

Daily Mail

The mystique of Mustique: Yes it's chic and gorgeous, but you DON'T need a fortune to enjoy this Caribbean island

- **Mustique may be an exclusive, moneyed Caribbean honeypot, but it's low key**
- **There is no bling-bling on the island - and not even a dress-to-impress rule**
- **There are two hotels on Mustique and 104 houses - many celebrity-owned**

Suddenly, it clicks. You hear endlessly that Mustique is an exclusive, moneyed Caribbean honeypot with past and present royal connections —and then you come here and discover that everything you've been told is true. But with one crucial twist: it's remarkably low key. Cynics might argue that it's where the poseurs take a break from posing. Unfair. More the case that Mustique (three miles long and one mile wide) is such a wonderfully disarming island that it effortlessly shoots down egos and, like some sort of miracle drug, brings out the best in people. 'There is no bling bling,' says Jacques Brouchier, general manager of The Cotton House, one of only two hotels on the island, before adding sotto voce, 'which is why so few Russians come here.'



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Simple affair: Two charming beautifully painted shops on the isle. There is no bling-bling here

Actually, it would be interesting to see how the bling-bling brigade would cope. The absence of any dress-to-impress rule (even on the Tuesday cocktail party night) would grate and I suspect the general laissez-faire vibe would soon see them eyeing up ritzy St Barts instead. They might not appreciate the heritage, either. And what a heritage it is.

The wildly extravagant (but with exquisite taste) aristocrat, Colin Tennant — later Lord Glenconner — bought Mustique in 1958 for just shy of £45,000 and then gave Princess Margaret a ten-acre plot as a wedding present in 1960.

She built the only home she ever owned and furnished it with love, after which others did the exact same thing: Mick Jagger, Bryan Adams, David Bowie, Tommy Hilfiger, Felix Dennis et al.

The parties were notorious and the numbers swelled. It was said that Tennant wanted only beautiful people and that anyone wishing to buy land here in the Sixties had to send a photograph first for his approval.

This might be apocryphal, but what proved to be true was that he could not abide the vulgar.

When one potential investor said he had flown over the island in his helicopter and liked what he saw, Tennant told him to take his chopper and his architectural drawings elsewhere.

In the Eighties, many of the homeowners rebelled against Tennant's iron grip (and financial follies) to form the Mustique Company and he ended his days in exile on St Lucia. But the anti-vulgar ethos survives.

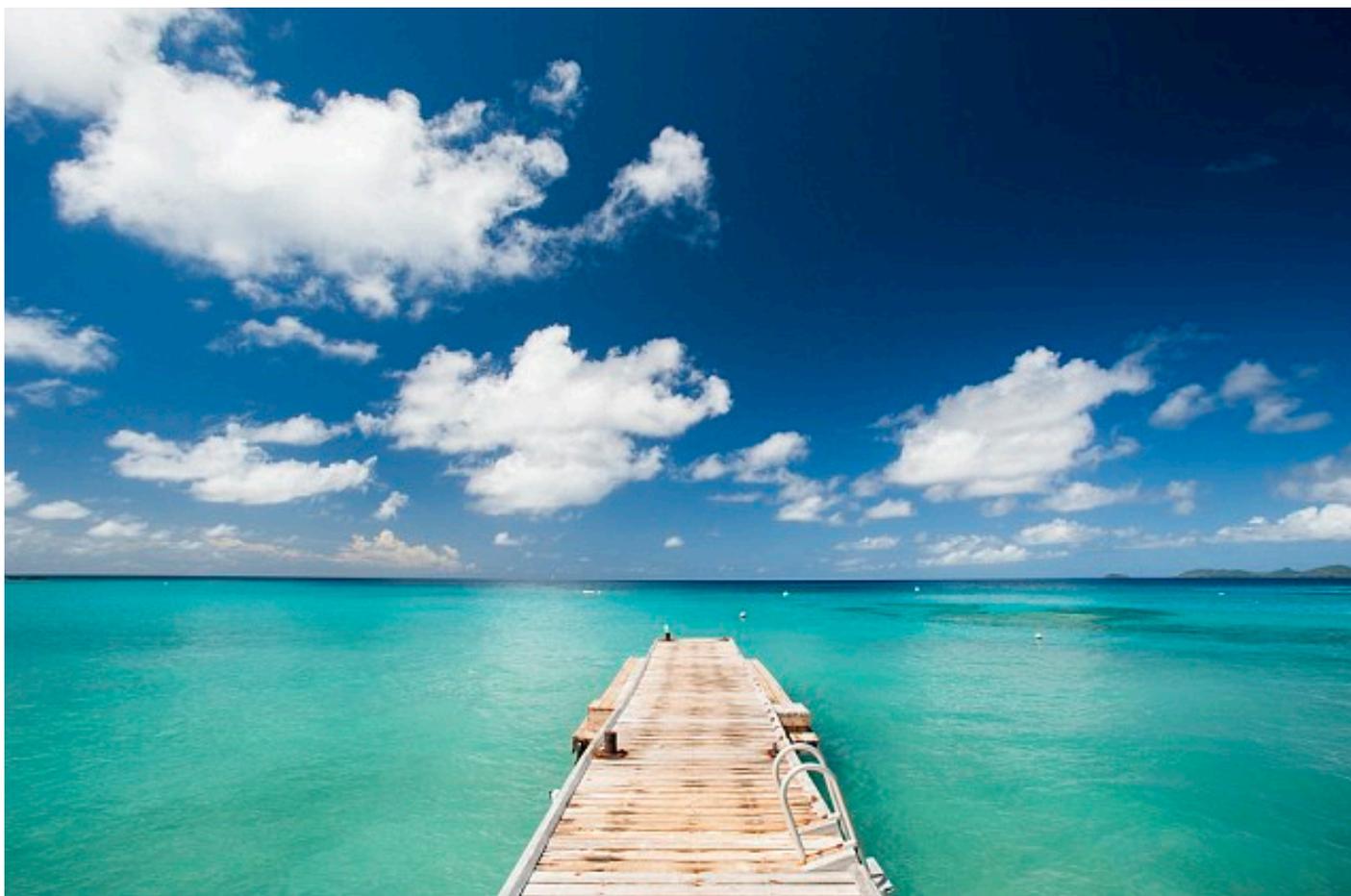
No one will countenance lengthening the landing strip for fear it will attract the private jet brigade; there are no electric gates or barbed wire; no armed security (although a former Scotland Yard chief superintendent and his team make sure there's zero crime).



