS AND THE SHIPWRIGHTS

The craft is said to have come with Scottish settlers at Windward, on Carriacou's east coast. Accounts place their arrival in the 1700s or the 1800s, and families there still carry the skills and some of the old names. Harvey Vale, on the same coast, is another boatbuilding village. Carriacou became known for its working sloops, and for the wooden schooners that carried cargo through the Grenadines.

In **2023** UNESCO inscribed traditional wooden boatbuilding in Carriacou and Petite Martinique on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It describes a centuries-old craft learned by watching and doing, passed from master shipwright to apprentice by word of mouth, which also brings people together at the building site to watch, take part and celebrate each milestone. Shipwrights choose their trees by the natural bend of the wood and fell them in the right phase of the moon, following the advice of elders. Before work begins, rum and water are poured on the keel and the stem for the ancestors. Men, women and children each have a part to play, and women now take on more of the technical work.



A wooden hull under construction on Petite Martinique, 2008.

FishSpeaker. CC BY 3.0. Via Wikimedia Commons.

THE LAUNCHING

A finished vessel is blessed and given godparents, traditionally children under eight, who reveal its name. The name is embroidered on a red flag that flies from the deck. Women and girls prepare smoked food and cake for the celebration. A visitor's account of a launching at Windward describes a community occasion with food, singing and dancing, and a blessing of the boat, the builder and the owner by a local clergyman, with neighbours helping to put the hull in the water.

A CRAFT THAT NEARLY FADED

Sailing histories say that wooden boatbuilding had almost died out by the early 1960s. They tell how a newcomer, J. Linton Rigg, commissioned the shipwright Zepherin McKlaren to build a 40-foot sloop, the *Mermaid of Carriacou*, and started a workboat race. That race became the Carriacou Regatta in 1965. Today the Grenada Tourism Authority and community groups promote boatbuilding among young people through fundraisers and educational programmes.

THE BIG DRUM

The **Big Drum**, also called the Nation Dance, is Carriacou's best-known tradition. It honours West African ancestors by nation, with songs and dances for the Cromanti, Igbo and Manding, among others. A chantwell leads the singing, and the rhythm is played on large drums called boulas.

The anthropologist Lorna McDaniel lived on the island and studied the rite for her 1998 book *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou*. She argues that coded rhythms preserve memory of African nations on early Carriacou and that the rite dates from the early 1700s. It is part of community occasions such as the village feast called **Maroon**, and Alan Lomax recorded Big Drum music on the island.

THE YEAR ON CARRIACOU

The **Carriacou Regatta** takes place in early August and grew out of that workboat race. The **Maroon** festival, a village feast with food, music and dance, is held in the spring. The **Parang Festival**, held in Hillsborough on the weekend before Christmas, celebrates Christmas music with string bands, a tradition also known in Trinidad.

1951 TO 1974

TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

The twentieth century in Grenada is the story of workers, ballots and one very dominant man.

Eric Gairy, who had worked in Aruba, returned in December 1949 and founded a union in 1950. From **19 February to 19 March 1951**, Gairy called a general strike of agricultural and other workers. There was widespread arson, a Royal Navy warship landed marines, and police arrived from Trinidad and St Lucia. Gairy was arrested and held on Carriacou for about two weeks. The strike ended with an agreement between his union and the agricultural employers that raised wages by 50 per cent and gave workers paid leave for the first time. The island held its first election with the vote for all adults on **10 October 1951**, and Gairy's Grenada United Labour Party won most of the seats.

Grenada joined the West Indies Federation from 1958 to 1962. In **1967** it became an Associated State, governing its own affairs while Britain kept defence and foreign relations. Gairy became premier. Independence followed on **7 February 1974**, with Gairy as the first prime minister and the island staying in the Commonwealth. Opposition to his rule was already growing.

JENNIFER HOSTEN, MISS WORLD 1970

On 20 November 1970, a young Grenadian woman walked on to the stage of the Royal Albert Hall in London and was crowned Miss World. **Jennifer Hosten**, born in St George's, had been working as a flight attendant before she won Miss Grenada. She was the first Grenadian to win the title, and she was widely celebrated as the first Black woman to win it. Some sources name Carole Crawford, Miss World 1963, as the earlier Black winner, because Crawford's heritage was not widely known at the time.

