

Travel

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Grenada: picture-perfect island caught in a struggle

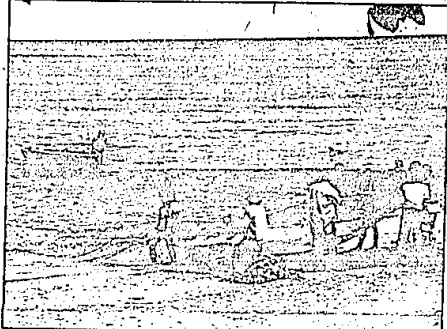
Travel writer recalls vignettes

My job sometimes takes me to places that are in the news, leaving me with a dilemma. I am a travel writer, not a political writer. I go to a country to report on travel possibilities, not to comment on political situations.

I am seldom in a place long enough to develop in-depth reportorial observations. For that reason I include politics in my travel stories only to the extent that readers need such information to make travel decisions.

On the other hand, I usually come away from such a trip with images and experiences in my mind that affect the way I hear the news. That's the way it was this week when U.S. and Caribbean forces invaded Grenada. And therein is my dilemma.

Would such images and experiences be useful to readers in evaluating the news? And how do I avoid that terrible traveler's temptation: assuming that I know all about a country that I have



Grenada looks like a paradise but has poor proud towns scattered around the edges of the island. Many Grenadians work long hours to provide food for their families.

In world of travel

Handicapped are making inroads

Anyone who drives is familiar with the international symbol of the handicapped, a stylized human figure in a wheel chair. Unless you are handicapped yourself, you may not realize how welcome a sight that sign is when you travel or how hard handicapped travelers have fought to be included in the travel world.

Although the handicapped are still waiting for the day when they can easily use a washroom in an airplane, a great deal of attention has been paid to the handicapped traveler in recent years. The law demands ramps and toilet facilities in public buildings. Many hotels are installing braille signage, wheelchair-wide doorways on shower stalls and other services.

Access guides are being published so that you can know in advance whether travel is accessible. I highly recommend a book called "Access to the World" (1993) by Louise Weiss which can be ordered from your bookstore or from Facts on File, 460 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016, for \$14.95.

This 221-page guide gives information about facilities available on airlines and ships, in hotels, on rail-

ways and buses, but its greatest usefulness may be in the many reference guides listed for the handicapped traveler.

ANOTHER BOOK worth consideration is "Travelability: A Guide For Physically Disabled Travelers in the United States" by Lois Reamy, \$11.95 from your bookstore or from McMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 101 K. Brown, Riverside, N.J. 08370. This was first published in 1979, and a lot of things have happened since then, so you may want to ask about an updated edition before you put your money down.

Many access guides are published either free or for minimal cost by cities, states and federal government agencies. I have on my desk a book called "Access National Park, A Guide for Handicapped Visitors" available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

This book gives you information about the accessibility of facilities, services and interpretive programs in almost 300 areas of the National Park System.

port when I was there. The U.S. government considered Grenada to be a threat because of its left-wing connections.

This month, of course, two new chapters were added: Last week Bishop and several of his political associates were killed and his government overthrown by a more radical group; this week U.S. and Caribbean forces invaded the island.

While I was listening to all this on radio and television a series of images and a multitude of voices kept flashing into my head.

THE SIGHT of this 133-square mile island rising mountainously out of the blue sea as we landed at a mountain airport big enough for small and medium sized planes. A luxury of nutmeg, coffee and fruit trees tumbling downhill as we drove an hour over potholed roads to the town of St. George's.

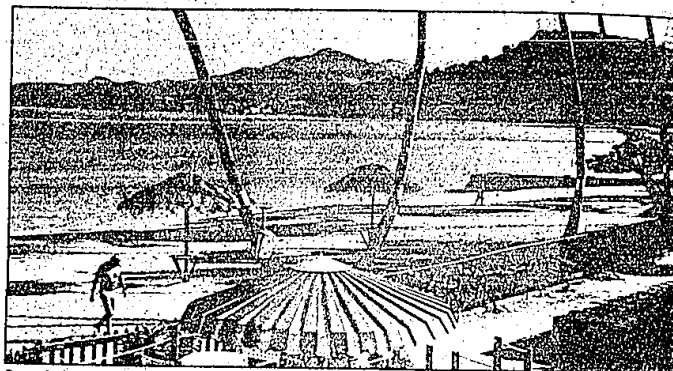
A poor, proud, town scattered around the edges of a huge bay. I could easily imagine a nineteenth-century sailing ship cruising into the harbor. What stood instead was a 20th-century cruise ship.

