

Columbia LIVING M a g a z i n e

Escape Plan

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Purchased by a London socialite in 1958, the island of Mustique has developed into a glamorous hideaway for jet-setters, royals, and celebrities.

By Katie McElveen



If months of social isolation have you plotting your summer breakout, consider Mustique, a tiny island paradise located about 70 miles south of St. Lucia.

Whether you're an escapist, a sun-seeker or someone who loves the idea of exploring a new tropical locale, Mustique ticks all the boxes: creamy beaches, perfect blue water, a smattering of just-right waterfront outposts for drinking and dining and a nearly nonexistent crime rate.

The island has a unique history, too. It was purchased in 1958 by Colin Tennant, a London socialite who spent the next 20 years transforming it from an anonymous spit of land into a glamorous hideaway for jet-setters, royals and celebrities. Britain's Princess Margaret was one of the island's first villa owners; before long, she was joined by Mick Jagger, David Bowie and, later Bryan Adams, Shania Twain and Tommy Hilfiger. Queen Elizabeth has made several visits, as have Prince William and Kate Middleton, both as a couple and, later, with their children in tow.

Although there are two small hotels on the island – the 17-room Cotton House and the seven-room Firefly – most visitors choose to stay in one of the 80 or so private villas that dot hillsides, bluffs and beaches.

These aren't your typical beach houses. Early landowners on Mustique were required to adhere to strict architectural guidelines that resulted in a number of remarkably distinct villas. Today, creativity continues with villas such the Japanese-styled Opium; Tuscan Hibiscus and gingerbread-clad Zinnia.

Then there's Toucan Hill, which presides over the island from the top of its highest peak. The all-white property is owned by Tatiana and Gerret Copeland, who discovered the site while stranded on the island in 1993. "The storm of the century was hitting the US so we couldn't leave the island," recalls Mrs. Copeland, who had been taking yearly trips to Mustique with her husband since the 1980's. "We'd just made the decision to purchase a home on Mustique, so we decided to use our time to explore the available properties. When we got to this one, I saw the view and fell in love with it."

Building the villa was filled with challenges, starting with the design: because of termites, concrete was to be used instead of wood. "As I was thinking about what one could possibly do with concrete, my mind turned to Alhambra, in Spain, and I realized I could build a fantasy that would take my guests away from their regular lives," says Mrs. Copeland.

It took ten years to complete and furnish the villa, a five-bedroom, 10,000-square foot Moroccan wonderland complete with ornate fountains, two infinity pools (one of which is an astounding 50 feet long), elegant arched loggias, acres of manicured gardens and a cloister that was inspired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The floor of the dining room pavilion, a circular, glass-walled aerie with views of the Caribbean Sea, is made of Brazilian marble tiles in a shade of blue that matches the sky. Throughout the ornate home, tables are topped with intricate mosaics of lapis, mother of pearl and malachite; Turkish tiles transform walls into works of art and Italian urns fill empty spaces. Each of the four bedrooms – five if you rent the optional master suite – opens to a terrace with a view of the ocean.



The villa is overseen by a full-time staff of seven who handle everything from housekeeping, cooking, gardening and bartending to driving, planning outings and making reservations. They fill your days with special touches, too, such as a table set with fine china, crystal, silver and pressed linens for every meal. You'll never see the same tablescape twice thanks to Mrs. Copeland's vast collection of more than 30 full sets of dishes and the creativity of Jamal, who plans each meal's décor. The team will also pack gourmet picnics for beach days or, if you really want to live it up, deliver a full-on luncheon complete with china and crystal, to one of the picnic shelters on the beach.

If you choose to leave the villa, you'll find the small island rife with activities. Beaches range from the calm Caribbean water that laps the island's west coast to the north's more rugged coastline; horseback riding (helmets and boots are provided), tennis and beach yoga are also popular. Take to the links on the Tom Fazio-designed course at the Grenadines Estate Golf Club – the daily rate for golfers from Mustique includes the 10-minute flight to neighboring Canouan, where the course is located. Spa treatments are available at the villa or at the Cotton House Hotel's tidy spa. Shopping is limited to two pastel-painted boutiques, the Pink House and the Purple House. Both specialize in island-style clothing for men, women and children; the Pink House is owned by Lottie Bunbury (and her husband, the island's doctor), whose Lottie B kaftans, sarongs and linen shirts are island staples.

Hiking can be dangerous on some islands, but not Mustique, which has perhaps the lowest crime rate in the Caribbean. And what a shame it would be to miss exploring the island's 22-mile network of hiking trails that lead through shady tropical forest, over rocky bluffs, along the sandy shoreline and through the island's bird sanctuary.

To keep the island's limited nightlife hopping, visitors and villa owners gather at the island's two most popular venues – Basil's Bar and the Cotton House Hotel – on an alternating schedule that covers Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday evenings and will almost ensure that you'll make new

friends on the island and, perhaps, join them at Patrick's Bar at the Firefly Resort for an after-dinner espresso martini.

Of course, you may choose not to leave the villa, where you can watch the sun rise and set, stroll through a vivid landscape, take in the view from the edge of the infinity pool and simply enjoy the serenity.

For more information, visit toucanhill.com or mustique-island.com