It was one of the most talked-about contests in the pageant's history. Women's Liberation protesters disrupted the evening, which the host, Bob Hope, had to deal with live on stage, and there was also controversy over entrants from South Africa under apartheid. Critics disputed the result at the time. Hosten wrote about it in her 2020 memoir, *Miss World 1970: How I Entered a Pageant and Wound Up Making History*, with a foreword by the actress Gugu Mbatha-Raw, who plays her in the 2020 film *Misbehaviour*. She went on to a career in diplomacy, trade and international development.



Miss World 1970, on the night of 20 November. From left: Irith Lavi (Miss Israel), Jillian Jessup (Miss South Africa), Jennifer Hosten (Miss Grenada), Pearl Jansen (Miss Africa South) and Marjorie Christel Johansson (Miss Sweden).

Associated Press photograph, published 23 November 1970. Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.

THE GAIRY YEARS

Opposition grew around Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement. On 18 November 1973, later called Bloody Sunday, leaders were beaten and jailed at Grenville. In January 1974, riots followed an attempt to break up a demonstration. Several people were killed, among them Bishop's father, Rupert. Gairy's armed plain-clothes force, known as the Mongoose Gang, intimidated opponents until 1979. International observers judged the 1976 election unfair because of intimidation. St George's University was founded in 1976 and welcomed its first students in January 1977, at Grand Anse.

1979 TO 1984

REVOLUTION AND 1983

These are the island's most recent and most painful years. Many Grenadians still disagree about them, and this chapter tries to report that disagreement honestly.

THE REVOLUTION, 13 MARCH 1979

While Gairy was abroad, Bishop's New Jewel Movement seized power on **13 March 1979**. Many called it a bloodless revolution. Bishop became prime minister, heading the People's Revolutionary Government. Supporters point to gains in health care, women's rights and literacy, claims that are widely made but not audited here. Critics cite the end of elections and the detention of opponents.

POINT SALINES

The government championed a new international airport at Point Salines, to replace the old airfield at Pears. Construction began under the revolution. A Canadian firm designed it, British and other firms were contracted, and more than 600 Cuban construction workers, some with military training, did much of the work. The government presented it as a necessity for tourism, while the United States alleged it could have military use. After 1983 it was completed with American help and opened on 28 October 1984. In 2009 it was renamed **Maurice Bishop International Airport**, which was controversial. It is the airport most guests arrive at today.

OCTOBER 1983

In October 1983 a dispute inside the leadership came to a head. Bishop was placed under house arrest by colleagues in the party leadership, and by 14 October it was known that he was confined to his home. On **19 October 1983**, a crowd freed him, and he was taken to Fort Rupert, today called Fort George, in St George's. Soldiers arrived, and Bishop and seven others, including Education Minister Jacqueline Creft, were executed. Civilians also died at the fort. General Hudson Austin announced that evening that a Revolutionary Military Council, made up of army officers, would govern.

Bishop's remains have never been found. Searches of a cemetery in St George's turned up bones ruled out as his. Other theories exist, including that the bodies were burned at Camp Calivigny, and the question is not settled. In 2023, the government made **19 October a public holiday of remembrance** for the first time.

THE INTERVENTION, 25 OCTOBER 1983

Six days later, on **25 October 1983**, a force led by the United States landed in Grenada, in what Washington called Operation Urgent Fury. It had Caribbean participation, and five member states of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States asked for it, with Barbados and Jamaica backing the request, while the stated reasons also included the safety of US students at St George's University. Figures differ by source: American forces of roughly 7,000 to 8,000, with about 350 Caribbean troops, faced about 1,500 Grenadian soldiers and some 700 Cubans, most of them construction workers. Major fighting lasted about three days. Nineteen US service members died, as did some Grenadian and Cuban troops, and about two dozen civilians, many of them patients at a psychiatric hospital hit by an air strike in error.



A US Army AH-1S Cobra over Black Hawk helicopters at Point Salines, 26 October 1983.

US Department of Defense (Defenselmagery). Public domain. Via Wikimedia Commons.

The UN General Assembly deplored the intervention by 108 votes to 9, with 27 abstentions, on 2 November 1983, and the United States vetoed a Security Council draft on the subject. Britain, whose monarch was Grenada's head of state, abstained in both votes. British files released later show that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was told of the plan only hours before it began and objected privately, but her government then declined to condemn it. Many Grenadians welcomed the end of the turmoil, while others opposed the intervention itself. No reliable public-opinion data was found, so the guide does not claim a majority either way. **25 October is still Thanksgiving Day**, a public holiday, and the tone of the day differs from person to person.

