

ck's Bar on  
aret Beach.  
xwise from  
room at  
on Bequia;  
t the Green  
mont  
t Elizabeth,  
bital



ext leaping over sulphur  
ing to branches and rocks  
ow paths that plunged  
final section was through  
solation, a steaming lunar  
arked with burbling hot  
e reached the lake, a huge  
of boiling water thought  
rack in the earth's crust,  
ten lava flows. After a  
made our way back. By  
stiff I could hardly move.  
few days, I fell into an  
e: a morning yoga class,  
ander to a nearby village  
massage at the simple but  
ghlights included a visit  
ool (a natural swimming-  
rest), a happy morning  
et in the capital, Roseau,  
to Victoria Falls, where I  
rock and leapt into the  
low, the powerful falls  
within an inch of my life.  
bruised, blistered and  
all it has to offer. Building

an economy while keeping the tourism  
experience authentic is going to be a  
difficult balance to strike, but if it works  
anywhere it will work here, where citizens  
still see the lack of international-brand  
hotels as something to boast about.

## BEQUIA

BEING PRINCESS MARGARET must have been  
very odd. She only had to set foot in a  
place and it would be renamed after her.  
Take Tony Gibbons Beach, for example,  
a slender strip of almond-tree-fringed,  
sugar-white sand on the beautiful eastern  
Caribbean island of Bequia ('island of  
clouds'). The beach was named after  
a reclusive fisherman who had lived in a  
shack on the beach for years, until HRH  
spotted it from her yacht in 1958, leapt  
overboard and swam ashore. The following  
day it was renamed Princess Margaret  
Beach. What she had stumbled across was  
one of the best beaches on one of the  
loveliest islands in the Grenadines, a mass  
of rainforest-covered hills rising sharply

from the ocean, fringed by white-sand  
beaches, with one town, several small  
villages and a lot of wilderness in between.

The exclusive island of Mustique,  
which became Princess Margaret's winter  
retreat, is just a 20-minute speedboat ride  
across the water from Bequia, but the  
two couldn't be more different. Mustique  
is a rarefied resort where little remains  
of the genuine Caribbean; whereas Bequia  
(pronounced 'beck-way') has remained  
original and interesting, sleepy and  
unspoilt, somewhere to raise children, go  
to church, pop out for rotis (flatbreads  
with spicy fillings) and gossip under the  
giant almond tree by the daily market.

Bequia is part of St Vincent and the  
Grenadines, a string of 32 islands. At 18sq  
km Bequia is the second-largest of them,  
but it is still too small to support major  
industries, and its airport cannot cope with  
anything bigger than the 18-seater Twin  
Otter that flies in from Barbados.

Bequia's colonial rollercoaster began in  
1664, when the French laid claim to the  
island. It became British in 1763, after

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The pool and grounds at  
Firefly Plantation Bequia

which slaves were shipped in from Africa to grow sugar cane and cotton. Nineteen tracts of land were also given to 'poor white settlers', generally displaced by exhausted plantations elsewhere in the Caribbean. After the abolition of slavery in 1833, the planter economy collapsed and the islanders turned to whaling, fishing and boat-building (Bequia became famous for its unique schooners).

Bequians are a colourful mix of the descendants of the Africans, Caribs, Irish, English and Scottish who settled here over the centuries, plus a handful of expats. Although its golden age of ship-building may have passed, the island is still known for high-quality boat repairs and a model-boat industry. The busiest week in its calendar is the Easter Regatta (21-25 April this year), when huge crowds of spectators gather at De Reef, a restaurant on the popular beach of Lower Bay.

I arrived on Bequia by ferry from St Vincent, which is the best way to get there. After an easy hour's journey among friendly locals and postbags, I saw Port Elizabeth, the island's sleepy capital of colourful wooden houses, on the horizon. It's a small town, big on character. Its few streets are full of little restaurants and cafés, most playing country music, which is more popular than reggae in Bequia ('Oh, What a Dream' by Johnny Cash was the first thing I heard on arrival).

Belmont Walkway, a promenade along the water's edge, is lined with characterful bars, B&Bs and small shops. This is where you will find the Green Boley café (known for its rotis), a great little B&B called Gingerbread, Dive Bequia and Mac's Pizzeria (famous for its conch fritters and its lobster pizzas, recently voted one of the top five pizzas in the world by the *New York Times*). For a massage, there's the Bequia Health Centre. The walkway eventually leads to Princess Margaret Beach, at one end of which is Jack's Bar, a great spot for a late-afternoon rum punch, beyond which is Lower Bay.

