

Sunday Telegraph

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## The Sunday Telegraph

### Caribbean



A fruit seller at St Antoine market in Pointe-à-Pitre, left

## Guadeloupe: the real-life St Marie

James Henderson explores the island locations of BBC One's tropical detective series 'Death in Paradise'

There are so many islands in the Caribbean that you could be forgiven for forgetting one of them – tiny St Marie, the setting for *Death in Paradise*, BBC One's tropical murder mystery series which airs for a fifth season starting next Thursday.

It's a fairly typical Caribbean island with a small capital, St Hono-é, lying in the shelter of a volcano; a rainforest; a tangled French and British heritage – and, for a population of 50,000 or so, an unfeasibly high murder rate of eight per year. But, of course, St Marie is fictional.

In reality, the series – which offers a burst of the exotic in the dark depths of a British January – is filmed in Guadeloupe, which lies about halfway down the eastern Caribbean chain, between Dominica and Antigua. Most of the action takes place in the island's rain-forested

DI Florence Cassell (Josephine Jobert) and DI Humphrey Goodman (Kris Marshall), right

north-western corner, around the town of Deshaies.

Some of the film locations on the fictional St Marie have become tourist curiosities. The police station is a pretty, old wooden building among the concrete modernity of Deshaies, and Catherine's Bar, where so many episodes conclude – and where Detective Inspector Humphrey Goodman (played for a third time by Kris Marshall) ate a whole chilli – is a wooden deck right on the town's beach. It is quite possible to get a sunset drink there.

Other regular locations familiar to viewers include the botanical gardens, where actor Ben Miller, the previous DI, met his death at the end of series two, and DI Humphrey's beach house, on a truly lovely stretch of palm-backed sand, Anse la Perle.

Last June I travelled to see these settings for myself – and to meet the crew and actors when they were about halfway through their five-month schedule of filming eight

MONTSERRAT

Atlantic Ocean

### GUADELOUPE

Deshaies GRANDE-TERRE

Pointe-à-Pitre

Caribbean Sea

BASSE-TERRE

10 miles

MARIE-GALANTE

new episodes in Guadeloupe. As I explored the area, I spotted small pink signs attached to electricity poles, saying DIP LOC (short for *Death in Paradise* Location), indicating temporary film sets.

In charge of finding these new locations, and of giving the series its rich tropical feel, is location manager James Chambers.

"It's a change from working in London where every scene has been used a million times before," he said, as we looked out on the sparkling bay visible from his office. "The beaches are a cinch – and then there are the benefits of the sunshine, the sea and working so close to nature."

The actors and crew relocate to Guadeloupe for five or six months of the year (guest actors for individual episodes visit for two weeks). It's obviously hard work, requiring the crew to be on set for up to 12 hours a day – but life in a tropical paradise has its compensations.

"I live in a villa on a cliff overlooking the sea, with an amazing view to Antigua on one side and Montserrat on the other," said Kris Marshall. "On a really clear day – which is rare, because the volcano usually has a pall of cloud around it – you can see pyroclastic flows running all the way down to the sea."

The volcano on Montserrat, once one of the gentlest and sweetest islands in the region, is still active after 20 years and shows no sign of calming down.

