

PRIVATE ACCESS

Ultraexclusive Caribbean island Mustique offers guests the protected paradise they crave.

BY PHEBE WAHL

An elegantly captained woman slips down the ladder into the sea. “Hello, I’m Lady Anne Glenconner,” she says as we share a swim treading water in the crystal Caribbean Sea off the dock in Mustique’s (mustique-island.com) Endeavour Bay. At age 91, the former lady-in-waiting to Princess Margaret, bestselling author and wife of Mustique founder Sir Colin Tennant, is one of many local luminaries who frequent Mustique today. The moment captures the very spirit of the wonderfully wild island, a castaway soul lost in paradise—that just happens to have icons like Mick Jagger, Tommy Hilfiger, Bryan Adams and a rotating roster of royals as the regulars.

GETTING THERE

The Mustique Company has regularly scheduled charters to Mustique from St. Lucia and Barbados to connect with international flight schedules. Only 30 minutes from St. Lucia and 45 minutes from Barbados, the comfortable 18-seater Twin Otter aircraft provides guests with stunning views of the Grenadines archipelago.

WHERE TO STAY

The Cotton House: Winter (Jan. 4 to April 30) rates from \$950 per room; Villa rentals: One- to two-bedroom villas from \$5,000 per week, eight-bedroom villas from \$85,000 per week, mustique-island.com

