

The Escapist

TRAVEL. WELLNESS. FITNESS



**THE HIPPEST
HYPNOTHERAPY
IN LONDON**
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Gold standard: a beach on Mustique. Left, one of the island's villas and riding horses in the sea

The paradise that loves to play it cool

HOLIDAYS

Luxury travel is booming more than ever, yet all the elite resort one-upmanship pales beside the legendary and stubbornly unchanged Mustique, says **Dylan Jones**

THERE is such a lot of noise around the luxury travel market that I wonder where it will all end. Every luxury resort regularly appears to go through some kind of inevitable reboot or upgrade, promising the kind of experiences that you are led to believe are fashioned from the very elixir of divine extravagance. At the top end of the market, consumer expectation has also never been higher, driven by a variety of reasons – a post-lockdown hysteria that has morphed into a kind of petulant travel entitlement; a post-White Lotus desire for destination bragging rights; and the basic (in both senses of the word) one-upmanship of social media.

Which all means that seven-star travel has become a bigger business than ever. St Bart's. St Tropez. Ibiza. The Hamptons. Palm Beach. Forte dei Marmi. You name it. Every resort and every resort hotel now promises the lifestyle experience of a lifetime, unashamedly



exploiting our relentless ambition to enjoy a bespoke life.

Or maybe that's just me. Either way, there is a lot of choice out there, and whether your penchant is for the latest Maldivian water villa hideaway, a Mediterranean super hotel, a floating nightclub or your own private island, there will be someone who can help relieve you of your stress, your social anxiety and your money (although not necessarily in that order).

Those who have made Mustique their choice of luxury getaway have long considered themselves to be above this kind of designer preening, and with good reason. The Caribbean island has become the gold standard of luxury retreats, a place that regularly hosts royalty and rock stars (the Prince and Princess of Wales

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stayed there this summer, for instance) and yet never brags about it. This is the place where you bump into the chief executives of entertainment behemoths playing beach volleyball, where you'll trade beers with household names from Hollywood, and where you'll find yourself at dinner sitting next to the writer of the book you've spent all day reading.

Mustique is that kind of place, a luxury paradise that doesn't encourage excess or ostentation. There are no designer shops, no dress codes, no clubs (apart from Basil's, which is the kind of place where local legislation means the bar band has to play Hot Hot Hot every 20 minutes... for 20 minutes), no opportunity to ponce around wearing watches that look like gem-encrusted lunar modules. And that's the way everyone



Mustique is the place where you bump into the CEOs of entertainment behemoths playing beach volleyball

likes it. The island is chic, quiet and reassuringly expensive. And rarely prone to change.

Although, ever so subtly, Mustique is changing. The good governors of the island never run when they can walk, but they are carefully, slowly upgrading the island and what it has to offer in predictably nuanced and sophisticated ways. There is a new path to the Gellicieux beach, making it easier to walk around barefoot. There is a new Pétanque piste, new menus at the Beach Cafe, and an increasing number of sporting activities and organised cocktail parties (if you book the right week you can even find yourself playing tennis with Tim Henman).

With perhaps an eye on the ever-fruitful US market, they are even building a state-of-the-art gym, something homeowners thought would never happen. A huge amount of thought has gone into the landscaping of the new building, the idea being that almost immediately the surrounding area looks "untouched". There is going to be a large natural pond with wildlife and nesting birds, as well as large windows to allow the outside in, and Lotty Bunbury fabrics used throughout. It will include a dedicated free weight and cardio area, a yoga studio for indoor classes and a physio/consultation/treatment room for more dedicated sports massage/body composition analysis.

Many regular visitors to the island think the gym is long overdue, especially as those same guests seem to spend most of their time trying to compete on the consumption of Whispering Angel.

The most talked-about villa on the island (there are only a hundred or so, most of which are available to rent — including Bryan Adams's and Tommy Hilfiger's, although not Sir Mick Jagger's) is The Terraces, a gigantic home that is being made available to rent for the first time (it's for sale, too, if you've got a spare \$200 million). It overlooks its own 17-acre plot with a floodlit tennis court, hand-painted Venetian-style fresco ceilings throughout, nine vast



A-Lister hideout: Tommy Hilfiger, Sir Mick Jagger and the Prince and Princess of Wales all holiday on the island

MUSTIQUE FACT BOX

- It packs in some serious real estate per acre, with over 100 private villas up for rent in just 5.7 square kilometers.

- Scottish aristocrat Lord Glenconner purchased the island in 1958 and is responsible for developing it into a private retreat for the rich and famous.

- Given its exclusive nature, the island can't be accessed by direct flights. So if you don't have a private jet, the only way to reach it is via an 18-seater Twin Otter aircraft — arranged through the island's travel concierge.

- In 1996, Noel Gallagher went on

holiday to the island and recorded what's become known as "the Mustique demos", 14 tracks which were finally released on the 2016 reissue of *Be Here Now*.

- Princess Margaret was given a 10-acre plot of land as a wedding present from Lord Glenconner. She built a villa called Les Jolies Eaux, which she described as "the only place I can relax".

- The late Queen and her husband, Prince Philip, also visited the island.

- As have the Prince and Princess of Wales, who often holiday there, and have reportedly stayed in a villa that cost £27,000 per week.

- Former prime minister Boris Johnson and his wife,

Carrie, are also among the elite who've holidayed in Mustique. A week-long stay in 2019 reportedly set them back £15,000.

- David Bowie built a sprawling hilltop estate named Britannia Bay on the island. He is said to have found it so relaxing that he struggled to write there. It's now called Mandalay Estate and is available to rent.

- Other A-list property owners include Bryan Adams, Tommy Hilfiger and Sir Mick Jagger.

- It is among the 32 islands that make up St Vincent and the Grenadines.

bedroom suites, a home cinema (obviously) and a staff of 18 as well as an entirely separate Miami-style entertainment building. The cost? Well, it's £150,000 per week, and for that you still have to buy your own Whispering Angel. It is beautiful though. Big, but beautiful.

Another new addition to the rental pool is Sundance, which is one of the island's best kept secrets. It is immaculate, designed in a slightly Long Island style and would be perfect for a large group with either six or 10 bedrooms available. It's also a little more reasonable, costing £32,000 per week.

The island became so popular during the stop-start lockdown period that not only did more people become aware of it (especially Americans, who suddenly realised it was a short jet-ride away) but it's also now almost as popular in the off-season as it once was at Christmas and Easter. Consequently it is busier than it's ever been, making it the perfect Caribbean destination all year round. Oh, and a tip: pack lightly. You'll never wear half the things you take, as this is an island of shorts and T-shirts. By all means take a couple of "Hi, I'm here!" shirts, but leave the ball gown at home.

● *One week at Tetto Rosso costs from £10,000 per week based on six sharing and including three staff. For further information and reservations please call The Mustique Company UK Office on +44 207 201 6831 or visit mustique-island.com*