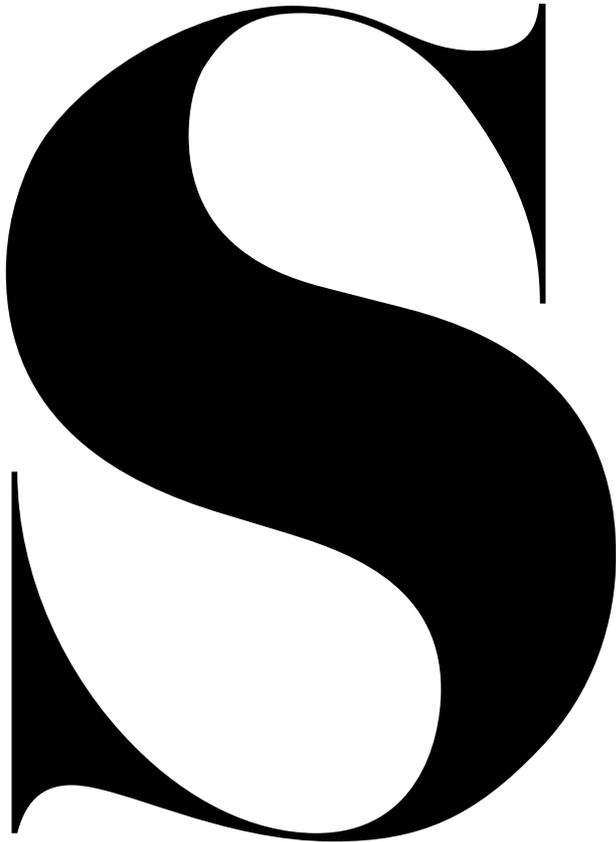


CALABASH HOTEL: A PLACE TO DWELL

Listed 9th on Tripadvisor's Top 25 Hotels in the World, Kered Clement dwells at Calabash Luxury Boutique Hotel and Spa in Grenada, to discover why it's the 2016 Travellers Choice.

Words by Kered Clement



ituated at the southern end of the Windward Islands, spanning 133 square miles of pristine coastline and a lush rainforest lies Grenada, rising to a peak of 2,757 feet. Fondly known as *'The Spice of the Caribbean'*, Grenada is home to a medley of herbs and spices, such as nutmeg, turmeric, clove and cinnamon often used to flavour our lives. Boasting unspoilt landscapes, greetings from genuine strangers and unpopulated beaches that are so rare globally, it is truly an authentic hidden gem, best illustrated as a picture perfect postcard. For those who live where others vacation, it is a charming existence. And it's no wonder founding family member Leo Garbutt snapped up the hotel in 1987, with a resounding sense that it felt like a place that would make people very happy.

It's a fresh dewy morning. Not the kind that's followed by an onslaught of frozen fingertips and runny noses. More like the relief of a cold shower on a hot summer's day. It was one of those morn-

ings where everyone from the plants to the people was yearning for liquid sunshine. Within a matter of minutes, the droplets dry up and an intense sun illuminates a perfectly manicured lawn, dotted with towering coconut trees and cottage style suites.

I'm sitting in the reception lounge surrounded by art deco inspired carpentry, adorned with a rich palette of deep olive and fuchsia upholstery. The setting is juxtaposed with the light and airy surroundings of the Rhodes restaurant, complete with floral roof hangings. The restaurant was opened in 2004 by British celebrity chef Gary Rhodes OBE, after he also fell in love with the island. A few years later Chef Mark B also caught the Grenadian love bug and came onboard to manage the St.Tropez-esque Beach Club, where you can enjoy tasty tapas and tempting cocktails, overlooking L'anse Aux Pine Beach.

Already losing myself in the thought of a night



“BEING NAMED ONE OF THE TOP TEN HOTELS IN THE WORLD IS DREAM COME TRUE. WE ALL HAVE DIFFERENT IDEAS AND WE HAVE MADE THEM WORK IN HARMONY. NOW WE HAVE A HOTEL THAT WE ARE EXTREMELY PROUD OF.”

of fine dining or sandy-toed beachfront dwelling, I’m greeted by Leo’s daughter and fellow Director Adele, who dons a healthy island glow and a cool yet attentive presence. I’m curious to find out about the name of the hotel, which we touch on briefly before diverting into a fashion-fuelled conversation about the covetable pieces I eyed in their newly launched fashion boutique. “We bought the hotel with the name Calabash and believe it was named after the Calabash tree, which you’ll find around the property” she advised. It felt like a match made in heaven, just like the branches and five petals of

a Calabash tree, all the components of the boutique hotel and spa are spread widely across the property and comprise of five Estate Villas, The Boutique at Calabash, The Beach Club at Calabash, Rhodes Restaurant, The Spa at Calabash and an inviting infinity pool attached to a soon-to-be-launched Wellness Centre.

