

# Great Escapes: Mustique Casts an Enchanting Tropical Spell

By  
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Basil's Bar is the stuff of local legend as Mustique's party place, featuring live music since the days when Princess Margaret came here to kick up her heels. The Mustique Company

Just getting to Mustique, a private island in the West Indies, is a departure from the ordinary. You can take a commercial flight to St. Lucia or Barbados, but the final leg of your journey is on one of The Mustique Company's 18-seat planes, which lands on a single airstrip with a tiny airport flying flags from around the world.

As crew rolls luggage into the open-air arrivals area, you proceed to a single passport control window to have your entry approved, essentially a formality as arriving guests are pre-screened to keep paparazzi out.

While some changes have been inevitable since its mid-20th-century heyday, there's still a sense that the island exists in a nostalgic bubble, one created by large personalities with big dreams and even bigger bank accounts.

"Mustique is like no other island in the world," says Tatiana Copeland, a businesswoman and philanthropist from Wilmington, Del., who started visiting Mustique with her husband, Gerret Copeland, in the early 1980s. They rented villas for several years before building Toucan Hill, her fantastical vision of a Moroccan palace, atop the island's highest peak. She notes that while other islands have traffic and congestion, "people come here to escape that part of life.

Another thing that sets Mustique apart is its pristine natural beauty that has been preserved and protected from development. There are no high-capacity hotels or resorts, no shopping malls, not even a golf course. Island life is refreshingly simple—a beach picnic, a game of tennis at the club, house parties, and weekly cocktail gatherings at The Cotton House Hotel, the island's boutique resort, where guests can mingle with villa owners sipping Champagne and gin-and-tonics, while the kids enjoy movie night on the lawn.

The result is a clubby, romantic paradise for the privileged few—just as its founder, the late Lord Glenconner, Colin Tennant, envisioned when he purchased the island in 1958 for £45,000. The place had no roads, jetties, or running water, but Tennant had a vision.

In August, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge chose the island for a family vacation. High-profile villa owners include Mick Jagger, Bryan Adams, and Tommy Hilfiger, whose Palm Beach villa rents for US\$50,000 to US\$140,000 per week depending on the time of year. At the other end of the spectrum, the two-bedroom Moana goes for as low as US\$7,800 per week.

## STAY



The Residence at The Cotton House Hotel, the island's boutique resort. The Mustique Company.

The Cotton House is the island's only resort, a social hub offering 17 suites and cottages on the estate's 13 acres bordering Endeavor Bay.

In recent years, the Parisian architect Tristan Auer has refreshed the property in keeping with the island's whimsical, yet sophisticated, boho spirit. The boutique resort offers a Bamford Spa, a main swimming pool, a small beach, and a water sports center for snorkeling, diving excursions, and equipment rentals. Rates start at \$590 per night with breakfast.

Another option is The Villa Collection. The Mustique Company offers 75 of the island's 100 villas for rental, including Toucan Hill, a Moorish-style enclave with four en-suite bedrooms, an expansive infinity-edge pool, and 360-degree views from island's highest perch. Villas are fully staffed and include the use of "mules," open vehicles for getting around.

Perched on a hillside overlooking Britannia Bay, Firefly is an intimate boutique hotel with seven individually designed rooms starting from US\$495 with breakfast. The restaurant's Caribbean chefs bring a modern twist to local

dishes, and Patrick's Bar is a favorite hangout for sundowners and nightcaps with an extensive wine list and craft cocktails, including a signature, eye-opening, espresso martini.

## **EAT & DRINK**

The Cotton House is also home to the island's fine dining venue, the Verandah Restaurant, in addition to the Beach Café & Bar, a popular barefoot eating and drinking spot on the shore.

Basil's Bar is the stuff of local legend as the island's party place, featuring live music since the days when Princess Margaret came here to kick up her heels. In addition to the weekly Wednesday Jump Up dance nights and Sunday Sunset Jazz, Basil's hosts an annual Mustique Blues Festival. (The 2020 edition wrapped up on Feb. 5).

Founded by Basil Charles, the honorary mayor of Mustique, Basil's Bar was acquired in 2016 by The Mustique Company, which rebuilt it in similar style with finishing touches by designer Philippe Starck. Chef Luke Ferguson, a former Gordon Ramsay protégé, put together an eclectic menu highlighting fresh and tasty local fare as well as burgers and pizzas.

Meanwhile, The View offers authentic Caribbean specialties and barbecue combined with a great view that make this casual spot popular among locals and visitors alike.

## EXPERIENCE



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Plan a picnic on one of the island's pristine beaches; take a hike on a nature trail; climb to the top of Gun Hill; head for the water to swim, snorkel, dive, paddleboard, or surf; play tennis; take a horseback ride; stay in practice with group or private yoga classes; get a massage at The Cotton House's Bamford spa —or just relax with a good book.

*The writer was a guest of The Cotton House Hotel and Toucan Hill.*