







# Life is SWEET

## Meet the entrepreneurs who are rejuvenating the Caribbean cocoa industry

In the 1920s it was common for **chocolatiers** to make their own chocolate from the **bean**, seeing the production process through from start to finish. However, over time the cocoa industry in the Caribbean was squeezed out by bananas and tourism. There are now a handful of entrepreneurs on the islands who want to change that. Diversification, added value, ethical trading, community involvement and low carbon emissions sit comfortably alongside their aspirations for quality and a luxury product.

**Sarah Cameron** investigates...



### LIVING THE DREAM THE TOBAGO COCOA ESTATE W.I. LTD

My mind drifted to that chocolate advert long ago,

'... and all because the lady loves...'; as I melted into the gaze of the tall, dark, handsome man who was talking to me so passionately about his own fine chocolate – chocolate with a taste profile of cherries and raisins, with a mild acidity and some tobacco notes. Chocolate worth getting passionate about.

This single estate chocolate has been the dream of Duane Dove since he acquired an old and redundant cocoa plantation on Tobago in 2004. After five years of careful planning and preparation, the first bar of chocolate went on sale at the end of 2009. It has been made with the collaboration of French chocolatier François Pralus, who specialises in small-batch artisan fine chocolate. Although manufactured abroad, it is the first single-estate chocolate made entirely from Tobago cocoa beans by a Tobagonian. Launched in the Caribbean in January 2010, it has been worth the wait.

Dove was born and brought up on Tobago but at age 17 he moved to Canada to study civil engineering. That was the plan, but after a year he gave it up, and after some part time work in a restaurant, changed tack to study hospitality. By chance he fell in with Swedish friends and when they went back to Sweden, he joined them where he trained to be a sommelier.

When his Swedish friends opened Sjögräs restaurant in Stockholm they also bought the building next door, which Dove opened in 2007 as *The Small Island Chocolates and Coffee* >>>



Shop ([www.smallislandchocolates.com](http://www.smallislandchocolates.com)), a funky, rootsy shak shak - a great place to find high quality chocolate while enjoying an espresso.

Meanwhile, Dove was also back on Tobago investing time, skills and money into his cocoa plantation venture, named the *Tobago Cocoa Estate W.I. Ltd.* Soil tests were carried out with the assistance of the Cocoa Research Unit at the University of the West Indies, while agronomists at the CENTENO government cocoa unit helped with preparation, spacing and planting know-how.

From day one Dove was also aware of the possibility of agri-tourism. His vision was to turn the estate into a tourist attraction to maximise returns on his investment. It has become a Heritage Park, with displays on the history of cocoa and its role in Tobago's development. Visitors are given hands-on experience of managing a chemical-free cocoa plantation, with information on planting companion crops, such as cassava and banana for temporary shade, all of which provide more income. Cassava bread is served on the tours, while bananas and cassava flour are sold to local groceries. A total of 30 acres is currently under production in the beautiful undulating rainforest overlooking the Atlantic coast of the island.

Dove has also built a traditional drying house using cedar sourced from Trinidad. Perfect cocoa beans are sun-dried on wooden floors, never touching any concrete or metal. This is crucial to the quality. Great attention has been paid to the detail of traditional methods so that visitors can see the full transition from cocoa pod through the drying and fermenting of the beans to the final product - a bar of fine chocolate with 70% cocoa. A sunset Creole dinner followed by rum and chocolate tasting sessions is a highlight of the tour ([www.rumchocolate.com](http://www.rumchocolate.com)).

The single estate chocolate is made in Europe, then re-imported so it is available for purchase along with T-shirts and souvenirs.

His success has not gone unnoticed. In April 2009 his work in 'encouraging the promotion of cocoa plantations as viable eco-tourism sites' was noted by the Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Marine Resources, the Hon. Arnold Piggott, at a cocoa conference, while in October Dove won the award for tree crops at the Entrepreneur of the Year Awards.

Asked what advice he could give to other entrepreneurs starting out, Dove was emphatic in stressing travel and exposure to foreign

markets. "We must utilise our own islands' raw materials, using something indigenous, but aiming for foreign markets. We must think big to get a brand out. The key is to work with the Tourism department to get a feel for the market. Find out about the consumer. Transparency and sustainability are vitally important."



### AGAINST ALL ODDS THE BELMONT ESTATE, GRENADA

Across the water from  
Tobago on Grenada,

cocoa growing and chocolate making have been taken a step further. Organic cocoa is grown and processed into luxury bars of dark chocolate, despite the sticky heat of the rainforest - with the added bonus of tourism.

Initially French, Belmont Estate was bought by Norbert and Lyris Nyack in 1944, the first Grenadians of Indian descent to own an estate on the island. It is still in the family, and today their great niece, Shadel Nyack Compton, is the Managing Director.