AFTERWARDS

Governor-General Sir Paul Scoon appointed an interim council under Sir Nicholas Brathwaite, which governed from 9 December 1983. Elections in December 1984 were won by the New National Party under Herbert Blaize, who served as prime minister until his death in 1989. Seventeen people, known as the **Grenada 17**, were convicted in 1986 of the killings. Fourteen received death sentences, which were later commuted, and the last seven, including Bernard Coard, were released in September 2009. Coard has denied ordering the killings.



Prime Minister Nicholas Brathwaite with James Maraj, Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Harare, 1991.

Commonwealth of Learning. CC BY-SA 4.0. Via Wikimedia Commons.

2004 TO TODAY

STORMS AND REBUILDING

Grenada lies at the southern edge of the usual hurricane belt, and for long stretches it was spared. Three storms in twenty years changed that.

Hurricane Ivan struck on **7 September 2004**. An assessment found that about 89 per cent of housing was damaged and losses exceeded US\$800 million, around twice the national economy for a year. Most forest cover was stripped, and only a small share of homes were insured. Of the roughly half a million nutmeg trees, between six and nine in ten were destroyed, depending on the count. Replanted trees take five to six years to bear fruit and about ten to mature fully, so nutmeg recovered slowly. Cocoa growers faced the same long wait. Tourism rebuilt steadily, and by late 2005 about three-quarters of hotel rooms were back in service, with the industry aiming for 90 per cent by December.



The market in St George's, 2020. The photographer notes the ruins of the old Parliament building in the distance, damaged by Hurricane Ivan, and the cathedral steeple on the hill.

Stabbur's Master. CC BY-SA 2.0. Via Wikimedia Commons.

Hurricane Emily followed in July 2005. It killed one person and damaged many houses, mostly in the northern parishes and on Carriacou.

HURRICANE BERYL, 1 JULY 2024

Beryl struck the northern islands directly. Carriacou and Petite Martinique, home to roughly 7,000 people, suffered the heaviest damage, with officials reporting that about 98 per cent of buildings were damaged or destroyed, including the hospital, airport and marinas. The World Bank's rapid estimate put economic damage at about US\$218 million, around 16.5 per cent of GDP. The government and international partners began rebuilding. Progress since 2024 is changing, so this guide does not report it. Ask Grenada Concierge for the current picture before you plan a visit to Carriacou.



The US Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort off St George's in June 2025, during the Continuing Promise 2025 mission.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Rylin Paul, US Navy. Public domain.
Via Wikimedia Commons.

THE PEOPLE

FAMOUS GRENADIANS

A small island has produced a long list of people who changed it, and sometimes changed the wider world. These are some of them, with who they were and why they matter.

Some were born elsewhere and made Grenada their own, and one made his career in Trinidad. The guide says so where it applies. Entries for living people are accurate to October 2026.

LEADERS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Theophilus Albert Marryshow 1887 TO 1958

Who. Journalist, newspaper editor and politician, usually called T.A. Marryshow.

Why it matters. He co-founded the newspaper *The West Indian* in 1915 and founded the Representative Government Association in 1918, which pressed for elected seats in the Legislative Council. He is often called the father of West Indian federation, and he was made a CBE in 1943. Grenada marks Marryshow Day on 7 November, and the T.A. Marryshow Community College carries his name.

Dame Hilda Bynoe 1921 TO 2013

Who. Born in Crochu, a doctor who trained in London and practised in Guyana and Trinidad, and the last colonial-era Governor of Grenada.

Why it matters. She served from 1968 to 1974 and is reported as the first woman to be a governor in the Commonwealth. She was made a Dame in 1969. Her term ended in January 1974, as the unrest before independence peaked.

Sir Eric Gairy 1922 TO 1997

Who. Trade unionist and politician, born in St Andrew. Grenada's first prime minister.

Why it matters. He founded a workers' union and his party in 1950, led the 1951 general strike, and brought agricultural workers into politics for the first time. He was Premier from 1967 and prime minister at independence on 7 February 1974. Critics alleged that his supporters and a plain-clothes force intimidated opponents, and he was overthrown on 13 March 1979 while abroad. In 1978 he asked the United Nations to study unidentified flying objects.