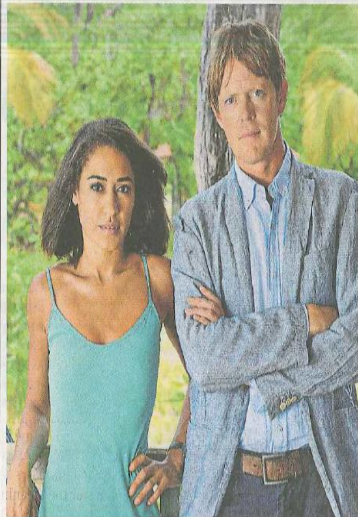
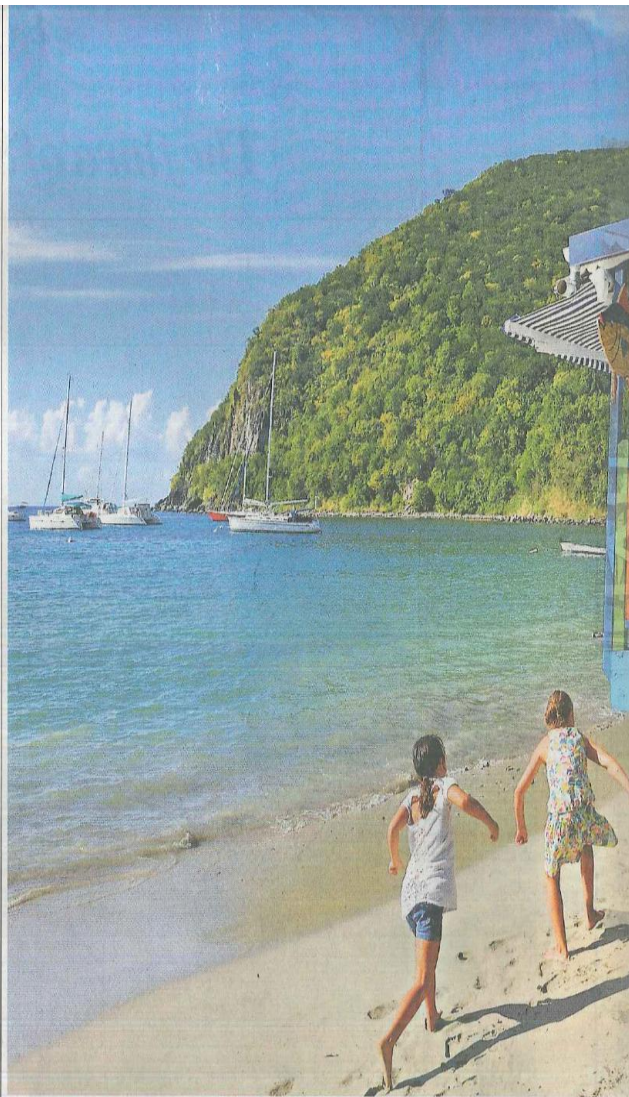
It turns out that Marshall has been to quite a few Caribbean islands, including St Lucia and Antigua. He visited Cayman and Bermuda as a boy, hitching a ride with his father, who flew for the RAF.

"I find that every island I go to is very different to the previous one," he told me. "St Maarten is like a Caribbean Magaluf, really, and I'm planning to visit Dominica and St Barts."

Does Marshall have a favourite Caribbean island?

"I'm looking forward to visiting Dominica," he said, "but really this part of Guadeloupe is my favourite – because of the volcano and the rainforest. There are hidden waterfalls with places to swim and my son loves the African drums sessions in Pointe-à-Pitre on Saturdays. There are fewer Brits and Americans here, and fewer high-end hotels – so there's a relative lack of tourism as well."

This corner of Basse-Terre does indeed have a lot to recommend it. It's an oddity in the Caribbean because it has good infrastructure



