

VOGUE

TRAVEL

As Kate Moss Celebrates Her 50th Birthday on Mustique, Here's Why the Caribbean Island Is Having a Moment



We're now in the twilight era of Netflix's *The Crown*—the show's final six chapters dropped in mid-December—and whether or not you're a fan, there's an inarguable truth about the drama: its team cares immensely for detail. This attention is consistent series-wide, from car models used (*Princess Diana's* 1994 Audi A4 Cabriolet) to music played (*Torn* by Natalie Imbruglia in the late '90s!) to the styles of its decades (*Prince William*, in an oversize rugby shirt, during the *early aughts at St. Andrews*).

But I especially liked a geographic moment in *Princess Margaret's* sendoff episode, in which she's seen merrymaking in flowery hothouse pomp on the Caribbean island of Mustique. Things start to decline health-wise for our *fast-living Princess*, but nevertheless, Mustique-mode Margaret declares that she'd "like a picnic on the beach with the whole gang, cocktails at the Cotton Club, and dinner followed by general bacchanalia at Basil's."



Ever since Princess Margaret was gifted a plot of land on Mustique in 1959—by the community’s founder, the late Colin Tennant, an uncle of the late model Stella Tennant—royals both monarchic and of Hollywood (most recently, Kate Moss, who rang in her 50th birthday on the island according to multiple British outlets) have flocked to the island for its seclusion, eccentricity, and promise of hedonism. Mustique is a privately held place that’s technically part of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, but it sort of feels like it belongs nowhere because it’s so... well, unlike anywhere else. Think of it as a gated community sans any Stepford-ian vibes and without any pre-fab uniformity. In fact, it’s mostly even absent of gates: Mustique’s feeling is equal parts super exotic and eclectic and isolated, its owners are rich as hell, and its social exchanges are the stuff of legend.



Quickly back to *The Crown* mention: in the quote from Princess Margaret previously mentioned, the show’s screenwriters smartly named three key elements of socializing on the island. Decades later, picnics on the beach are still the daytime thing to do, The Cotton Club (in actuality The Cotton House—we assume the name change was intentional for clearance-related reasons) is the island’s sole hotel and a popular place to meet for dinner, and Basil’s, a bar, is indeed where bacchanalia has unfolded for nearly 50 years. Mustique has no golf courses, no resorts, no jet-accommodating airstrip (just props), and no real roads, even: the only other places to gather are at people’s villas, just over 100 of them, each more lavish than the next (more on these shortly).



With the sun high, those picnics can be seen popping up on any number of Mustique's sands. (Macaroni Beach is maybe the island's most famous, but I like the quieter shores of Gellicaux Bay.) These are not your typical blanket-on-the-ground, beers-in-an-Igloo picnics; they are often staffed, furnished, and feature freshly prepared Caribbean lobster and rosé flowing as reliably as the tides. Someone might even have cigarettes on hand for old time's sake. On the Cotton House's website, it's written that Mustique's picnics are so interwoven in the island's traditions that they are "notorious."



Even if copious amounts of wine have been consumed at the above, visitors to the island invariably end up at Basil's, where the party continues; especially on New Year's Eve, when the venue hosts an ostensible carnival, replete with fireworks, that goes until sunrise. Yet it's buzzing most of the time, often thanks to the live music on offer—and, per their own website, Basil's has become a “cult spot” for people like Bon Jovi, Bryan Adams, and Mick Jagger (the Rolling Stones frontman owns property on the island).

Ultimately, though, it's at the villas where most of Mustique's mixing-and-mingling transpires. Each villa has a name, and many of them can be rented (this is what we're guessing Moss and her party are doing). Most are quite large, and house parties are a de facto way of life. There's no other way to describe what you see: Mustique's home game is *crazy*.



There's Toucan Hill, an airy Moorish architecture-influenced compound on one of the island's peaks. There's the \$200 million The Terraces, which is gaudy but breathtaking. There's the grand, sea-abutting pile called Palm Beach, which is owned by Tommy Hilfiger. There's Obsidian, a classic, daresay understated house said to be favored by Tom Ford. There's the striking all-bamboo Beach House, said to be favored by Daphne Guinness. There's Princess Margaret's Les Jolies Eaux, designed by the famed Oliver Messel, still standing today.



And there's my favorite, [Hummingbird](#), a travertine mega-home dreamed up by the architect Paolo Piva for a family with a supermarket fortune, with views so pretty and big and impossible that they make your heart race. (Also, its angles are so sharp that you start to think: I better not have *too* much champagne or I might slip and end up with a Harry Potter-esque scar on my forehead.)



Yet, the glamour of all belies the fact that, in a weird way, Mustique is also relatively low-key. And that's what makes it so desirable. Yes, it's glitzy, and yes, it's starry, but it's not stiff and gawker-y in the way that St. Barts, another glitzy and starry Caribbean locale, can be. In Mustique, paparazzi aren't really a worry, there's no dress code, and you'll often get invited to villas of people you've never met (and that, still, you may never meet even if you do attend, so open are the doors). Sure, it's lost a bit of its roguish nature, but it's still strangely delightful—and still a place where Adams and Jagger might be seen, on the floor of the town hall, trying to fix a broken speaker (this actually happened). As Margaret also says in *The Crown*, it's a place for the rich and famous to be perhaps just a little bit more of the former and a little bit less of the latter—a place where people in the spotlight and in rarefied tax brackets can be “in full flow.”

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