On Grenada, Sandals steps up its luxury-resort game

Experiencing Caribbean pampering on “Spice Island”

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In the southwest corner of the Caribbean, situated between Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, determined beach vacationers gravitate to the lush, volcanic island of Grenada. Until the past decade, the 133-square-mile island was known more for growing, processing and exporting nutmeg and other spices than attracting tourists. But after Hurricane Ivan devastated the island in 2004, devastating homes, buildings and its valuable crops, efforts to develop tourism increased. After all, a nutmeg sapling takes eight years or more to bear fruit and begin to develop tourism increased. After all, a nutmeg sapling takes eight years or more to bear fruit and begin to develop tourism increased.

A brief stay on the “Spice Island” back in 2001 followed a small-ship sailing cruise, which began and ended at Grenada’s picturesque horseshoe-shaped harbor overlooking the capital city of St. George’s. Through the years, my husband and I have become huge fans of Caribbean vacationing, and we’ve gone to many islands rather than hotel chains.

On a recent trip back to Grenada, however, we decided to deviate from our usual routine and try Sandals LaSource Grenada Resort and Spa. Following its March 2014 opening, it’s been a hit, and we’re all-inclusive advocates — personal butlers, suites and overeating.

Island fun includes scuba diving, monkey watching and a 30-minute subway ride from the center of downtown Taipei, Beito is the epicenter of hot springs on an island that is steaming with geothermal activity. You can pay top dollar to visit a luxury resort, or just take your shoes off and soak your feet in one of the brooks that tumble down the hillsides.

Back when Japan controlled Taiwan, the area around Beito Park was one of the largest spas in Asia, filled with tar- verts, music halls and houses of ill repute. During the Vietnam War, American soldiers helped turn Beito into a notorious red-light district. Then, Taiwan banned prostitution in the late 1970s and Beito languished for a while, but it is coming back strong — today, visitors from mainland China arrive in tour buses to fill the resorts that ring Beitou Park. There’s a simple trick to meeting people in Taiwan — just look lost. It happened so many times during a recent week spent there that it became a running joke. These efforts of assistance almost inevitably led to extended conversations with our good Samaritans in a huffing mix of English and Chinese. They were intrigued to know where we were from and what we thought of their home, a place the Portuguese named “Ilha Formosa,” or beautiful island.

More than a century, Taiwan has been known as a generous welcomer of outsiders, and the tradition continues. Possibly because their future is so precarious — living on land claimed by China, with a democratic government unrecognized by most of the world’s nations — the Taiwanese take great pride in greeting people and showing off their culture. They were intrigued to know where we were from and what we thought of their home, a place the Portuguese named “Ilha Formosa,” or beautiful island.

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with infinity-edge pools and unlimited everything, from wine to water sports to dining the coral reefs. A major $45 million expansion transformed the former spa-centric, 100-room Lasaleoke resort over a 20-month period into one of the largest 223-room venues—set on an 800-foot beach, so named for its renowned sand.

Since the original Sandals opened in 1980 in Montego Bay, Jamaica, the brand has dominated the luxury all-inclusive market in the Caribbean with a current total of 14 resorts—seven in Jamaica, three in St. Lucia, one each in Antigua, Bahamas and Grenada, and most recently, Barbados.

The brand boasts of a high percentage of repeat visitors and an audience that often seems more interested in the on-site pampering than island exploration. On our room TV kept us informed about special events such as live musical performances, presentations, and cocktail parties.

DIVING AND SNORKELING IN GRENAADA’S UNDERWATER SCULPTURE PARK

All Sandals resorts offer unlimited diving with equipment and guided boat dives included—a big plus for certified scuba drivers, since scuba diving can be an expensive hobby.

We spent most of our mornings diving, exploring the healthy reefs and coral-encrusted shipwrecks like the Crescent C, a 650-foot cruiser liner known as the Titanic of the Caribbean. A highlight was being able to dive Grenada’s Underwater Sculpture Park, which opened in 2010. While drivers remain among the 110 sculptures, these can also be viewed by snorkelers and from a glass-bottom boat, since they are in shallow depths—up to 10 feet under the surface.

A circle of tall figures holding hands, cast from local children, is the most impressive of the sculptures, spread throughout half a mile of the protected marine area. MONA MONKEYS

A circle of life-sized figures cast from local children. Of course, we were surprised. As the designated foodie in our household, I was looking forward to a range of flavors and styles. We began our foodie week at the Grenada Chocolate Company, where cocoa beans are processed for making some of the world’s finest dark chocolate bars at the Grenada Chocolate Company.

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