

Lesser Antilles

Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & Grenada

A Greentours Itinerary

The classically curving archipelago of the Lesser Antilles divides the Caribbean from the Atlantic. This ambitious wildlife odyssey takes us through half a dozen of these islands, a zone rich in endemic fauna and flora. North to south we'll start in the Antigua, in the Windward Islands and travel slowly down through the Leeward Islands before finishing in Grenada. Completing all six islands is a big trip so it is possible to join this tour for all or just some of the islands. Just pick which parts of paradise you want to visit!

Around forty million years ago the Atlantic Tectonic Plate began to move under the Caribbean Tectonic Plate and volcanoes grew along the latter's margin. These were largely submerged but the tops now form the string of islands that reach from Guadeloupe almost to the South American Mainland. The islands generally have a high volcanic interior, are richly forested with ample rainfall, and each has coral reefs developed on the sheltered western coasts. The landscapes are often achingly beautiful with verdant forest bedecked in vines and flowers attracting those shimmering jewels of the air, the Hummingbirds. We'll spend several days on each island enjoyed the many fine and often little-visited protected areas.

During the we visit 6 different islands. On each island we stay either 3 or 4 days. It is possible to join the tour for any consecutive combination of islands up to the full six. As a rough guide each island sector costs approximately £1550 per person (single supplement £300) plus the international airfare to the start and from the finish and any internal air fares/ferry fares necessary to get to those starting and finishing points. If you wish to join the tour for anywhere between 1 and 5 island sections contact us for the exact price as it will vary slightly between islands!

Day 1

Arrive Antigua

An afternoon arrival in Antigua will give us a chance to have relaxing night at the Lord Nelson Hotel just five minutes from the airport in Antigua. The original Lord Nelson was the island's first beachfront hotel in the 1950s.

Days 2 - 4

Dominica

A short flight takes us across right over the scenic island of Guadeloupe to Dominica where we can begin our Odyssey of the Leeward Islands in earnest. We'll head straight to the Mango Island Lodge where we'll stay for the next three nights before heading out into the field for the afternoon. This lodge has an exceptional setting, surrounded by tropical vegetation and with breathtaking views of the sea from the pool or your private deck.

On this quiet and characterful island we'll explore the Northern Forest Reserve where we'll find the magnificent and extremely rare Imperial Parrot. We'll visit Morne Trois Pitons National Park which protects the rugged interior of the island, a land of steep volcanos and deep canyons all cloaked in forest home to Red-necked Parrot, Red-legged Thrush, Forest Thrush, Plumbeous Warbler and the glittering Blue-headed Hummingbird. We'll see Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, Black-faced Grassquit, Scaly-naped Pigeon and the little Kalinago Wren, little-known and now probably found nowhere else in the world. Brilliant orange *Anaea dominicana* is found only here as are the Dominican Snout, and the endemic hairstreak *Electrostrymon dominicana*. Brilliant orange Julia Heliconian is a frequent sight on flowery track edges where we'll also find Purple-washed Skipper, Pale Yellow and Dictynna Skipper. Widespread Caribbean butterflies include Polydamus Swallowtail, Red-rim, Caribbean Buckeye and the Orion Cecropian. Lesser Antillean Dancer damselflies haunt streamsides and hopefully we'll come across the extraordinary *Sibovia nielsonia*, a 'sharpshooter leafhopper' with mint-green and black stripes. We'll make a particular effort to unearth the impressive Giant Ditch Frog which is now critically endangered as well as Crested Anole and Dominican Anole. We'll take a whale watching trip to see Sperm Whales as well as Spinner, Spotted and Bottlenose Dolphins.

Days 5 - 7

Guadeloupe

A Ferry takes us past Fort Napoleon overlooking the seas surrounding the Îles des Saintes, a small group of islands off the southern end of Guadeloupe. These waters can be good for cetaceans and we've a chance of spotting Pantropical Spotted Dolphins and Short-finned Pilot Whales during the crossing. After landing we'll head for the hotel, the Habitation Saint Charles - Hôtel de Charme & Spa for a three night stay. Nestled in lush vegetation along a small river bordering sugarcane fields, the Saint Charles has its own waterfall pool in a natural setting.