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"Our room is a duplex with two balconies on the first floor, one of which looks across to the Oliver Messel-designed Great Room (pictured) and Verandah restaurant in the main building"



"You can pay more for far less on other Caribbean islands. We never locked our door or attempted to put anything in the safe"

No advertising hoardings, no golf course, no water skiing (too noisy) and heaven help anyone who tries to smuggle in a jet ski.

There are some 104 houses, of which many are rented out when the owners are not in residence, including Princess Margaret's Les Jolies Eaux (£25,840 a week in high season for five bedrooms). The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and the whole Middleton gang are regular villa renters, of course.

But paying that sort of money is not the only option. The Cotton House hotel has 17 charming rooms (some with plunge pools) scattered amid acres of beautiful gardens and a separate spa where I have the best massage ever. Ours is a duplex with two balconies on the first floor, one of which looks across to the Oliver Messel-designed Great Room and Verandah restaurant in the main building.

You can pay more for far less on other Caribbean islands. We never locked our door or attempted to put anything in the safe.

The closest thing to downtown Mustique is Britannia Bay (so named because the Queen visited in the Royal Yacht in 1966). There's a general store, two or three shops and famous Basil's Bar, where the Jump Up party night goes down a storm on Wednesdays.

On the way there (you get around on petrol-fired Mini Mokes called 'mules') we come across a church choir and full band on one side of the road, an enraptured congregation on the other. It would be rude to cross without stopping, and thank goodness we do come to a halt. The lead singer is sensational, taking gospel to a new level. My wife watches from our buggy, but I'm out feeling the love, praising the Lord and making something of a spectacle of myself.

A couple of days later, a member of staff at the Cotton House wants to show a short video on his mobile of a 'crazy man'. To my horror, it's of me dancing in the street.

The other hotel is Firefly, run by a delightful British couple, also above Britannia Bay. Rooms are built into the hillside with fabulous views. It's a favourite of society sisters, models Cara and Poppy Delevingne.

The Mustique beaches are Dr No's Ursula Andress-emerging-from-the-surf-in-her-white-bikini gorgeous. Pristine sand, immaculate, uncrowded.

Our favourite is Gelli-ceaux, where we swim almost every evening at sunset and never see another soul. Before leaving, we call in on Basil Charles, who ran Basil's Bar (which was recreated at the Goring Hotel before William and Kate's wedding) for decades and has just relinquished day-to-day control. He came here aged 24 and never left.

'People ask me where I'm from,' Basil tells me,' and I say: 'I don't know where heaven is, but I live just next door.'

Travel Facts: Plan your own dash to Mustique

Double rooms at The Cotton House (cottonhouse.net) from £245. Virgin Atlantic (virginatlantic.com, 0344 874 7747) flies from London to St Lucia from £520pp. Book The Cotton House and flights from St Lucia to Mustique (from £350pp return) via mustique-island.com or call 0044 207 201 6831. Meet and greet parking (maplemanorparking.net) at Gatwick for seven days from £50.99.

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