

Telegraph

10 things you probably didn't know about Mustique, Boris Johnson's holiday island of choice



As Boris Johnson enjoys a holiday on this tiny isle in St Vincent and The Grenadines, here are some unexpected facts about the glamorous Caribbean getaway.

1. Mustique was bought without stepping ashore

The flamboyant Scottish aristocrat Colin Tennant purchased Mustique in 1958 for £45,000. As his biographer, Nicholas Courtney, recounts in *Lord of the Isle* (Bene Factum, £20), the 32-year-old adventurer sailed around the remote island but never landed. He then sent a cable to his father requesting permission to buy this semi-deserted speck of hills and beaches, which is only three miles by one-and-a-half and named for its ubiquitous mosquitoes. “Full agreement if plenty of water” came the reply. Needless to say, Mustique had no water supply beyond the rain that occasionally fell on its palm-dotted shores.



2. It's had a visitor from outer space

In 2015 a large chunk of an Ariane space rocket washed ashore on Pasture Bay. It's not the first unexpected arrival – in 1971 a French cruise ship, SS Antilles, ran aground in L'Ansecoy Bay off the island's north coast. Despite being a difficult dive that requires calm waters and a light current, a porthole, retrieved from the wreck by Princess Margaret's son, Lord Linley, now graces a bathroom window at her former home, Les Jolies Eaux.

3. There are two hotels

Most visitors, including our PM and his girlfriend Carrie Symonds, will stay in one of the island's 100-odd privately-owned villas. Many of these are available for rent, but there are also two boutique hotels, The Cotton House and Firefly Mustique, that are a good way to get a taste of the island. The first has 17 rooms and is close to a delightful beach, ideal for families and honeymooners. The latter, which has just seven rooms overlooking Britannia Bay was bought sight-unseen over 20 years ago by British co-owner Liz Clayton. As she describes it, “Firefly has a relaxed and friendly house-party atmosphere. It is not for the boring, the pretentious or the stuffy!”



The Cotton House

4. Say hello to giant copulating tortoises

The late publisher, poet and Mustique stalwart Felix Dennis is responsible for the sculpture of two enormous tortoises mating beside a road junction – a useful landmark for first-timers trying to find their way around the island. Made by the Lancashire-based artist Marjan Wouda, it is not out of place – Mustique has an abundance of small red-footed tortoises that bravely cross the road at a top speed of around 100 yards an hour. Not far away stands another striking artwork, a 13ft statue of the island's eccentric creator complete with his broad-brimmed hat, sunglasses, cane and trademark Indian tunic.

5. There are no road signs

Most owners and guests get around by 'mule', a heavy-duty golf cart that is now giving way to electric vehicles including Smart cars and the odd Hummer. The island's first motor was a self-assembly jeep shipped in from the luxury department store Neiman Marcus that took Tennant three days to put together – only to find the key was missing. In frustration, he kicked it so hard he broke his toe.

6. Feel the magic of Messel

Oliver Messel (1904-78) was a highly successful stage designer who found a second career in the Caribbean as an architect and interior designer, working in Barbados

and Mustique on homes that are now much admired for their graceful proportions, indoor-outdoor vistas and assured use of yellow and green. Today the Mustique Company, which was created in 1968 to develop and administer the island, offers ten 'Messel Masterpiece' villas for rent. One of the most appealing is six-bedroom Clonsilla, which dates from 1972 with weekly rates ranging from £24,200 in low season to £60,802 over Christmas and New Year.

7. Basil knows everything

Basil Charles, who grew up on St Vincent and started his eponymous bar here in 1976, was one of four islanders invited to the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton in 2011. Now in his seventies, his famous watering-hole was 'sympathetically rebuilt' by designer Philippe Starck in 2018 – you can see its location in Britannia Bay on a dedicated 'Basil Cam' that celebrity-spotters will find totally useless. There's a Jump-Up here every Wednesday night while the complimentary Tuesday night cocktail party held at The Cotton House attracts most of those on-island. But of course, all the best parties are held in the villas.



Basil's, Mustique's iconic wooden bar, is still packed with happy partygoers

8. Beach picnic sites have to be reserved

That's right, and they have names like secret passwords – Pasture 1, Macaroni 2, Lagoon 3½. Some are only for two to four guests, others take 16 or more. Your villa staff will prepare and serve everything from the lobster cocktail to champagne.

9. Princess Margaret liked Formica

In 1960 Tennant asked the recently engaged Princess Margaret and Anthony Armstrong-Jones (later Lord Snowdon) if they would prefer “something in a small box from Asprey, or a piece of Mustique” as a wedding present. Her Royal Highness chose wisely. In the early 1970s Oliver Messel designed her a house, Les Jolies Eaux, set at the southern end of the island. The property included a room to accommodate the Scotland Yard detectives who accompanied her, and was furnished in a simple and practical style, although her bedroom was painted vivid orange. As Tennant put it, “she filled it with things she had seen at the Ideal Home Show: there was an awful lot of Formica.” Today the property has different owners and a fabulous new look.



Princess Margaret and Tennant CREDIT: GETTY

10. It's a great place to walk

Everyone assumes Mustique is an exclusive private hideaway where the rich plot, party and hobnob, which of course it is, but a key reason for its enduring success is the island's natural beauty. Unlike other wealthy enclaves, such as Monaco and Macau, this one is healthy, relaxing and discreetly secure. There are 22 miles of walking trails, along with an equestrian centre, six tennis courts, a spa, watersports, boutiques, a fish market and a community library. There is also a sanctuary for retired horses and the surrounding waters are rich with turtles. The musician and long-term resident Bryan Adams has initiated a successful coral restoration project in Endeavour Bay, and the island's future as a posh paradise seems assured. Boris

Johnson will be very happy on Mustique – so don't be surprised if he's back there next year.