Maurice Bishop 1944 TO 1983

Who. Barrister and leader of the New Jewel Movement. Born in Aruba to Grenadian parents, he moved to Grenada in 1950.

Why it matters. He led the 1979 revolution and was prime minister until his death. His government expanded free health care and education and ran a literacy campaign, and it won Cuban and other aid for the new airport, now named after him. No elections were held, and many opponents were detained. He was executed with colleagues at Fort George on 19 October 1983, and his remains have never been found.

Sir Paul Scoon 1935 TO 2013

Who. Educator and civil servant, born in Gouyave. Grenada's second Governor-General.

Why it matters. He held the office from 1978 to 1992, through the revolution, the 1983 crisis and the return to elections in 1984. After the October killings he was the one constitutional authority left, and he appointed the interim council. His part in the request for outside intervention is still debated.

Sir Herbert Blaize 1918 TO 1989

Who. Politician from Carriacou, and Gairy's rival for about twenty-five years.

Why it matters. He was Chief Minister in the 1960s and founded the Grenada National Party in 1953. He led the New National Party to win 14 of 15 seats in December 1984, the first election after the invasion, and he was prime minister until his death in December 1989.

Sir Nicholas Brathwaite 1925 TO 2016

Who. Teacher, born in Carriacou, who became a national leader in a crisis.

Why it matters. He chaired the Interim Advisory Council from December 1983 to December 1984 and steered Grenada back to elections. He was prime minister from 1990 to 1995 and was knighted in 1995.

Keith Mitchell BORN 1946

Who. Mathematician and statistician turned politician, and leader of the New National Party from 1989 to 2024.

Why it matters. He was prime minister from 1995 to 2008 and again from 2013 to 2022, which makes him the longest-serving prime minister in Grenada's history.

Dickon Mitchell BORN 1977

Who. Lawyer and leader of the National Democratic Congress.

Why it matters. He became prime minister in June 2022 after his party won nine of the fifteen seats. He chaired CARICOM in the second half of 2024.

Dame Cécile La Grenade BORN 1952

Who. Food scientist who ran a family nutmeg products business.

Why it matters. She has been Governor-General since 2013 and was the first woman to hold the post. She represents the head of state in Grenada today.

CULTURE AND LETTERS

Jennifer Hosten BORN 1947

Who. Born in St George's. The first Grenadian to be crowned Miss World.

Why it matters. She won in London on 20 November 1970 and was widely celebrated as the first Black woman to win. The full story is in the Towards Independence chapter.

Canute Caliste 1914 TO 2005

Who. Self-taught painter from L'Esterre, Carriacou, who was also a fisherman, a boat builder and a quadrille violinist.

Why it matters. He is Carriacou's best-known artist. His bright pictures of boat building, fishing, Carnival, the Big Drum and mermaids, and of the 1983 invasion, brought him international attention, notably after the 1989 book *The Mermaid Wakes*. Sources give his birth as 16 April or 15 July 1914.

The Mighty Sparrow 1935 TO 2026

Who. Born Slinger Francisco in Grenada and taken to Trinidad as a toddler. Grenada-born and Trinidad-made, he was known as the Calypso King of the World.

Why it matters. His 1956 hit "Jean and Dinah" launched a career that won multiple Calypso Monarch and Road March titles, and honours from Trinidad and Tobago. He died on 27 September 2026, aged 91.

Merle Collins BORN 1950

Who. Poet, novelist and short-story writer. Born in Aruba to Grenadian parents, she grew up and was educated in Grenada.

Why it matters. She worked in the government of the 1979 revolution and left for England in 1983. Her books include the poems *Because the Dawn Breaks* (1985) and the novel *Angel* (1987). She taught at the University of Maryland from 1995 until she retired in 2021.

SPORT

Kirani James BORN 1992

Who. Sprinter from Gouyave. Grenada's first Olympic medallist.

Why it matters. He won the 400 metres at the London 2012 Olympics, then silver in Rio in 2016 and bronze in Tokyo, and was world champion at 18 in 2011. He was made a CBE in 2022 and received an honorary doctorate from the University of the West Indies in 2024.

Alleyne Francique BORN 1976

Who. Sprinter and Grenada's flag bearer at the 2004 and 2008 Olympics.

Why it matters. He won the World Indoor 400 metres title twice, in Budapest in 2004 and in Moscow in 2006, and finished fourth in the Athens 2004 Olympic final.