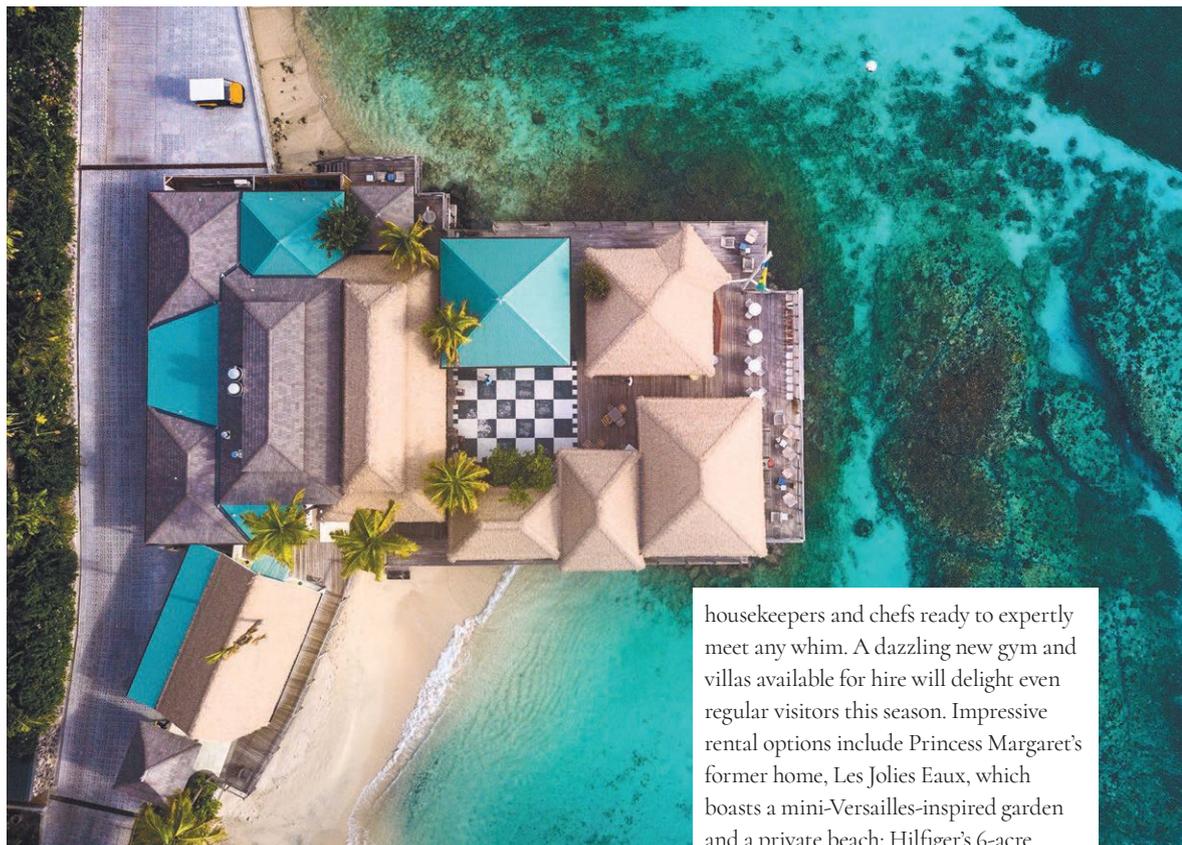
WHEN TO GO

The high season runs November to January and again during March and April. Rates are lower in spring and summer, but the island is just as popular in the summer months.

For the first time, guests can rent the 17-acre, nine-bedroom estate The Terraces in Mustique.

The word rarified applies to Mustique in every sense. The natural beauty is unspoiled and unparalleled. The perfectly appointed and expertly staffed private villas offer seven-star hotel service. Even getting to the island via the chartered propeller planes operated by the Mustique Company feels like a pre-screening. There are no jumbo jets here—the runway is too small (sorry, not sorry).

It is quickly apparent how the protected world of the exclusive island stands apart from its Caribbean neighbors. The Mustique Company has a hand in everything that happens on the tiny oasis, including screening passport numbers, as each guest arriving by air must be preapproved to keep out unsavory characters like the paparazzi. In fact, “the Company” owns and operates everything on the island—from the local airline to the charming bamboo-thatch hut of the airport to the staffed villas and hotel. The island, part of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, was purchased in 1958 by Colin Tennant (Lord Glenconner to you Anglophiles) for a mere £45,000. After unsuccessful attempts to develop it as a cotton plantation, Tennant gifted his friend Princess Margaret a plot in 1960—transforming the island into a playground for glitterati seeking to escape the limelight. As the rich and famous flocked to snatch up plots, the Mustique Company was formed, with the homeowners serving as shareholders. Notable architects like Arne Hasselqvist and Oliver Messel constructed an eclectic mélange of breezy mansions reflective of the equally eclectic group of socialites and stars who sought sanctuary from their hectic lives. Luminaries became



housekeepers and chefs ready to expertly meet any whim. A dazzling new gym and villas available for hire will delight even regular visitors this season. Impressive rental options include Princess Margaret’s former home, Les Jolies Eaux, which boasts a mini-Versailles-inspired garden and a private beach; Hilfiger’s 6-acre oceanfront Palm Beach and the adjacent six-bedroom La Palma; or the 10-bedroom Yemanjá, offering two pools and a waterfall. For the first time, guests can rent the 17-acre, 9-bedroom estate The Terraces (or snatch it up for a cool \$200 million). For those who wish to stay in a hotel, The Cotton House is a full-service property with a pool, a gift shop, two restaurants and a spa. The magical mystique of the island is immediately apparent. Charming golf carts quietly whisk us from the airport runway to our villa, where bags are unpacked and replenishing snacks and cocktails appear. Every inch of the island seems immaculately maintained, and the island’s expert staff anticipates every need.



From top: An aerial view of the island; Veranda Restaurant at The Cotton House; Colin Tennant, 3rd Baron Glenconner, and his wife, Anne, in Mustique in March 1973.

homeowners and invested in the island’s infrastructure, working hard to preserve the unspoiled natural beauty of the small, 3.5-square-mile paradise. Today, the assortment of dreamy homes is available for rent for nobles and notables who can afford the bill. Megawatt renters come for privacy—including billionaires, celebrities, and Prince William and Kate Middleton.

The Company’s stable of 87 rental villas come in various shapes and sizes to accommodate any party, and each is fully staffed with variations of butlers,

Beachside picnics and parties are part of the weekly routine, presented on a secluded shore as butlers wait in the shady palms to replenish plates. Local traditions still run strong today, ranging from the Jump Up dance parties and Sunset Sessions at Basil’s Bar to the annual Mustique Blues Festival to the New Year’s Eve blowout bash (if you are lucky enough to score an invite). And don’t miss the weekly cocktail parties at The Cotton House or a daily dip at the dock—as you never know who you might bump into. ◻