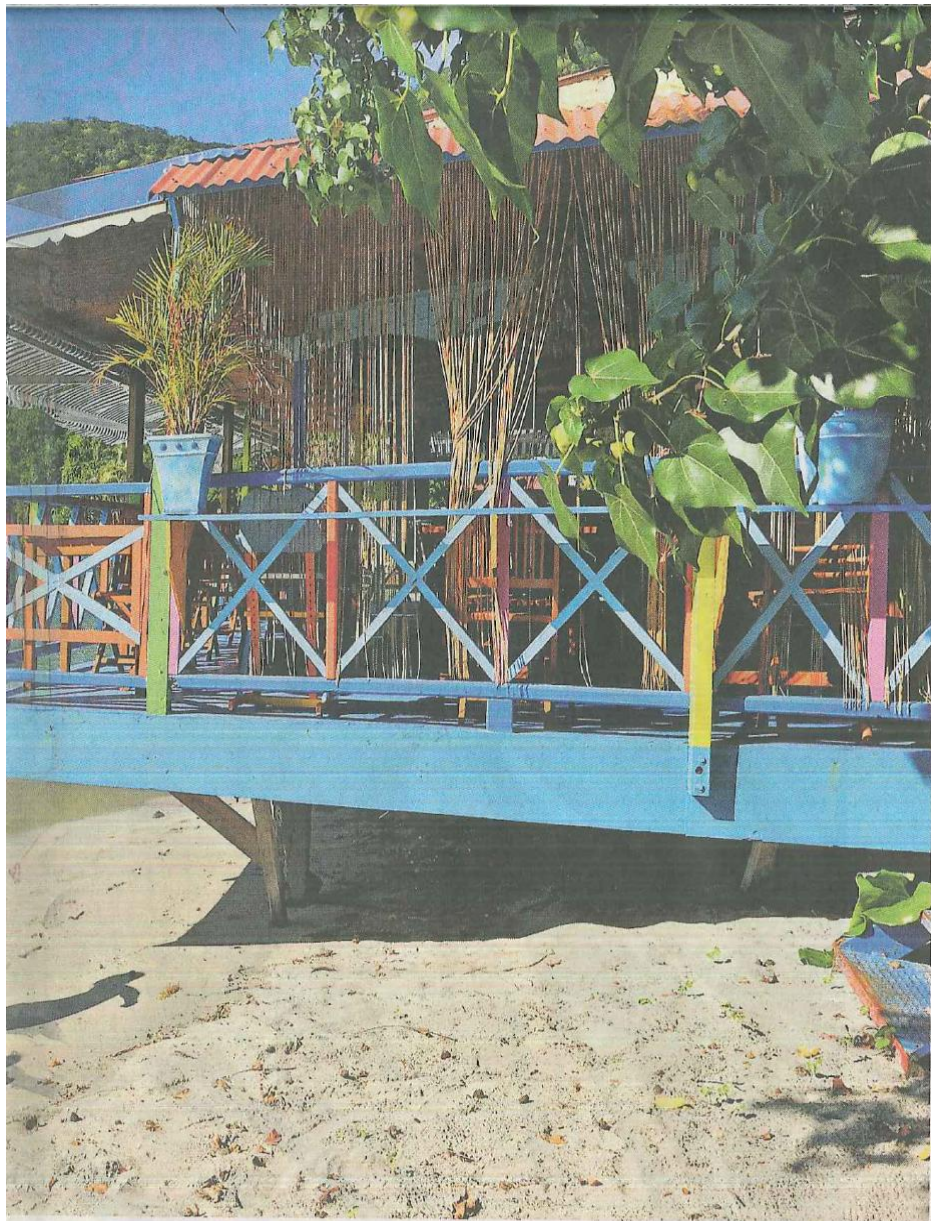
(technically part of France and the European Community, it is much more prosperous than other islands nearby), and yet its beaches remain relatively undeveloped. The Fort Royal Hotel, where I and many of the film crew stayed, is the only hotel of any size in the area. Most of the island's tourist hotels can be found near the white sand and turquoise sea of Grande-Terre – the island's flatter, coral-based eastern half.

Basse-Terre is toweringly, rampantly green and heart-stoppingly beautiful, with jungle that tumbles down the mountain into steep-sided coves of sugary orange sand. It is ideal for an independent traveller, and specialises in inns and gîtes, each with just a few rooms with kitchenettes (often without a dining room because there are so many places to eat out). Some are on the beach but others sit in rambling, rock-strewn gardens up on the hillsides.

When not shuffling between caravans to interview cast members,



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## Essentials

James Henderson travelled as a guest of the Islands of Guadeloupe ([visitguadeloupe.co.uk](http://visitguadeloupe.co.uk)) and Air France ([airfrance.co.uk](http://airfrance.co.uk)) and stayed at the Langley Fort Royal Hotel outside Deshaies ([fortroyal.eu/en](http://fortroyal.eu/en)). Onyx Travel (0118 947 2830; [onyxtravel.co.uk](http://onyxtravel.co.uk)) can offer seven nights at Habitation Grande Anse, room only in a studio with kitchenette, from £925 per person, based on two people sharing, including return flights from London via Paris to Guadeloupe on Air France plus transfers and seven days' car hire (delivery of car to accommodation also available at a supplement). Alternatively, split a stay between Grande-Terre and Basse-Terre with Western & Oriental (020 3588 6130; [westernoriental.com](http://westernoriental.com)), which offers seven nights from £1,428 per person (based on two sharing, including return flights, transfers and bed and breakfast) with four nights in a Comfort Room at Creole Beach Hotel and three nights in a Bungalow Garden View Room at Langley Fort Royal in Deshaies.

will-o-the-wisp), but it is there in all aspects of French Caribbean life – in the mixed French and African faces, in the food and even in philosophy (there was once a French Caribbean school of thought, *Négritude*).

I was at least able to pin down some logic in the restaurant *Ô z'épices* (from the French "*Aux Epices*", literally "At the Spices"). Its shed-like building was unprepossessing, but it had a lovely view over the sea horizon. I chose from a short blackboard menu and quickly an *amuse-bouche* arrived, a *rilette de marlin*, a rich fishy paste with a plantain chip and a tiny slice of star fruit.