Not here: Julien Fédon, who is in the British Grenada chapter. People are included for their record, and the list is not complete. If you would like someone added, write to hello@grenadaconcierge.com.

FOLKLORE AND LIVING TRADITIONS

Grenada's stories were carried by voice. Some are well documented, and others are told across the Caribbean with local variations.

How to read this chapter. The Big Drum and Shango traditions are supported by scholarship. The folk characters below are described in sources covering the wider Caribbean, and only a few of them name Grenada specifically. The guide labels each so you know what you are being told.

SPICEMAS

Grenada's carnival, **Spicemas**, is held in August, with the Dimanche Gras show on the Sunday night and J'ouvert at dawn on Monday. **Jab Jab**, played before sunrise, takes its name from the patois word for devil. It is widely linked to emancipation, with costumes of black oil, charcoal and molasses, and many Grenadians read it as a mocking of the devil by people who had been enslaved. **Short Knee** wears bright costumes with mirrors and bells, and sprinkles talc on those who give. **Vieux Corps** (Véyé Cou) is another traditional character of the mas. Their origins are not firmly dated in the sources reviewed.



Carnival in Grenada, 1965, with feathered headdresses, from a family photograph. The date is the one given on Commons.

Photographer not named; uploaded by Infrogmation. CC BY-SA 2.5 and GFDL. Via Wikimedia Commons.

SHANGO

Grenadian Shango, sometimes called African Work, has Yoruba-derived songs, drums and altars for Ogun, Shango, Yemanya and Oshun. It is less formally structured than in Trinidad, and Alan Lomax recorded kalinda drumming and Shango songs on the island.

FISHING, BOATS AND THE SEA

Each year on **29 June**, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Gouyave holds the **Fisherman's Birthday**, with a church service, the blessing of vessels, racing and fish dishes. Christmas tables often include sorrel, ginger beer, rum-soaked black cake and salt ham.

THE CHARACTERS

These figures are found across the eastern Caribbean. Grenadians may tell them differently, and the sources found for Grenada itself are slight.

- **La Diablesse** (Lajables). A beautiful woman in a long dress and a wide hat who lures travellers off the path. One Grenadian-American informant spells it *Lajabless*.
- **Soucouyant**. An old woman by day who sheds her skin at night and travels as a ball of fire. In Grenada the same figure is often called a loogaroo, and parents across the Caribbean have used the tale to keep children indoors.
- **Ligaroo** (loup-garou). A shape-shifter from the French werewolf tradition, believed to blend European and African beliefs.
- **Mama Dlo** (Maman de l'Eau). A water spirit, half woman and half serpent.
- **Papa Bois**. The guardian of the forest, with a cloven hoof, who warns the animals of hunters.

THE LAKE THAT HAS NO BOTTOM

At **Grand Etang**, a crater lake high in the rainforest, locals say the water is bottomless and a mermaid lives in it. Caribbean Beat reports that the lake has been surveyed at roughly twenty feet deep, and calls the tale one told to schoolchildren and credulous visitors. You can enjoy both versions.



The Grand Etang House, Grand Etang National Park, 2012.

giggel. CC BY 3.0. Via Wikimedia Commons.

SEEING IT FOR YOURSELF

PLACES THAT TELL THE STORY

History is easier to feel on the ground. These are places the research supports, so confirm opening hours before you go.

- **Grenada National Museum.** Its building in St George's, one of the town's oldest, is permanently closed to visitors, but the museum holds exhibitions at different venues from time to time. Ask what is on during your stay.
- **Fort George**, St George's, built by the French as Fort Royal, and the site of the 19 October 1983 killings.
- **Leapers' Hill**, Sauteurs. A place of remembrance, with a monument and a view out over the sea.
- **Mount Rich petroglyphs**, St Patrick. Carved faces beside the river.
- **Grand Etang National Park**, in the central rainforest, for the crater lake and the hiking trails.
- **Gouyave**, the island's fishing town, and the nutmeg station there.
- **Carriacou**, for the Big Drum and the August regatta.

The Grenada National Trust publishes a free **Grenada Heritage Map App**, with over fifty points of interest. The **Grenada Heritage Archives** hold more documents online.



A mortar in the courtyard of the Grenada National Museum, Monckton Street, St George's.

Annelis. CC BY-SA 3.0. Via Wikimedia Commons.