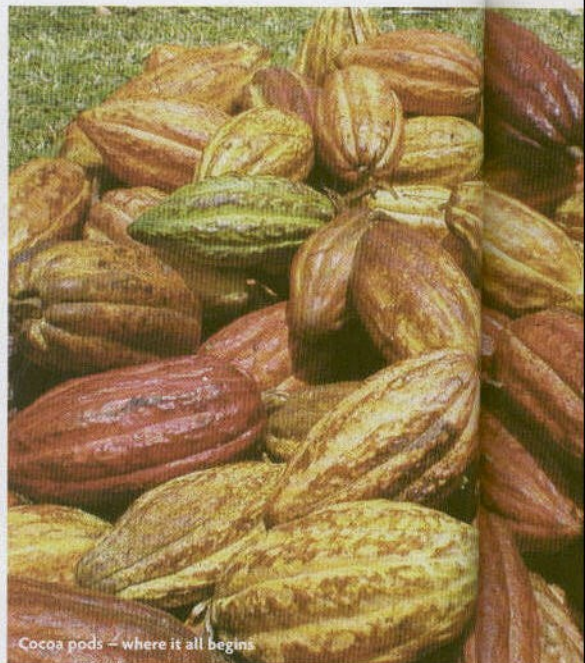
Nyack Compton is the driving force behind the estate's agritourism project, steering the business to profitability after the devastation of Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. Plantation tours, a museum and a restaurant were first offered in 2002 and were popular with Grenadians and foreigners alike. Organic

### Did you know?

**1 cocoa tree produces 50-60 pods and you need two to three cocoa pods, or 85 to 90 perfect beans to make one 100g bar of chocolate.**

cocoa was introduced and organic certification received in 2003. However, the hurricane damage to trees, cocoa drying facilities and other buildings meant that the Estate was closed for three years while restoration took place. 80% of the nutmeg trees were destroyed, while the cocoa, vegetables and fruit fields were extensively damaged.

Despite huge challenges, Nyack Compton and her staff persevered to reopen Belmont Estate to visitors in 2007, offering a traditional historic plantation at work with agriculture, food, historic and cultural traditions all on show. With significant investment of funds and labour, output of cocoa has risen from



Cocoa pods - where it all begins



Belmont View

7000 lbs in 2005 to around 60,000 lbs in 2009, from a stock of 19,000 organic trees, while planting of cocoa, nutmeg, bananas, fruit and vegetables is still expanding.

Visitors can enjoy numerous attractions, including a heritage museum, restaurant, cafe, craft market, gift shop, produce stall, conference facilities, and small-animal farm. As well as organic products, the estate follows the Slow Food ethos and takes its ethical conduct and corporate community responsibilities very seriously. This wonderful agritourism project benefits the whole community while maintaining historical and cultural traditions, and is well on its way to making a profit. >>





Traditional methods are employed throughout the cocoa growing and chocolate making process at the Belmont Estate  
IMAGES: STEVE SANDS





Collecting pods at  
the Belmont Estate.  
RIGHT: Farmers  
from The Grenada  
Chocolate Company  
BELOW RIGHT: Cocoa  
beans at Hotel Chocolat

### Did you know...?

Cocoa beans were used by the Amerindian peoples to make a strong, bitter tea far removed from our sweetened hot chocolate. In 1528, Hernán Cortés brought back the recipe for 'xocoatl' after his expedition to the Aztec empire, but it wasn't until someone later added sugar that it became a popular drink in the Spanish court.



GRENADA CHOCOLATE COMPANY



### SMALL BUT BEAUTIFUL THE GRENADA CHOCOLATE COMPANY

Organic cocoa grown in  
Grenada is the essential

ingredient for the chocolate produced by *The Grenada Chocolate Company*, founded in 1999 by a trio of like-minded men who wanted to revolutionise the cocoa bean-to-chocolate system. Mott Green and Doug Browne, both Americans, teamed up with their friend, Edmond Brown, a Grenadian. They wanted to make great chocolate, but they wanted it to be

STEVE SANDS





organic, locally-grown and produced by farmers paid a decent wage. They envisaged a company structured as a cooperative and a factory powered by solar energy. The cooperative-owned company now has ten member organic farms (including Belmont Estate) and a chocolate factory, owned and operated by the chocolate-makers and member farmers, all Grenadians, mostly from one village.

Sadly, Doug Browne has since died, but the other two are still following their dream. Mott Green is the face of the company, an eccentric 'honorary Grenadian' who has been visiting and living on the island since he was 15. Having dropped out as an engineering student, he left New York to live in a bamboo hut he built in the Grenadian rainforest on a steep mountainside, where he developed his ideas on cooperatives, chocolate and solar power. Agreeing that "you have to be mad to make chocolate in the tropics", he still lives in spartan conditions with a roll-up bed in the little room in the factory where staff leave their coats and belongings.

They are probably the only small-scale chocolate makers anywhere producing fine chocolate where the cocoa grows, and they believe that they are the smallest chocolate company in the world.

The size of the factory initially created problems however, because of the lack of suitable machinery available. This meant they had to refurbish antique equipment or design their own, based on what was used at the beginning of the 20th Century, before mass production became the norm.