Guadeloupe National Park, a UNESCO Biosphere reserve, protects over 40,000 acres of fabulously luxuriant rainforest, home to endemics such as Guadeloupe Woodpecker as well as endemic frogs like *Eleutherodactylus barlagnei*. We'll explore marine and coastal environments where we can enjoy the underwater world, some great coastal birding, and two rather beautiful reptiles, the green and yellow *Anolis marmoratus*, found only on Guadeloupe, and the colourful Fantastic Least Gecko. Though only sixty or so species of butterflies are found on the island there are some beautiful species including several intricately-marked green hairstreaks notably *Allosmaitia piplea*, *Chlorostrymon simaethis* and *Chlorostrymon lalitae*. There's also striking *Strymon columnella* and *Ministrymon azia* which is altogether more subdued. *Anaea minor* is a characteristic and brightly coloured species of the higher mountains and some birds we should see in these areas are Bridled Quail Dove, Caribbean Martin, and the Antillean Crested Hummingbird, a little beauty with a shimmering green pate.

The piratical silhouette of the Magnificent Frigatebird is a frequent sight around Guadeloupe's coastlines where we'll see Brown Booby and various Terns. There

are some areas of mangrove too where we'll look for Black-whiskered Vireo and Mangrove Cuckoo. We'll have the opportunity to take to the coral reefs which are exceptional. Colourful fish abound with fabulous Queen Angelfish and striped French Angelfish, garish orange and black-striped Peppermint Basslet, the aptly-named Rock Beauty, and shoals of Blue-striped Grunts. Others include spotty Smooth Trunkfish, Goldentail and Chain Morays, Common Lionfish and the pastel shades of Green Razorfish.

Days 8 - 10

Martinique

We'll take a flight back over Dominica and continue south along the island arc to lovely Martinique. Here we'll have three days exploring the volcanoes and forests of Pitons du Carbet and the sublime peninsula landscapes and coasts of lovely Presqu'île de la Caravelle where we'll find the Martinique form of White-breasted Thrasher, Grey Trembler and Martinique Oriole. Those two lovely hummers Purple-throated Carib and Antillean Crested Hummingbird are common here. Coastally we'll see good numbers of Brown Pelican and should be on the lookout for Red-billed Tropicbird. Lesser Antillean Iguanas sun themselves, keeping an eye on us lest we approach too closely. Like most of the other Leeward Islands Martinique has its own endemic Anole species, imaginatively named Martinique Anole. We'll also see tiny Lesser Antillean Whistling Frog and the hardly larger Martinique Robber frog.

Days 11 - 14

St Lucia

Our second and last ferry journey takes us from Martinique to St Lucia in only an hour and a half. Not so much time to search for the Sperm Whales that are sometimes noted between the two islands. The ferry arrives early in the afternoon and that'll give us plenty of time to go and enjoy our first evening in perhaps the finest hotel on the tour, the Fond Doux Eco Resort. This French colonial estate house in Soufriere is set amidst a fully operating, 135-acre cocoa plantation. Surrounded by tropical gardens, the 19th century plantation is a World Heritage site. Fond Doux Eco Resort boasts three tiered, outdoor pools with waterfalls. Needless to say we'll start our exploration of St Lucia's wildlife in the hotel grounds.

The wildlife of St. Lucia is a little better known than the other islands on this tour – the Edmund Forest Reserve, protecting the lovely interior volcanic forests, a popular destination amongst birders. Here we can see the iconic St. Lucia Parrot, as well as St. Lucia Warbler, St. Lucia Oriole and St. Lucia Black Finch. The last is a large-beaked finch looking not dissimilar to the widespread Lesser Antillean Bullfinch. But according to recent research, its closest relatives are actually the Darwin's Finches which are endemic to Galapagos, 2,200 miles away in South America. The Edmund Forest Reserve is full of lush green valleys and fantastic waterfalls amidst a forest of towering trees. The vegetation is very diverse, the trees covered in ferns and bromeliads. There's orchids, tree ferns and passion flowers and not surprisingly an amazing diversity of insect life. The Green Jewel Fly will no

doubt elicit a chorus of admiration but there's plenty of other beauties too such as the Spotted Pink Lady Beetle, the Common Sieve Tortoise Beetle, and several hawk moths including the Pluto Sphinx. Butterflies are abundant with colourful species such as Gulf Fritillary, elegant Orion Cecropian, the Red-rim and the stunning bright green hairstreaks *Chlorostymon simaethis* and *Chlorostymon measites*. There's also Ruddy Daggerwing, pretty Angerona Hairstreak, and both Dominican Leafwing and Florida Leafwing.