The guns of Fort George, which once defended St George's against attack from the sea.

David Stanley. CC BY 2.0. Via Wikimedia Commons.

Grenada Concierge can arrange a guide for any of these places. Ask Grenada Concierge for the right person on the day.

WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE

HONEST DIFFERENCES

History is rarely a single story. These are the points where the best available sources differ, and how this guide handled them.

Settlement	French landing on 17 or 18 March 1649, purchase of the island in 1650. Some sources call 1650 the settlement.
Sauteurs	30 May 1650 (the museum) or 1651 (older popular books). The number who leapt is given as around 40 to 50.
Fédon's captives	Counts range from about 40 to 48 killed out of 47 to 53 held. One often-quoted account says 44 of 47.
End of the rising	19 June 1796 is given as the official end. Articles of capitulation were reportedly signed at Gouyave on 10 June.
Home's title	Lieutenant-Governor in the colonial records and in Jacobs, simply Governor in some books.
Fédon's birthplace	Records read by Jacobs point to St Mark's parish, Grenada, around 1752. Some books say Martinique, and another historian thought the family may have arrived later.
Fédon's fate and aims	His fate is unknown. His aims are debated, and the guide gives the main views.
Emancipation	1834 is when the law took effect, 1838 is full freedom. Both are correct.
Indian indenture	First ship carried between 287 and 375, and the total is given as 3,033 to about 3,206. End of indenture is given as 1885 or 1890.
Nutmeg	Frank Gurney, 1843 (FAO). Other stories name a ship captain, which could not be traced.
October 1983	Courts convicted 17 people. One, Bernard Coard, disputes responsibility. Bishop's remains are not found.
First Black Miss World	Hosten is widely celebrated as the first, and some sources name Carole Crawford (1963). Hosten was the first Grenadian winner in either case.
Scottish boatbuilders	Widely repeated, including in a 2025 Ministry press release, but no documentary source was found. Accounts give the 1700s or the 1800s.
Canute Caliste	Born 16 April or 15 July 1914, depending on the source.
Mighty Sparrow	Born in Grenada, at Grand Roy by most accounts and at Gouyave in one essay.
Invasion figures	US troops are given as more than 7,000 to nearly 8,000, and casualty figures vary.
Ivan and nutmeg	Different measures give different losses, from 60 per cent destroyed to about nine in ten gone.
Folk characters	Told across the Caribbean; few Grenada-specific sources.

Not covered because no reliable source was found: Obeah, the Tim Tim riddle tradition, pirate stories of Carriacou, and any folk belief about nutmeg. The guide leaves them out and invents nothing. If you know them, please tell us.

WITH THANKS

PICTURE CREDITS

The cover picture is the 1849 harbour watercolour credited below. Every picture in this guide comes from Wikimedia Commons, the free media library, except the nutmeg and cocoa photograph, which is by Hugh Whyte. Each keeps its own licence. Where a licence asks for a credit, it is given beside the picture and again here. Public domain pictures are credited too.

A wooden hull under construction on Petite Martinique	FishSpeaker. CC BY 3.0.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boat_Building_on_Petite_Martinique_-_panoramio.jpg
Part of the great rock at Mount Rich	Thomas Huckerby, 1921. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Huckerby_1921_Plate_V_(Mt_Rich).png
The main stone at Mount Rich today.	Jonathan Hanna. CC BY-SA 4.0.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Main_Mt._Rich_Petroglyph.jpg
Nutmegs in sacks at a nutmeg collective	Paul Harrison. CC BY-SA 4.0.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nutmeg_Collective_Grenada_2009_02.jpg
A ripe nutmeg split open to show the red mace around the seed	Photograph by Hugh Whyte, 2015, for Grenada Concierge.	Grenada Concierge photo library
Carnival in Grenada	Photographer not named; uploaded by Infrogmation. CC BY-SA 2.5 and GFDL.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GrenadaCarnival1965FeatheredHeadDresses.jpg
Miss World 1970	Associated Press photograph, published 23 November 1970. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Miss_World_1970.jpg
St George's harbour	Captain Henry A. Turner, Royal Artillery. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:View_of_the_Harbour,_St._George's,_Grenada,_West_Indies_(original).jpg
A soldier of the 2nd West India Regiment	Richard Knötel. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:West_Indies_soldier.jpg
St George's	Illustration in a book held by the British Library. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GRENADA,_ST._GEORGES_(1893).jpg
The Inner Harbour	Unknown author. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grenada_-_Inner_Harbour,_St._George's.jpg
Government House	The National Archives, UK. No known restrictions.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Government_House_Grenada_Main_Entrance.jpg
One penny stamp	De la Rue. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1887_1d_Grenada_circle_D_Yv23_SC40.jpg
Grenadian Volunteers and bandsmen	Unknown photographer, Royal Collection, National Archives. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grenada_Volunteers.jpg

