

## *Greetings* from **MUSTIQUE**



**My trip to  
the royals'  
favourite  
holiday  
island**

**By Gavandra Hodge**



# Mustique? I'm with the Waleses

**William and Kate skipped the Baftas to go to the exclusive island loved by the rich and famous. Having been myself, I can see why, says Gavandra Hodge**

For some, the big news at Sunday evening's Baftas was not that Mikey Madison had pipped Demi Moore to the award for best actress, it was that the Prince of Wales, the president of Bafta, was not present.

Instead of being forced to sing along to the Proclaimers by David Tennant, he and the family had their espadrilles on, refreshing fruity cocktails in hand, and were staring out at the placid sunset waters of Mustique, the Caribbean hideaway made infamous by his great-aunt, Princess Margaret.

Colin Tennant, who would later become the 3rd Baron Glenconner, purchased the island in 1958. Initially he tried to farm the jungly land but soon gave up and decided to turn the place into an exclusive holiday paradise for his well-to-do chums. He encouraged them to buy plots of land, build their fancy villas and invest in the island's infrastructure.

His best idea was to give a four-acre plot to Princess Margaret as a wedding present in 1960 — Glenconner's wife, Anne, was one of Margaret's ladies-in-waiting. The princess completed her villa, Les Jolies Eaux, in 1973 and was a frequent visitor, often with her lover Roddy Llewellyn, spending her days bobbing in the lush turquoise waters of Gelleceaux Bay and her evenings holding court at Basils Bar.

The 6,000-acre private island is punctuated by numerous sheltered coves, inviting crescents of white sand which in the 17th century were used by marauding pirates, but by the 1960s and 1970s were hosting celebrities and various bohemian aristocrats.

Princess Margaret once claimed that Mustique was "the only place I can relax". There were no pressures, no paparazzi, just other wealthy and famous homeowners — Mick Jagger, David Bowie, various South American potentates — and their guests. Everyone knew everyone, parties were had, privacy was respected and a sort of sunburnt English gentility presided. Queen Elizabeth herself visited in 1966, while on a tour of the West Indies.

One of the things that makes Mustique so unusual is its ownership structure. In 1968 Tennant formed the Mustique Company to further develop the island — including the creation of the airport. In 1976 Hans Neumann led a consortium that bought a controlling share of the Mustique Company, and in 1987 Tennant sold his remaining shares to Neumann, who in 1988 created the organisation that still exists today — a private limited company with the homeowners as minority shareholders. Tennant retained a plot on the island until 1992, when he moved to St Lucia, and bought land there in the hope of



Sadie Frost, Kate Moss and Rosemary Ferguson last year

creating another Island community. Tennant died in 2010, leaving his St Lucia home and 95-acre estate to his valet, Kent Adonai. There is still a statue of Tennant on Mustique, recognisable with his cane and his wide-brimmed sun hat.

The place remains a home away from home for the royals, although Princess Margaret's son, David Linley, sold Les Jolies Eaux in 1999. Prince George celebrated his sixth birthday here in 2019, and Prince Harry, in his twenties, apparently wandered into the wrong house for a dinner party, but was nonetheless treated to nibbles and an aperitif, such is the vibe — laid-back while also being reassuringly exclusive.

This atmosphere still presides — just about. The place is certainly not as exclusive as it once was. They let me in, for a start (my dad once did Princess Diana's hair, but that's about as royal as I get). Anyone can hire one of the villas. Antilles, for instance, where the Waleses stayed in 2019, with its four bedrooms and heated infinity pool, can be yours for £33,000 for a week in high season.

We stayed in the 17-bedroom Cotton House hotel, which is £1,200 a night, although I was on a press trip. Still, there is something a bit special about the place. It's fancy while also being eccentric, like a mad posh granny. The island's airstrip can only accommodate small propeller planes, there are no ATMs and no traffic lights.

Most guests hop around the island in golf buggies and pretty much everyone you pass will say hello. Every Tuesday night there is an open evening at Cotton House, the central clubhouse that was Tennant's first building project in 1968, when he commissioned the theatre designer Oliver Messel to convert a cotton warehouse into a glamorous location for gin and tonics and backgammon.



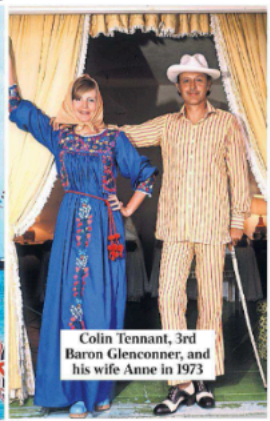
Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Margaret in 1977

The purpose of the open evening is for guests to see who else is in residence and plan social events accordingly. There were no celebrities visible when we were there, but apparently Tom Holland and Zendaya had been the week before, dutifully attending the Tuesday evening event, and possibly a little surprised by the scrum of upper-class English people milling about gossiping and getting drunk.

During the day the social hub is the Beach Café and bar in Endeavour Bay. No money ever changes hands, everything is signed for and settled at the end of the trip. The villas all have their own chefs, but owners still come to the Beach Café for lunch (prawn tempura, hamburgers, pizza). We saw Marie-France Demolis, the long-term partner of Felix Dennis, the publisher who remains a madcap spirit of the place, even though he died in 2014.

It's fun to walk around the island, patting the tortoises and peering into the grand houses, like those of Tommy Hilfiter and Lawrence Stroll.

There are no high-security fences here and no private beaches, so some low-level snooping can be done. Which is perhaps why Mick Jagger has built two rather forbidding stone "groins" (no pun) on either side of the portion of beach in front of his



Colin Tennant, 3rd Baron Glenconner, and his wife Anne in 1973

home. In theory these are to prevent further erosion of L'Ansecoy Bay, which is now so worn away it is barely walkable — even the beaches of billionaires are subject to the ravages of climate change.

Likewise great piles of stinky sargassum moss can pile up on the sands, snagged with plastic bottles. Turtles, however, once again paddle in these waters, since their hunting was banned in St Vincent and the Grenadines in 2017, and there is a programme of reintroducing coral to the denuded shallows, with guests encouraged to take part. A nice activity for the eco-minded Waleses.

The only real nightspot is Basils, a glorified seafront shack where bands perform and DJs play party tunes. On the night we went there was quite an odd mix. It was a bit like an uneasy transatlantic wedding. Posh middle-aged women, cheeks pink from a day of sunshine and champagne, were bobbing about to Sade on the dancefloor, entirely unselfconscious, barefooted and with hair unbrushed.

And then the Americans arrived. A group of about eight of them, immaculate in matching flowing white garments, like something from a D:Ream video. They surveyed the scene, the shoddy British orthodontics and the Boden leisurewear, the people just having fun and not really caring what they looked like, and they left.

Because, you see, these days there are far ritzier resorts than Mustique for the super-rich. But nonetheless it is a beautiful destination that has not been overdeveloped, with a compelling history of dressed-down decadence.

The Waleses have had an incredibly tough time and Mustique is a familiar feelgood escape when life has become a bit too much — I went just before I had to put my mum in a care home in South Croydon. And if someone gave me the option, a night at the Baftas or a week on Mustique, I would be on that propeller plane in a flash.



The Prince and Princess of Wales