As with Belmont, not long after they had found their feet and were selling out of their limited output of 1200 bars of chocolate a week, Hurricane Ivan blew them away. The factory, in a converted house in the tiny village of Hermitage, was badly damaged, but could be repaired much quicker than the cocoa trees on which they depended for the raw product, beans had to be temporarily sourced from Costa Rica. Incredibly, production is now up to 1000 bars a day and the quality of the chocolate has in fact improved, as evidenced by the mounting number of awards they have received.

There are now 150 acres of organic cocoa farms in the cooperative, growing beans which are fermented just one mile from the little factory where they are then processed into cocoa powder or the two varieties of exquisite dark organic chocolate: sweet and rich 60% cocoa or strong and bitter-sweet 71% cocoa.



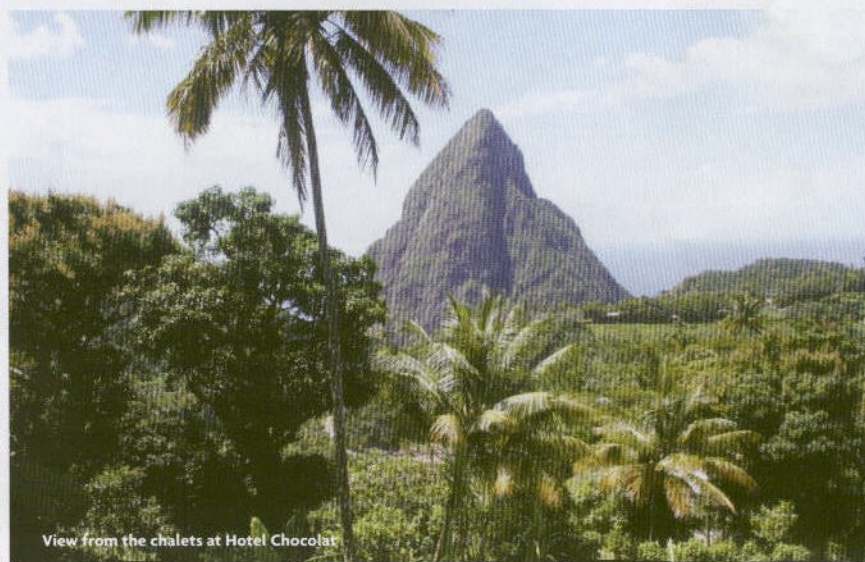
## SWEET DREAMS HOTEL CHOCOLAT

The quality of the cocoa and resulting fine chocolate coming out of the volcanic Caribbean islands has hit the taste buds of competitors and a trend is now evident. The gourmet *Hotel Chocolat* company in the UK has turned its attention to the Caribbean, where Angus Thirlwell (above), one of the co-founders, has family connections. In 2005 they bought the 140-acre Rabot Estate in sight of the Pitons on St Lucia.

Their aim is to do everything that Duane Dove, Mott Green and Shadel Nyack Compton are doing, and more. The old cocoa estate is being renovated, new cocoa trees are being planted and it is now organic. Following training under a joint government scheme, 73 local farmers are improving their trees and selling

them their chemical-free cocoa beans at above world prices. St Lucia single origin milk and dark chocolate is already being made and sold by Hotel Chocolat in Britain, but a new chocolate factory on the estate will ship the final product to the UK. This new factory, using solar power and rain-harvesting techniques, will be a tourist attraction, with viewing points of the process for visitors, who will be able to buy the finished bar on site. Local people will be trained and employed as chocolate makers, while sugar and milk will also be locally-sourced.

In phase three of the project, Hotel Chocolat will indeed become a hotel: a boutique eco-lodge overlooking lush, forested hills of the Rabot Estate so that chocoholics can immerse themselves in the bean-to-bar experience, with spa treatments such as cocoa nib exfoliation and cocoa butter moisturising massages and a menu drawing on the savoury heritage of cocoa, as well as amazing chocolate drinks and desserts. Please form an orderly queue... ●



View from the chalets at Hotel Chocolat

## See for yourself...

\* Tours of the **Tobago Cocoa Estate WI Ltd** are available 9am and 11am Monday-Friday, weekends by reservation. Culinary tours with a creole dinner and rum and chocolate tasting with Duane Dove are held December-May by reservation. For bookings, contact the Tobago Cocoa Estate WI Ltd, Cameron Canal Road, Argyll Waterfalls Road, Tobago, Tel: (868) 390-2021, [info@tobagococoa.com](mailto:info@tobagococoa.com). [www.tobagococoa.com](http://www.tobagococoa.com)

\* **Belmont Estate**, St Patrick's, Grenada, is open 8am-4pm daily except Saturdays and Christmas Day, Tel: (473) 442-9524, [www.belmontestate.net](http://www.belmontestate.net).

\* **The Grenada Chocolate Company Ltd.**, Hermitage, St Patrick's, Grenada, Tel: 473-442-0050, [www.grenadachocolate.com](http://www.grenadachocolate.com)

\* For updates on **Hotel Chocolat**, St Lucia, go to [www.hotelchocolat.co.uk](http://www.hotelchocolat.co.uk)