



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Mustique was barren before Lord Glenconner transformed it into a laidback Caribbean escape for the well-to-do; Villa Antilles; Basil's Bar is currently undergoing a refurb ahead of the 50th birthday celebrations; The Cotton House provides affordable accommodation; The Residence suite at The Cotton House offers complete seclusion and privacy; Cara Delevingne has holidayed on the idyllic island



No doubt you have heard of the private island of Mustique. Perhaps you know someone who knows someone who owns a villa there. Or you have admired the wild, seagrass knitted beaches in the Instagram feeds of Peter Dundas, Jade Jagger and Cara Delevingne. But unless you've been yourself, the chances are that you have quite the wrong impression of it. Private it is. Pretentious it is not.

When Colin Tennant, the late Lord Glenconner, bought the Caribbean island in 1958 for £45,000, he got little more than three square miles of mangroves and mosquitoes. His vision was of a barefoot paradise, where his wealthy friends – like Princess Margaret, to whom he gave one of the first plots – could party without the paparazzi killing their vibe. Now 50 years on, Mustique draws supermodels, rock gods and royals, hosts infinite cocktail parties and has a collective property value somewhere north of \$1bn. It's an absolute triumph.

Of course, the price tag – villas sell for upwards of \$6m and rent from \$9,000 per week – ensures that it remains desirably private. As does the tiny airstrip, with its manifest carefully vetted by The Mustique Company, the collective of villa owners who act as the governing body of the island.

And yet it somehow maintains an air of carefree

simplicity. You don't have to be beautiful, rich or famous. And once you're ushered under the thatch of the tiny airport, it doesn't really matter who you are. 'Even Kate [the Duchess of Cambridge] can go off for her morning run without her security detail,' explains Jeanette Cadet, social matriarch and longtime employee.

For all this exclusivity, there's a hotel, The Cotton House, where depending on the season, you can bag a room from \$200 per person a night. Not exactly exorbitant. Particularly given that The Mustique Company has recently bought it and it is in the final flings of a major refurbishment under the eagle eye of award-winning Parisian architect Tristan Auer of Chiltern Firehouse and Hotel de Crillon fame.

The suites are fresh and breezy, retaining Oliver Messel's theatrical use of tropical fabrics, but set against whitewashed furniture with plunge pools in 10 of the 15 rooms. It's an excellent example of what fractional ownership can achieve when the purse strings are well managed. What remains to be seen is whether the island's storied institution, Basil's Bar, which reopens this summer in time for the 50th anniversary celebrations, can defend its rustic charm against the tide



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of a \$6m refresh by (sigh) Philippe Starck.

With iconic kaftan-toting Basil Charles still at the helm, you can only hope that the modernisation hasn't killed its authenticity. Perhaps after one or two 'Hurricane David' cocktails, you won't notice the change.

There's an inevitable incongruence to the idea of a group of UHNW Brits trying to pull off a wild, no frills, desert island hideaway. While Mustique eschews flashiness and is genuinely as relaxing as a rum sour at midday, there's no doubt that business is discussed over conch fritters at the beach bar, and deals sealed across the nets of the tennis club.

But for the most part, Tennant's vision has been marvellously upheld. Everyone here takes the conservation of Mustique extremely seriously and more than half of the properties are still British owned with, so far, no emerging-market key holders.

Even Abramovich's generous offer (in excess of \$100m) to Canadian billionaire Lawrence Stroll for his property, The Great House, once Colin Tennant's island home, was rejected and he was duly pointed towards St Barth's with false apologies: 'Sorry, we don't have a deep dock' and 'We've no space for a private jet runway, thanks all the same'.

There are now 103 villas built and the remaining plots have been snapped up by current owners to preserve their privacy and views. Driving around in your mule, you won't see much beyond elaborate entrance gates and private property signs. It's from the water on a sunset jaunt on Lady Anne, the island's spanking new motorboat, that

you can marvel at the Moorish mansions, futuristic follies, pretentious pagodas and cubist cabanas that punctuate the forested hills.

Thankfully, preserving the remaining green space is a big focus for the company. The last plot was sold last year, and in its place is the subtly delivered villa Antilles. Owned, designed and built by Andrew Dunn of Finchatton, this is a bold beauty, designed with lateral family living in mind. Multi-gen families should look at contemporary colonial Fisher House, with its waterfall pool ideal for younger kids, cinema room and guest cottages for teens.

The views from Oliver Messel-inspired hilltop pad Obsidian (where Tom Ford chooses to spend Christmas) are ace, while the chic plantation-style villas designed by Arne Hasselqvist sum up old Mustique: Carissa is a fabulous example. If you want to really feel like part of the scene, then a villa stay is a must. As are Tuesday night cocktails at The Great Room – wear your one good frock and wangle an invitation to one of the many afterparties.

As with any private club there are some unwritten rules to abide by: couture is unwelcome, shoes unnecessary and children are free range. Crucially though, tortoises have right of way. ■

**Book it:** From £211 pp per night based on six sharing at Fisher House, room only, including four staff (mustique-island.com). From £206 pp per night at The Cotton House, based on two sharing a Cottage Room, B&B (cottonhouse.net)

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