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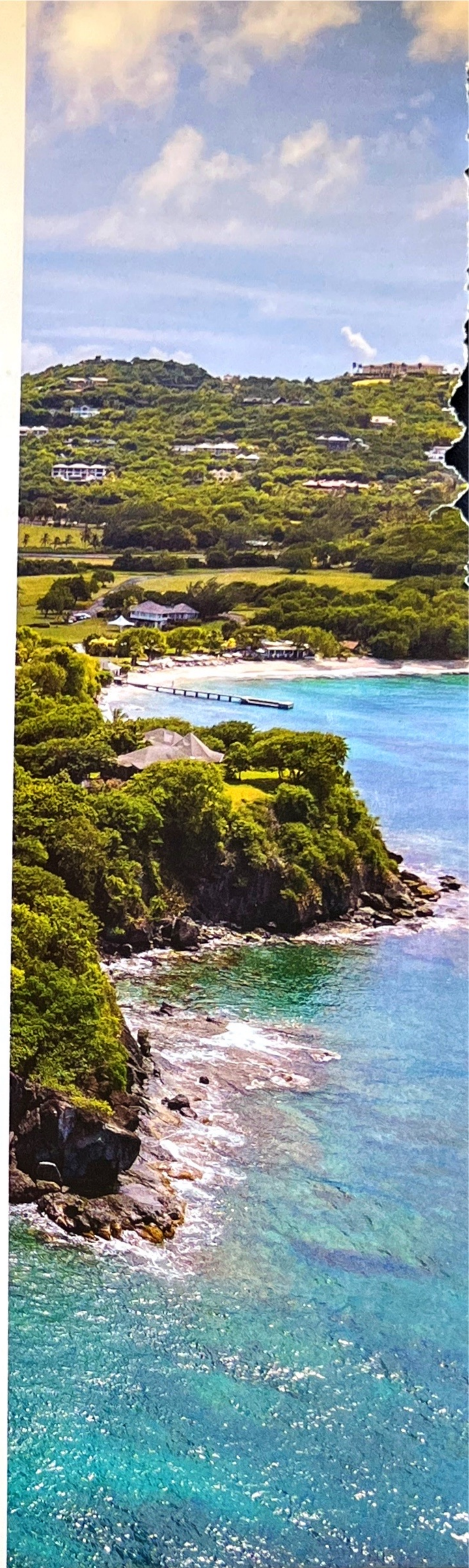
## The Mystique of Mustique

Is this the safest island in the Caribbean? Though most villa owners here could afford to buy their own atoll, the historic lure of its landscape and inhabitants is nothing short of magical—as is the security force.

BY DEBORAH FRANK

**W**ith this year's coronation of King Charles III, everything and anything British is front of mind, including the final season of Netflix's royal hit *The Crown*, set to air late fall. In seasons 3 and 4, Princess Margaret escaped to her holiday hot spot, Mustique, a three-mile-long Winward Island in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Filming, however, took place on the Canary Islands, as Mustique wanted to maintain the privacy of its residents and guests. A quick hopper flight from St. Lucia or Barbados, the secluded island vets all visitors and preapproves their arrival. Private jets or the island's exclusive charter service with its own fleet of 18-seater Twin Otter aircraft shuttle VIPs during daylight hours because the small runway at the iconic bamboo airport has no lights.

Mustique's director of security and aviation, Paul Hurley, runs the airline and secures every inch of the island and its perimeter with his 29-member staff of Vincentians, who are mostly former coast guard or police officers. "They all have a policing security background," says Hurley, who himself spent 33 years as head of homicide and organized crime in South Wales. "When I came in, I reshaped the department to meet the demands of the island and what was happening globally, from terrorism to serious organized crime. We have high-net-worth clients coming here, we've got to be able to respond on a tiny island to what could be a major incident." →





## The island's only inn, the Cotton House is the social center of the community with its main building acting more like a clubhouse than a boutique hotel.