A long strip of glorious sand and beach with low but fairly luxurious little hotels tucked into the palm trees. A rough winding road leading through fishing villages around the perimeter of the island.

That's the physical setting. Grenada looks exactly the way a tropical island should look: tropical trees spilling downhill down flowered hillsides to an emerald sea.

And there were images of the people of Grenada: Young immigration officers being officious in a simple wooden airport terminal. A serious young voice explaining that Grenada needed the new airport being built at the other end of the island; it would bring tourists in to enrich the economy. (Americans had to stay overnight in Barbados and fly in the next day on a smaller plane, which certainly limited tourists from the U.S.)

Another young man leading us po-



Grenada is a 133-square mile Caribbean island which looks the way a tropical island should look — tropical trees spilling down flowered hillsides to an emerald and blue sea and sandy beaches with small hotels tucked in among the palms.

lity through an old wooden building to the ministry of tourism. Sincere talk about a struggling economy, a tiny nation of poor people trying to survive out there in the eastern Caribbean with lots of salable spices but little industry. I couldn't argue with their premise that it was a perfect setting for tourism: an unspoiled island with magnificent mountains and beaches but no high rise hotels or casinos. Their plan was to keep things small, and a little luxurious, but not too expensive. Like many underdeveloped countries, they saw tourism as their main economic hope for the future.

THE VOICES of the middle and upper class, especially the voices of American residents, surprised me. I assumed that they would be most resistant to the Bishop government, since it was left wing and had closed down the newspapers. There were many voices, but they all said more or less the same thing:

"Let's give Bishop's government a chance. The so-called democratic government of Eric Gairy, who ruled here for years, was a farce. He was a corrupt dictator. This new bunch of politicians are mostly young, and they don't know what they're doing, but maybe they will be able to make this island work. Let's give them a chance."

Outsiders, like myself, can seldom evaluate that kind of talk. All we can do is listen. I asked guides and fruit sellers and bystanders for their opinions. They were mixed. Some said, "We like this government." Some said, "They were going to do great things, but they're terrible."

AND THEN there was Dr. John Watta: a Grenadian educated at Michigan State University, an island politician for 25 years under the Gairy regime and chairman of the Grenada Tourist Board under the Bishop regime. Educated, blunt, friendly.

"Grenada is a 17th century country

in a 20th century situation," he said. "The U.S. would do better to help us develop economically than to fight us because Cubans are helping us to build an airport."

All these images come back to me this week as I watch the news. Images of billboards that read "If you know, teach. If you don't, learn." Of a man who painted pictures on his housefront to celebrate the Bishop government that threatened us because it was too left wing and threatened those who overthrew him because it wasn't left wing enough. Images of the remaining newspaper, a terrible rag full of rhetoric about "yankee imperialism."

So what is happening in Grenada now? I don't know. I'm just a travel reporter with images in my head. I can tell you one thing though. In this, as in almost every other politically lousy country I have visited, things are not as cut-and-dried as they look on the television screen.



This traveler finds that ramps have been provided aboard ship to allow him to maneuver. A great deal of attention has been paid to the handicapped traveler in recent years. New laws demand ramps and handicapped toilet facilities. Many access guides are available to help travelers.

HEALTH INFORMATION of all kinds is a major topic in tourist bureaus around the world.

Central Kentucky Riding for the Handicapped Inc. has information about a program called "Free to Ride" for children and adults with a variety of handicaps. Contact them at Kentucky Horse Park, P.O. Box 8007, Lexington, Ky 40533.

Special accommodations for the handicapped are available in towns around the forests of Germany's Harz mountains. Contact Harzer Verkehrsverband, Postfach 1609,3380 Goslar 1, Federal Republic of Germany.

Flying Wheels Travel has trips year-round for the disabled, including a Caribbean cruise on the Queen Elizabeth II Nov. 11-21. Call toll-free 1-800-353-3531.

For free health data about shots, foods to avoid etc., call Worldwide Health Forecast toll-free, 1-800-353-3531.

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