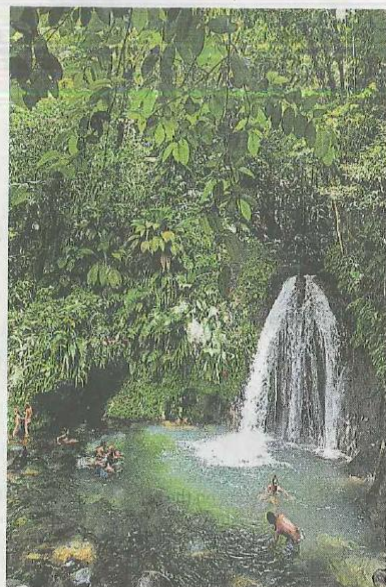
The culinary technique here is classical French, but then Guadeloupean chef Jimmy Bibrac uses Caribbean ingredients and spices, grown in his garden nearby, to create a "*cuisine gastronomique créole*". My lamb was served with a passion fruit sauce and a pumpkin purée, and I followed with a "*pêché mignon*" (a "little sin"), a rum-touched Chantilly with a confit of hibiscus petals. I finished up chatting to him, a glass of fruit-flavoured rum in hand, about Caribbean life, cuisine and everything. In a convoluted, quite French, way, we concluded that creole is something more than the sum of its visible parts.

Back on set, between sweltering takes, there was chat about the upcoming episodes – the series will start with a scuba-diving conundrum, and there is an episode based on the historical story of HMS Diamond

## You can see the pyroclastic flows running to the sea

Rock (in which the Royal Navy commissioned a rock off Martinique to deny the French maritime access). And the actors discussed their characters. Danny John Jules, who plays Officer Dwayne Myers, talked of how he and his junior officer JP Hooper (Tobi Bakare) muddle along to help the eccentric DI. And there was a lot of discussion of the wardrobe of undercover DI Florence Cassell (Josephine Jobert), particularly about her shorts. Will there be a flirtation? No, I was told, though apparently she will be helping Humphrey with his love life.

Eight mind-boggling murders each year (and only between the months of January and March, when the series is screened) must make St Marie statistically the most dangerous place in the world – which seems a little unlikely for a small and dozy Caribbean island. Still, rest assured, the devilishly clever DI Humphrey will manage to solve each mystery within the hour.



Girls playing on the beach near Deshaies in Basse-Terre, above; and the Cascade des Ecrevisses, left, a secluded spot in which to take a dip

The new series of *Death in Paradise* will air on BBC One at 9pm on Thursdays, starting on January 7 2016.

I headed out to explore the island, driving two or three thousand feet up on the mountain road, where lianas hang from massive ficus trees and 20ft ferns seemingly explode at the roadside.

A short walk into the close and sweaty forest took us to the Cascade des Ecrevisses, a waterfall crashing into a small pond. It was incredibly refreshing to take a dip. At the botanical gardens, among tangle-stemmed pandanus bushes and whole ranges of bougainvillea, emerald-throated hummingbirds flashed, momentarily engaging in a dogfight over territory, and then flitted away, wings whirring. Heliconia are bewildering. Their flowers are like plastic ornaments – scarlet lobster claws and glowing torches.

But the strongest impression of travelling in Guadeloupe is immersion in creole. As a language, creole is audibly French (though even for a French speaker the meaning is often elusive, evaporating like some Gallic

PH: GERALD B. BECKER; PLANET PICTURES; DENIS GUYENONG; GETTY IMAGES



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## TV choice



**Jericho:** Jessica Raine and Amy James-Kelly

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### **Death in Paradise** *BBC One, 9.00pm*

Back to the Caribbean for a fifth series of beach-based whodunits as DI Goodman (Kris Marshall) puzzles over who bumped off a millionaire environmentalist.  
*Chris Bennion*

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### **Jericho** *ITV, 9.00pm*

We travel back to the 1870s for a saga set around the building of a great railway viaduct across a pristine Yorkshire valley. Former *Call the Midwife* star Jessica Raine takes the lead as Annie, a demure widow and mother of two forced by eviction to seek shelter and work at the temporary village growing up around the vast construction site at Culverdale. Written by *Sherlock* regular Stephen Thompson and directed by *Cilla/Mrs Biggs's* Paul Whittington, this first episode (of eight) isn't as smart and sharp as you might expect. But what it lacks in subtlety it makes up for in action, and the backdrop is magnificent.  
*Gerard O'Donovan*