

A large, white, sans-serif letter 'G' is positioned on the left side of the page. It is superimposed over a background image of a sunset over a beach. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by a dark, silhouetted hill. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and grey. The water is dark, and the beach is visible in the foreground with a few people walking away from the camera.

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GRENADA

A REMARKABLE JOURNEY
– VOLUNTEERING IN GRENADA –

In June 2016 I volunteered for Ocean Spirits on the spice island of Grenada for 3 weeks.
Ocean spirits is a non-profit organization, involved in monitoring sea turtles and community work.



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Grenada is a small island best known for its variety in spices, especially nutmeg, but also for having one of the largest unspoiled beaches in the Caribbean region namely Levera beach. There, researchers are able to monitor Leatherback Sea turtles and keep an accurate data base of all the nesting.

Doing volunteer work sounds vague, but in reality the job is very diverse;

Scanning Bathway beach every morning for any possible turtle tracks (this means leaving the volunteer house around 5AM as the sun is already up). If you find turtle tracks on the beach you have to disguise them using a rake to avert potential poachers or predators (birds or stray dogs). Bathway beach is a public beach where both locals and tourists enjoy spending time. Leatherback Sea turtles are generally nocturnal animals, but occasionally one will emerge during broad daylight. This usually means that she has to lay her eggs and can't wait any longer. During my volunteer work I was lucky to see a turtle by day on my first official working day. Some of the lifeguards working on Bathway beach are also supervisors for Ocean Spirits and immediately called us to come out. A Leatherback Sea turtle is obviously very noticeable, so news spreads like wildfire when a day turtle emerges. Within minutes the area is flocked with tourists, locals, lifeguards and volunteers. Only those working for Ocean Spirits; researchers, supervisors and volunteers are allowed to approach the Leatherback Seaturtle. All other onlookers were still welcome to watch this magnificent creature from up close, but were not involved. As more tourists and locals gathered around this spectacle, questions were answered by one of the members of Ocean Spirits.

Night survey (from 20.00 – 6.00): monitoring any sea turtle emerging from the sea. This can take several hours as the turtle has all the time in the world. While monitoring her, the job contains of being able to identify the turtle (flipper tag, injuries, measurements, pit scans), do egg counts and take nesting measurements. Of course you also have to do this when it is raining. Sometimes you will see hatchlings emerge from the sand. During night surveys you use red light instead of LED or white light as sea turtles have sensitive eyes. When you see hatchlings going towards the sea you have to switch off all lights otherwise these little creatures will follow the light.

It is remarkable to know that out of the dozens of hatchlings only one will return back to the same beach to lay its eggs. The moment they crawl out of the egg, these small creatures have a lot to overcome. It is already a struggle to get out of the sand, let alone to crawl over the beach and trying to make it to the ocean. Not to mention what is waiting for them in the big ocean. Life is one rough route for these hatchlings. Besides monitoring the Leatherback Sea turtles, Ocean Spirits also focuses her work on the community. They regularly organize workshops or other community projects to involve the locals in their work, especially the younger generation. The community work of Ocean Spirits is well received by the locals. The local news has for instance covered a planting project Ocean spirits did with one of the schools. Next to working on the beach with sea turtles or working with the locals, a volunteer has mandatory tasks. For example maintenance of equipment, accommodation and means of transport. As Grenada is an island; most of the products and items are imported. So you try to keep up the equipment as long as possible.

Kate and Kester are the ones in charge of this intensive work of Ocean Spirits. Two warm people who are dedicated to do their jobs. Strict and at the same time making sure every volunteer will feel at home. During my stay, there was enough time to relax and explore the island. Public transport is easy and cheaper than taking a taxi. Since Grenada is a small island, everyone knew i was a volunteer and was willing to help me, when i took the wrong bus for example.

Working as a volunteer for Ocean Spirits also gives you the opportunity to see 2 types of beaches:

- One that is protected and is only meant for sea turtles, like Levera beach
- And one that is for public use. Gran Anse beach is a great example. Regularly main events are organized for everyone. For instance free seafood was given away if you signed a petition to save the Sharks.

My other volunteer colleagues were into scuba diving and since the water is so clear, you can see everything that is swimming around (and underneath) you very clearly. At one time we even saw a Green turtle passing by.

The chocolate factory was also one of the attractions I was able to visit in my spare time. From cocoa seeds to a chocolate bar, the whole process and its history was patiently explained by a guide. Grenada surely produces the best chocolate. After the guided tour which included a wonderful hike through the whole area, we finished the tour by having lunch in the restaurant. This place offers great views and has delicious treats.

Beaches, hiking and exploring both nature and the city, there was enough to do those 3 weeks I was in Grenada. But the best part was working closely with the Leatherback Sea turtles on Levera beach.

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