



Island paradise. Yachts at one of the many tropical islands in the Grenadines

My life on the ocean waves

Brian Moynahan takes his friends on a charter around the Grenadines

Last year, myself and four friends left a wintery London, hunched up against the traffic and sleet and, less than 12 hours later, we were boarding a 50ft yacht at St Vincent in the West Indies. She was called *Puka*, but she had a kindly motion that belied her name. Comfort aboard increases exponentially with length. A 50-footer is not twice as grand as a 25-footer, but four or five times so.

We got a lot of boat for our money. *Puka* had four proper cabins, each with its own shower, loo and basin, lots of hanging space, and full headroom. If the engine had been running, there was hot water. Since there were five of us, we rotated, with one person sleeping in the large and comfortable main cabin. In theory, the boat could take eight, but they would have to be agile and get on very well together. A crowded boat is worse than a crowded anything else, since it's difficult to escape.

We got Guy Hadley, the young owner-skipper, too. A wise move. He provided local knowledge to guide us through tricky reefs to wondrous bays, and muscle power for a non-functioning electric windlass. He cooked well, ferried us safely home after

Happy Hour outings to various rum shacks, and kept us in good humour.

The boat with Guy cost us just over £600 each for 15 nights aboard. Island supermarkets give discounts to boat crews, and provisioning was not expensive. Eating ashore varied, both in cost and quality. Local rum was excellent, cheap and – in its overproof version – near lethal. The only additional expense was the air ticket to Barbados and on to St Vincent.

For that outlay, we acquired a steady 28°C, kept fresh and insect-free by a cooling breeze, a warm island-strewn sea, and the means of moving about it in some style. A string of islands runs south to Grenada, with 20 miles or less between them. Each has its own character. The largest have airstrips, but a boat is the only way to explore them all.

From St Vincent, we made for Bequia, an old whaling island with a charming waterfront of clapboard houses. A fast sail in a stiff breeze took us past the strange houses of Moonhole, built into the writhing shapes of the cliff rocks, without glass in the windows, kept cool by the Bequia breezes. We caught a barracuda off Isle à Quatre, an

uninhabited island once used by whalers, and clipped on to cook it with some breadfruit at a beach barbecue on Mustique.

To the south lies the casino island of Canouan, swarmed over by security guards in golf carts. From this strange place, we went on to Salt Whistle Bay, a beautiful half-moon bay on Mayreau island. The Tobago Cays, an exquisite place of corals reefs and fine snorkelling, where local boats sell lobster and ice, are close by.

Then there are more islands: Petit St Vincent, Petite Martinique, Carriacou and Union Island, a surprisingly and pleasantly Frenchified place of excellent boutiques and good food. And finally the wooded Chatham Bay, its only residents a small yacht built on the Solent in 1928, the owner, his wife, of almost the same vintage and provenance, and the ship's dog. But, if you can't get to live like that yourself, for now at least, chartering is the next best thing. ■

HOW TO GET THERE

BA flies to Grenada – a 25-minute connecting flight from the Grenadines – from London Heathrow. Visit ba.com

Brian Moynahan sailed around the Grenadines courtesy of Grenadine Escape (www.grenadine-escape.com)