We'll also visit the highlands of Babonneau and The Des Cartiers Rainforest Trail. This will give us another chance to spend time with the St. Lucia Parrot, also known as the St. Lucia Amazon, locally 'Jacquot'. In the 1970s only about a hundred remained, so an international conservation effort was launched that included captive breeding programs, habitat protection and the recognition of the 'Jacquot' as St. Lucia's national bird. The results have been very encouraging with the population rising considerably. The trail takes us along the side of a valley with observation points overlooking the impressive rainforest trees. We'll no doubt hear the Jacquots' squawks before we see them! Also here are Rufous-throated Solitaire and yet more variety in the lizard department with both Saint Lucia Anole and Watt's Anole. The Lesser Antillean Euphonia is a small jewel box of colour with bright turquoise head and yellow beak bar, contrasting with chartreuse-green wings, back and breast. Despite its shocking colours, this bird easily blends into the green canopy!

Barbados Anoles pose on trees at the back of Grand Anse's beautiful sweep of sand. Ponds and streams behind the beaches are exceptional for Odonata with species such as Vermillion Saddlebags, Great Pondhawk, Tawny Pennant and Three-striped Dasher found here. Northern Tropical Buckeye and Androgeus Swallowtail are amongst the larger butterflies in this drier habitat, also favoured by the St Lucia Horned Iguana, Black-faced Grassquit and St Lucia Wren. Scaly-breasted Thrasher is found amongst the dry scrubby woodlands along with Caribbean Elaenia, and both Lesser Antillean Pewee and Lesser Antillean Saltator. This is the habitat of an endemic form of White-breasted Thrasher, the St Lucia subspecies quite likely to be upgraded to a full species soon.

Days 15 - 17

St Vincent

We continue our journey south along the island arc with a flight to St Vincent. Here we've a three night stay in Grenadine House located in central Kingstown with expansive views over the capital and the Grenadines.

St. Vincent of course also has its own parrot, the St. Vincent Parrot. Renowned for its fabulous tropical beaches, St Vincent also has some excellent snorkelling around the little island of Bequia where we'll also find seabirds such as various Terns, Noddies and no less than three species of Booby. Bequia is perhaps infamous as one of the few places in the Western Hemisphere where the IWC still licences a small whaling industry. However since 2015 the St Vincent & Grenadines environment fund has been retraining local fisherman to work with whale and

dolphin watching operators. So we will take a boat trip out to Bequia with them and spend the day looking for cetaceans, turtles, birdwatching and snorkelling around this wonderful little island. It takes an hour or so to get there from the mainland so we can be on the lookout straight away for the Humpback Whales, Sperm Whales and Short-finned Pilot Whales. There is a turtle breeding beach on Bequia and we may well see Green Turtles and Hawksbill Turtles either from the boat or whilst snorkelling. On the island itself we may well come across the Red-footed Tortoise. The fish life is mesmerising. There are colourful species such as Atlantic Blue Tang, Blue-head Wrasse, Creole Wrasse, the beautiful Green-band Goby and the well-named Flamefish. Others we might come across are Long-spined Porcupinefish, Sharptail Eel, Scrawled Filefish, Green Puffer, and a rich variety of colourful Butterflyfish and Parrotfish.

The Vermont Forest reserve in the Buccament Valley on the slopes of Mt Soufriere is home to Grenada Flycatcher, Cocoa Thrush, Whistling Warbler and Lesser Antillean Tanager. In the skies above we can see Lesser Antillean Swift, Common Black Hawk and Broad-winged Hawk whilst along the forest trails are St Vincent Wren and Grenada Flycatcher.

Days 18 – 21(am)

Grenada

Flying to our last island, we've three nights at the charming La Sagesse Hotel in Grenada situated just a few steps away from a palm tree shaded beach and with stunning views of the surrounding countryside. Inland of the crescent-shaped beach is an area famed for its wildlife and nature trails.

The final island on our itinerary is Grenada which as an island is a masterpiece, shapely volcanos bedecked in lush forest with idyllic crater-lakes dotted here and there. We'll visit the Mt Hartman National Park, home to the Grenada Dove, one of the World's most endangered birds. Scaly-naped Pigeon is also here along with Bananaquit, Spectacled Thrush and the Grenada Wren. The Grenadine Ameiva is plentiful and other reptiles include Bronze Anole and Grenada Tree Anole.

The picturesque Grand Etang National Park is a fabulous place to enjoy Caribbean colour whether it's the abundant butterflies, flowers or colourful hummingbirds such as the petite Antillean Crested Hummingbird, the Purple-throated Carib, and the iridescent gem that is the Green-throated Carib. We'll also see the Rufous-breasted Hermit, Grenada Flycatcher and butterflies such as White Peacock, Red Peacock, Polydamus Swallowtail, Gulf Fritillary and the fiery Julia Heliconian.

Day 21(pm)

Evening flight

Our British Airways flight to London Gatwick takes off in the evening, stopping briefly in St Lucia before heading across the Atlantic.

Day 22

Arrive UK

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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