Like Dominica, Bequia is increasingly included as a stop on cruise-ship itineraries, so for a few hours a day, a few times a week, holidaymakers fill the restaurants on Port Elizabeth's harbourfront. But go one block inland, to the laid-back Hibiscus Bar, for instance, and it's Bequians all the way. The island may be sleepy, but there is always something going on: the Thursday-night Jump Up at Frangipani, for example, and Friday-night parties at Devil's Table.

For a relatively small island, there is a lot to see. You can hire a car, but many of



the roads are incredibly steep and it is much more relaxing to explore by taxi or by 'dollar bus': open-backed trucks (with unlikely names like 'Pebbles') that carry passengers around the island.

Princess Margaret, Mick Jagger and Tommy Hilfiger may have plumped for Mustique, but Bequia has never been short of high-profile admirers, most of whom tend to gravitate towards Friendship Bay. I stayed at the Bequia Beach Hotel there. Originally two adjacent hotels developed by a delightful Swedish hotelier, Bengt Mortstedt, it has reopened as a very good, 61-room classic-contemporary hotel, spa and beachfront restaurant, Bagatelle. Friendship Bay is the largest and loveliest beach on the island, with Mustique clearly visible across the water. Next door to the hotel is what was once British Prime Minister Anthony Eden's beach house, and next to that, the beautiful, modern villa New Eden, where actress Rachel Weisz and her family have stayed for Christmas.

There are two amazing, secluded beaches north of Friendship Bay which are accessible only on foot: the gloriously deserted Hope Bay (take a picnic) and Spring Bay, above which Firefly Plantation Bequia (sister property of the Firefly Mustique hotel) sits on a palm-covered hillside. It's a beautiful hotel, but unless you're looking for complete seclusion it is a better bet for lunch or dinner than as a place to stay. Carry on up the road and you will eventually get to the Old Hegg Turtle Sanctuary, a conservation project run and funded by a former Bequian fisherman, Orton King, to save the endangered hawksbill turtle.


On the wild, craggy south-western tip

*Continued on page 183*

## Dominica & Bequia

**W&O Travel** (0845 277 3399; [www.wando-travel.com](http://www.wando-travel.com)) offers a week in Bequia and Dominica from £2,099 per person, including all flights, one night at Grenadine House on St Vincent, three nights at Bequia Beach Hotel and three nights at Jungle Bay Resort & Spa, plus activities, yoga and a daily spa treatment.

**British Airways** ([www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) flies London to Barbados. From there, **Liat** ([www.liatairline.com](http://www.liatairline.com)) flies to Dominica; **SVG Air** ([www.svgair.com](http://www.svgair.com)) flies to Bequia.

**Journey time**  Nine hours' flight to Barbados, then an hour's domestic flight to Dominica or Bequia.

**WHERE TO STAY**  
**Jungle Bay Resort & Spa.** Dominica (001 767 446 1789; [www.junglebaydominica.com](http://www.junglebaydominica.com)). Doubles from US\$207  
**Bequia Beach Hotel.** Friendship Bay, Bequia (001 784 458 1600; [www.bequiabeach.com](http://www.bequiabeach.com)). Doubles from US\$180  
**Firefly Plantation.** Bequia (001 784 458 3414; [www.fireflybequia.com](http://www.fireflybequia.com)). Doubles from US\$474  
**Gingerbread.** Admiralty Bay, Bequia ([www.gingerbreadhotel.com](http://www.gingerbreadhotel.com)). Doubles from US\$120

**Moonrise** (00 1 207 763 3441). From US\$1,475 a week  
**New Eden Beach House** ([www.grenadine-escape.com](http://www.grenadine-escape.com)). From £1,860 a week

## WHERE TO EAT, DRINK & VISIT

**Green Boley.** Port Elizabeth, Bequia (00 1 784 458 3247)  
**Devil's Table.** Port Elizabeth (00 1 784 458 3900)  
**Frangipani.** Port Elizabeth ([www.frangipanibequia.com](http://www.frangipanibequia.com))  
**Hibiscus Bar.** Port Elizabeth  
**Mac's Pizzeria.** Admiralty Bay, Bequia (00 1 784 458 3474)  
**Jack's Bar.** Princess Margaret Beach, Bequia (00 1 784 457 3762)  
**Fernando's Hideaway.** nr Lower Bay, Bequia (00 1 784 458 3758)  
**De Reef.** Lower Bay (00 1 784 458 3958)  
**Dive Bequia** ([www.dive-bequia.com](http://www.dive-bequia.com))  
**Old Hegg Turtle Sanctuary.** Union Vale, ([www.turtles.bequia.net](http://www.turtles.bequia.net))  
**Bequia Health Centre** ([www.bequiahealthcentre.com](http://www.bequiahealthcentre.com))

## WEATHER TO GO

 The eastern Caribbean is hot all year, but July-Nov is hurricane season and can be very wet.