



If a princess invited you to her soirée, wouldn't you go?

I imagine the enthusiasm of Tatiana Copeland's resounding "yes!" when the notoriously charismatic and playful Princess Margaret, sister to Queen Elizabeth II, first invited her to the private island paradise of [Mustique](#) in the West Indies. Copeland is a jet-setting polyglot, philanthropist, and successful businesswoman with an impressive family lineage that includes the likes of Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff. Along with her equally well-connected husband, Gerret (a scion of the prominent DuPont family), Tatiana has returned many times to Mustique since that first royal invitation about four decades ago.

And with good reason: The remote island, with its overall ambiance of joie de vivre and laid-back elegance, continues to be the Copeland family antidote for stress.

"At first we rented other people's villas, and over time, we stayed at nearly every one on the island," Tatiana tells me as we sip libations by an infinity pool at Toucan Hill, a Moroccan-inspired villa she built and finished in 2004. She gestures to the nearly 360-degree, panoramic view of cobalt sea, just as the sun sets, a fat orange ball exploding into purple octopus arms across the sky. A satisfied look consumes her face. "Finally, we just had to build our own fantastical dream." Visitors can rent Toucan Hill, one of 100+ villas that comprise [Mustique Island & Villas](#), which itself is owned by the island's various homeowners.



The infinity pool at Toucan Villa in Mustique.

One of the Caribbean's best-kept secrets, 1,400-acre Mustique island has drawn glitterati for decades. Visitors once required an invitation from Princess Margaret, but the island still carefully curates its list of guests – only those of its two small hotels or Mustique Island & Villas' properties can enjoy a stay on Mustique. Even the retreat's airspace remains private.

Mustique is a deliberately unorthodox destination, both tranquil and social, clubby yet welcoming. There's no golf course, helicopter landing, casinos, night life, or cruise ship port. People drive around in golf carts (called mules), ride horses and bikes, or walk bumpy roads to its few restaurants and shops. Tortoises amble over lawns, tree frogs croon at night, dogs and goats gambol freely, while everybody waves a heartfelt greeting when you pass. For those seeking a sophisticated seclusion, Mustique – which is just about three miles long – is ideal, even during peak season, when flawless Macaroni Beach, the island's finest crescent of sand, feels like a personal secret.

At the same time, for those with a penchant to rub shoulders with magazine cover models, fashion designers, Grammy winners, or glamorous globetrotters, the

Tuesday night all-island cocktail party at [The Cotton House, Mustique](#) (one of the two tony hotels) ensures an opportunity to imbibe in the company of famous new friends.

Mustique was developed with the permission of Saint Vincent and Grenadines when Scotsman Colin Tennant bought it on hopes and dreams (plus the equivalent today of a million pounds) in 1958. At the time, it had no water, few inhabitants, and a plethora of feral cattle – not to mention an army of mosquitos.

But with a Don Quixote-esque clarity of purpose, Tennant vowed to build a kind of blue blood, Bohemian commune, a haven for fellow members of the haute monde to escape the dull reality of convention, a spot where desires and whims, both hedonistic and ordinary, could be realized. Tennant's tropical utopia took off once he gave Princess Margaret a plot of land as a wedding gift. She quickly hired the eccentric artist and stage designer Oliver Messel to develop her villa, called Les Jolies Eaux, and more homes by Messel followed. Then, a slew of idiosyncratic, lavish, opulent mansions in other styles went up, such as Tatiana Copeland's Toucan Hill.

Across the island, during the 1960's and 1970's (and beyond), the parties made headlines. Photos from the time hint at debauchery and scandal, experimentation and glee. This was a safe place that many of the island residents and homeowners craved. Still, many serenity-seeking guests came, too. Like visitors today, they sunbathed, built sandcastles, sipped rum punch, picnicked on the beach – and slept off a season of hard work. Both vacation styles attracted a clique-y, international coterie of legends.

Mustique's mood today is more tempered, yet still glamorous. Over dinner at Toucan Villa, as I marvel at yet another unique table setting (Tatiana has 36 complete sets in her cupboard), we sip a robust California red (turns out the Copelands also own Bouchaine Vineyards in Napa).

I question her about those bygone days. She smiles at me – conspiratorially – but stays silent. There's a twinkle in her eyes. "Things are a bit more boring now on Mustique," she says, the light falling just right, illuminating her hair and cheekbones. Like a sultana, clad in a chic caftan and ensconced among Toucan Hill's colorful kilims, gem-dotted art, Moorish arches, master bed sheathed in 18-karat gold, and the island's best views, Copeland inadvertently proves the opposite. Mustique couldn't be boring if it tried.

Travel Advisor Tip

“Mustique is perfect for travelers seeking an exclusive, villa getaway. Advisors can match their clients to specific villas to ensure that both the property and staff personality are the right fit. Cruising the island in private mules [golf carts] adds a sense of adventure for all ages. What’s more, the island is easy to reach, after a connecting flight in Saint Lucia.”

– *Laura Epstein, Virtuoso travel advisor, Atlanta*

When You Go

Mustique Island & Villas offers more than 100 unique, fully staffed villas. A few of our favorites:

Toucan Villa

Crowning the highest point on Mustique island, Tatiana Copeland’s mansion might be the setting for a scene from *Arabian Nights*. Full of her priceless curated finds, picked up in bazaars from India to London, her Moroccan-styled home makes the perfect party house for sophisticates or tony families. In blue and white hues that mirror the sea and sky, Toucan Hill (complete with an abundance of toucan figurines) has four bedrooms, expansive pools, and lush gardens, all invigorated by the startling vistas.

Les Jolies Eaux

Oliver Messel set the standard on Mustique and you can stay in Princess Margaret’s 1971 history maker, the villa that started it all. With two swimming pools and five bedrooms, the property occupies a private section on the southern tip of the island.

Hummingbird

Whipped cream-colored travertine tile embellishes this three-story wonder by Italian architect Paolo Piva, with sleek interiors by Dan Kleinberg. Encompassing eight acres on a hillside, the jaw-dropping home makes a statement. Larger groups can book the property’s guest house in addition to the six-bedroom main villa – both have pools.