The security aspect of Mustique dates back to Princess Margaret's time. She arrived here in the early '60s after receiving 10 acres as a wedding gift from Scotsman Colin Tennant (aka Lord Glenconner), who bought the island in 1958 to create the ultimate tropical vacation haven for a curated group of high-profile friends. Today, her much-beloved six-bedroom, Oliver Messel-designed home, called Les Jolies Eaux (meaning beautiful waters), is available for rent from \$25,000 to \$50,000 per week and comes with a butler, a chef, and two housekeepers.

Over the years, other celebs followed: David Bowie, Mick Jagger, Bryan Adams, and Tommy Hilfiger, whose villa, named Palm Beach, stands out like a massive estate from its eponymous city. Jagger, in fact, owns two villas on this 1,400-acre island. "He's part of the fabric of Mustique," says Hurley, "one of the godfathers, and a massive contributor to development of the island." Prince William and Kate Middleton vacation here regularly, and with security as tight as it is, it's a wonder Prince Harry and Meghan Markle didn't hole up here during their traumatic time with the paparazzi.

"From a security perspective," says Hurley, "the key factors are privacy, discretion, and safety. Those wanting privacy are not being elitist; it's just how we protect them from paparazzi and threats. We want to make sure that the people arriving here are coming for the right reasons, which is to enjoy the peace and tranquility of a beautiful island. Not to capture a photograph of a celebrity or a member of the royal family or somebody of

note." The important thing to remember, he says, is that Mustique is not an exclusive club; it's a private island owned by shareholders that is operated by the Mustique Company, established more than 50 years ago to govern the island and its development on behalf of those shareholders.

The island does have a relaxed, trouble-free vibe without feeling upper-crust and exclusionary. After a few days visiting, people treat one another like neighbors they've known for years, waving hello as they pass by in their electric Kawasaki mules. No one dares ask what one does for a living; that comes after perhaps four days of spending time together. The thinking is, if you are vacationing on this island, you can afford it. And with some villa rentals costing upward of \$60,000 a week during peak season, that's a fair assumption.

"We don't exclude anybody from coming here," says Hurley, "but we know who's coming and where they're coming from. We have advanced passenger information so we can check off why they're visiting and make sure they have accommodations. They have to be staying with a friend, or they must book a villa or a room in the Cotton House." The island's only inn, the Cotton House is the epitome of tropical shabby chic. It's the social center of the island with its main building acting more like a clubhouse than a boutique hotel (from \$730/night). Within walking distance to its beach and three restaurants are 17 suites and cottages with private verandas and plunge pools, plus a main swimming pool, gym, and four-room

spa offering treatments by British skincare-brand Bamford. The Residence, situated on its own hilltop, has two bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms and a private villa-like feel.

Activities abound, from varying levels of hiking trails with stunning views to horseback riding on the beach to fanciful picnic parties that are the talk of the island. In town on Britannia Bay is Basil's Bar, an open-air, Balinese-style restaurant designed by Philippe Starck that has become a community hangout since its founding in 1976. Boats anchor at its pier to unload guests for lunch and dinner, but only if they called ahead and paid the high mooring fees. "No matter how you get here," says Hurley, "there's always a security filter. Many people who own villas on Mustique first came here by boat. They arrived on a yacht, came to Basil's, and enjoyed the environment."

In February 2021, Hurley and his team got a new, high-tech security boat with all the latest bells and whistles. "We have a 1,000-yard fishing exclusion zone around the island to protect the coral reef," he says. "So, we not only patrol for people coming in, but for those abusing the environment." According to Hurley, this has led to a massive influx of turtles whereas in years gone by that wasn't the case. "We patrol the island by land, sea, and air," he says. "People return here because they know it's safe. You can leave a key in the mule or your iPhone in a car and it won't get stolen." Like a good British mystery, there's not another island like it in the Caribbean. [mustique-island.com](http://mustique-island.com) ♦