

## Sailing away in the virtually untouched Grenadines

*The collection of islands in the Caribbean are sublimely beautiful and surrounded by sparkling turquoise waters*



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Canouan as seen from above... Sharon Lindores / National Post



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How many shades of azure blue and turquoise exist? In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, it seems there's an unlimited amount of the stunningly coloured, crystal clear water.

It shimmers, sparkles and splashes. And, it never disappoints.

Even seen from the sky, the Caribbean colours are enchanting. As the six-seater Cessna airplane I'm on approaches Canouan Island, on the northern tip of the Grenadine chain, I feel like I've fallen under a magical spell.

The little-visited, multi-island state is reputed to be the authentic, unspoiled Caribbean. A sliver of about 30 islands, cays and islets, of which eight are inhabited, the strip is about 190 kilometres west of Barbados.

Once I pass through customs in the charming, thatched hut of an airport, it's a mere 10-minute drive to Glossy Hill Marina and the catamaran that will be my temporary home. Sailing is the absolute best way to explore the area.



"Life", the Lagoon 52 Sharon Lindores / National Post

But this isn't just any old sailing. This is yacht territory, favoured by luxury catamarans. I sail and stay on a 60-foot Fontaine Pajot and a 52-foot Lagoon. The cats are part of TradeWinds, a luxury travel group that not only offers chartered yachts, but also villas in this distant part of the Caribbean.

The yachts and the marina are on the strikingly beautiful water, just across from a charming pastel-coloured row of buildings and the open sea. With scenery like this, it doesn't take me long to make myself at home in my cabin — which has a queen-size bed and an en-suite bathroom (with a normal, flushable toilet and a proper shower) — and return to the deck and the view.

My group of seven then meets for a feast of fresh lobster on board the Fontaine as we watch the sun gently set, painting the sky a wispy, soft pink, which becomes a pale, misty rose colour before slowly dipping below the horizon.

The next day, we set sail to discover the natural beauty that surrounds us. The sailing is peaceful, with steady winds and a calm sea. Torontonian Walter Footman and Tash Laurie, who hails from the Western Cape in South Africa, make up the two-person crew. They take care of everything, but are happy to let us lend a hand should we want.

As it happens, we generally just sit back and enjoy taking it all in. We head to Tobago Cays Marine Park, a protected archipelago with five islands and extensive reefs, which is only accessible by boat.

We anchor in a secluded area and one-by-one jump into the beautiful, refreshing water to see what it's like underneath the surface. The snorkelling is rewarding with extensive coral. I watch amazing little fish with flashes of electric blue, fluorescent yellow and bright purple scales swimming by, and even see a few small schools of tropical fish.



TradeWinds CEO Magnus Lewin steers the yacht, while Captain Walter Footman works the sails. Sharon Lindores / National Post

Afterwards, we sail a little closer to one of the islands with a long spit of white, powdered sand, which beckons as an enticing destination. Before long, I'm snorkelling again and I get distracted not just once, or twice, but three times by individual leatherback turtles. They swim effortlessly under water, occasionally surfacing for a breath or two of air — and it's wonderful to just glide through the sea with them as they meander on their way.

With a snorkel here, and a beach walk there, it's oh-so-easy to lose track of time. The most wonderful thing is there's no need to rush anywhere. The seemingly infinite sea is really sensational; as are the mainly untouched islands.

I take a walk up Petit Bateau Island and discover land crabs, the odd lizard and some cacti among the greenery. Plus, there's a fantastic view at the top of the little hill.

I walk down the other side of the island and discover a beach barbecue in the making: Locals are prepping freshly caught lobster and a few tables have been set up for whoever comes ashore — by swimming, or dinghy.

Over the next few days, we sail around by Union Island, Petit Martinique and Petit St. Vincent. The latter is a private island resort, known for its tropical woodlands, sandy beaches and the absence of technology (they don't have phones, TVs, or internet). Guests simply use the island's driftwood flagpole system to let staff know if they want room service, transportation or to be left alone.



The views from the bow are blissful... Sharon Lindores / National Post

It seems that wherever you are in the Grenadines there's plenty of space and time to completely relax. There really aren't too many boats, there are no jet-skis or the like, and only once did I see a small cruise ship in the distance.

For the most part, our two catamarans anchored in areas on our own, or with a handful of other yachts. And when I went diving in Chatham Bay, the three of us who took the dinghy from the cat to the reef were the only ones diving.

Similarly, when we went ashore on Mayreau Island and stayed in the TradeWinds villas (of which at this point there are only two — though more are being built), we had 20 acres of beachfront property all to ourselves.

As blissful as this was, I just had to explore what was on the rest of the island, which has a population of 250. There's an old, stone church on a hill, with a lovely view over the Caribbean and Salt Whistle Bay, which has moorings, a few little shops and kiosks. The most colourful place on the island is called Robert Righteous & de Youths Restaurant & Bar, which doubles as a shrine to Bob Marley and is run by the aforementioned and affable Robert Righteous himself.

Back by the villas, I could do as much, or as little as I wanted. There's a pool and there are kayaks and paddle boards — and there's even a small catamaran. But really all I had to do was take a walk on the beach, go for a dip in the sea or just look out at stunning location and practice the art of doing nothing. Such was the spell of the Grenadines.

*The writer was a guest of TradeWinds. The organization did not review this article.*