At this point, I’m fully immersed and excited by the possibilities. In one location I could chose European style al-fresco dining, drool over Caribbean inspired tapas dishes, shop contemporary British labels like Blank London and Miami-based beachwear from Pitusa, renew my mind, body and soul at their spa with East Asian characteristics, or take in awe-inspiring views of the entire property in their luxurious hillside villas. As you do while dwelling, I wondered some more about how this family of five, along with a small team of dedicated staff run such an eclectic hotel. “There are so many of us involved who are deeply passionate about the hotel. It’s not just a business, it’s a lifestyle to us,” she added, “we travel, we stay at the best hotels in the world and we experience what they have to offer. Our boutique is like a luxury independent boutique in London, and our Beach Club is very much like something you would find in Ibiza. We



have improved all aspects of the hotel to create an amazing all round product.”

We take a tour of the property and start with the recently upgraded suites and villas. I begin to learn that Calabash Hotel has a bit of reputation for frequent upgrades, expertly executed, with minimal disturbance to guests, who just get to enjoy the fruits of their labour. I’m itching to know what’s next, so naturally, I pick Adele’s brain. “The big news is that we have just signed a deal to become an Elemis Spa. Elemis is widely known as being one of the best skincare lines in the world. The new treatments and products are amazing, so there is a lot to look forward to at our spa,” she reveals. I make a mental note to check out the spa as we make our way to the suites.

The immaculate pool suites were decked out by British designer, Sam Moss of Bottega Lifestyle. And the bonus, an outdoor bathtub, hot water shower and pool with a peek-a-boo view of clear blue skies and noseey coconut trees. In addition to the pool suites, guests can choose from junior, superior, deluxe to penthouse suites, each laid out to give a sense of having a home away from home. The villas, furnished by German interior designer Charlotte Kraemer, range from two to five bedrooms each with their own personality, unmatched views of the ocean and spacious open plan living, which marries effortlessly with island life.

I’m ready to hit the spa and at the entrance the jaw-dropping view eradicates any tension built up from my lack of a firm decision on what to experience next. With the Spa, Grenadian Architect Bryan Bullen managed to create the illusion of floating over the ocean, yes I repeat. A massage where you actually feel like you’re levitating over paradise is the best way to describe the Calabash Spa experience. I opt for the back massage and completely check out for 60 minutes, while the therapists nurturing hands ease me back to consciousness. I head back to my pool suite and take a long soak in the outside tub, at which point I’m overcome by a blissful burst of Julie Andrews style chorus, remixed with the line, “this is the good life!” I close my eyes and paint a vivid picture of all the smiles and friendly staff and happy guests I encountered in the space of a few hours.

Sunset is approaching and somewhere between the pool, spa and villa viewings, I purchased a beautiful panama and floaty floor-length dress to fit in with the ocean blue decor of the Beach Club. We arranged another catch up over their ever-popular Banana Crumble dessert because at Calabash you indulge and if you want dessert before dinner, you can do it. “We have concentrated on doing everything to an excellent standard. We have been known for having excellent food and service for quite some time,” she proclaims proudly. At which point I agree, while nodding profusely and trying not to have a public foodgasm. “This filters down to the staff. They have Calabash running through

“OUR FASHION BOUTIQUE IS LIKE A LUXURY INDEPENDENT BOUTIQUE IN LONDON, AND OUR BEACH CLUB IS VERY MUCH LIKE SOMETHING YOU WOULD FIND IN IBIZA. WE HAVE IMPROVED ALL ASPECTS OF THE HOTEL TO CREATE AN AMAZING ALL ROUND PRODUCT.”

their veins,” and as she confidently states this, a member of staff is already by our table with a smile as wide as the swoosh of caramel that frames my warm pot of deliciousness.

As the day draws to a close and the clear blue sky transforms into a fiery orange, I start to understand how Adele’s calm yet assertive traits as a Director in her late 20s, coupled with harmonious decision making with her sister Beth, who is also a cuisine expert. And the fine art eye of their youngest sister Bobbie, along with a committed team and supportive parents (who have put her daughters at the forefront) who are very much involved in the daily operations, all enhance the experience and make the perfect recipe for an award-winning hotel.

Before the crickets drown out our conversation and the stars make an appearance, I ask Adele what makes her most proud. “Being named one of the top ten hotels in the world is dream come true. The recognition is very much something that we strive towards and feels wonderful to achieve. It’s always a team effort. We all have different ideas and we have made them work in harmony. Now we have a hotel that we are extremely proud of. And we have some big news for 2017, but nothing can be revealed just yet!”

Photos by Terel Moore and Kered Clement