Grenadian troops of the British West Indies Regiment	Unknown photographer. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grenadian_troops_WW1.jpg
A US Army AH-1S Cobra over Black Hawk helicopters at Point Salines	US Department of Defense (Defenseimagery). Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AH-1S_over_Grenada_October_1983.JPEG
Prime Minister Nicholas Brathwaite with James Maraj	Commonwealth of Learning. CC BY-SA 4.0.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CHOGM_1991_-_Grenada_PM_at_Commonwealth_of_Learning_expo.jpg
The market in St George's	Stabbur's Master. CC BY-SA 2.0.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St_George's,_Grenada_-_50591353337.jpg
The US Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort off St George's in June 2025	Petty Officer 2nd Class Rylin Paul, US Navy. Public domain.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:USNS_Comfort_Visits_Grenada_(9106826).jpg
The Grand Etang House	giggel. CC BY 3.0.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grenada,_Karibik_-_Grand-Etang_House_-_panoramio.jpg
A mortar in the courtyard of the Grenada National Museum	Annelis. CC BY-SA 3.0.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grenada_National_Museum_-_Mortar_C_IMG_0492.JPG
The guns of Fort George	David Stanley. CC BY 2.0.	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guns_of_Fort_George_(39973844293).jpg

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READ FURTHER

SOURCES

This guide is original writing, drawn from the sources below. Where a source is a Wikipedia article, a blog or a search summary, the guide used it only as a lead, or described it with caution. For a full reading, begin with the first four.

- Grenada National Museum: *Kalinago* (museum.gd/kalinago), *Slavery* (museum.gd/slavery), *European invasion* (museum.gd/european-invasion) and the archaeology page (museum.gd/?p=2955).
- Grenada National Trust and Grenada Heritage Archives (grenadanationaltrust.org).
- Jonathan Hanna and colleagues, Grenada archaeology teaching kits (grenadaarchaeology.com).
- Lorna McDaniel, *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou*, University Press of Florida (1998); Alan Lomax recordings, Association for Cultural Equity (culturalequity.org).
- UNESCO, Carriacou and Petite Martinique boatbuilding, 2023 (ich.unesco.org/en/RL/01893).
- Grenada Tourism Authority release on the inscription, 12 December 2023; Cruising World on a launching at Windward; Sail and Caribbean Sailing on the origins of the Carriacou Regatta.
- Food and Agriculture Organization, nutmeg chapter (fao.org/4/x5047e/x5047E04.htm).
- Shantel George, *Yoruba Are on a Rock*, Cambridge University Press (2025).
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- Global Voices, "Forty years later, Grenada officially remembers the murders of its prime minister" (2023).
- UN General Assembly Resolution 38/7 (2 November 1983), UN Digital Library.
- Mark Curtis, "The only US military intervention Britain somewhat opposed", Declassified UK, drawing on British government files at the National Archives. An independent outlet with a clear point of view; the guide uses only the documented dates and votes.
- Assessments of Hurricane Ivan (GFDRR/ECLAC, 2004), Hurricane Emily (NOAA) and Hurricane Beryl (World Bank, 2024, and UN OCHA).
- Caribbean Beat, "Back to Grenada" and Christmas and Grand Etang features.
- For the Famous Grenadians chapter: Government of Grenada, Prime Ministers page (gov.gd); UWI pages on Dickon Mitchell and Kirani James; CARICOM and Commonwealth Secretariat obituaries for Hilda Bynoe and Nicholas Brathwaite; Caribbean Beat, "The artist of Carriacou" (issue 136); World Athletics; University of Maryland, interview with Merle Collins; AP and theGrio on Mighty Sparrow.

Corrections are welcome. Dates and figures were checked against several sources on 18 October 2026, and where the sources disagree the guide says so. A number of them still rest on secondary sources and not on a primary record. Write to hello@grenadaconciierge.com and I will update the next edition.