

THE TIMES

TRAVEL

An extravagant hill-top paradise on a welcoming island, popular with celebrities and royalty alike, is truly the stuff of dreams, writes Gavandra Hodge.



One of the pools at The Terraces, Mustique

Mustique is the kind of place where fantasies are transformed into reality — a bit like the novel *The Hearing Trumpet* by the surrealist artist Leonora Carrington, in which a community of old ladies live in houses that look like birthday cakes and igloos or whatever it is they fancy. On Mustique, the small community of homeowners, including Mick Jagger, Tommy Hilfiger and the hedge-fund titan Peter Lynch, have unleashed their imaginations to create Balinese temples, retro sci-fi lairs and Renaissance palazzi beside the tranquil white sand bays.

Some of these villas are available to rent, some are not. One of the most extraordinary, the Terraces, which is set upon the island's highest peak, lording it over all the other properties, has rarely been accessible. But now it is — to rent or, if you really like the place, to buy — so you too can be king or queen of an island already bustling with bona fide royals.

Mary Wells Lawrence was an ad-land supremo in New York during its *Mad Men* heyday, coming up with the “I Love New York” logo (with the help of Milton Glaser). Her husband, Harding Lawrence, was vice-president of Continental Airlines. It was they who conceived the Terraces, lopping off the top of a mountain for their marble-colonnaded reverie, a sort of Getty Villa meets the Hamptons. They filled it with original Roman and Greek sculptures, Pre-Raphaelite art, Renaissance furnishings, Murano chandeliers, and many, many terraces for breezy evening cocktails while surveying their empire.

All of this is still in situ, making it feel like the Lawrences have just left, even though Mary sold the property after Harding died in the early Noughties. Its subsequent owner, Malcolm Healey, a fitted-kitchen magnate from the north of England, had a different aesthetic. He added a 12,000 sq ft shiny white box that he filled with all sorts of swanky toys, ping-pong tables and billiards, a bar and a sunken chill-out area. It is, by all accounts, the largest playroom in Mustique.



One of several reception rooms, which feature Pre-Raphaelite art and Murano chandeliers

Two owners means two fantasies and it is rather discombobulating moving between the spaces via a long corridor that looks like it might be taking you to a spa (there is no spa). What gives the place coherence is the staff, of whom there are about 20, including the chef, Caitlin, who has been at the Terraces for 38 years. She was sent to France and Italy by the Lawrences for training and is able to produce anything her guests desire (on the day we visited she was cooking an incredible chicken curry).

The property has nine bedrooms — one with the most extravagant pink marble bathtub I've seen — tennis courts and its own chapel, built for Mary's meditations and featuring some extraordinary murals that merge Catholic themes with more New Age vibes. It would be a great location for a wedding. "There has never really been a proper party here," laments Roger Pritchard, the managing director of the Mustique Company, while sipping a glass of Taittinger under a vine-draped loggia beside one of the pools.

The earliest accounts of visitors to Mustique describe an island of extraordinarily lush vegetation with a dense and tall forest. It has been tamed by successive waves of interventions, the final and most significant that of Lord Glenconner, who purchased Mustique in 1958. At first, he sought to farm the island, but then decided to make it the ultimate luxury commune, inviting friends to take plots and build homes. The most famous of these friends was Princess Margaret, whose house, Les Jolies Eaux, overlooks the prettiest of the beaches, Gelliceaux Bay, a perfect white sand oval with gentle turquoise seas, accessed via a cliff-hugging stone walkway busy with crabs and splashed by occasional swells.

The exclusive atmosphere of Mustique's early period still pervades. Back then, everyone either knew everyone or was about to meet them at a dinner party, and it still feels a bit like that, even though there is now a 17-room hotel, the Cotton House. Everyone waves and says hello, whether you are walking past or driving in one of the electric buggies that bounce along the narrow roads (there are cars, but not many). It all makes the island, which is about two square miles in size and can be reached by boat or 18-seat Twin Otter aircraft from St Lucia, feel incredibly welcoming and incredibly safe. The famous bacchanals of the Princess Margaret era, rum-fuelled fancy dress parties, still rumble on — and not only in the private villas. Fantastic nights are to be had dancing to soca bands at Basil's Bar, drinking spicy margaritas and eating lobster fritters.

But there are other ways to spend one's days in Mustique, including wonderful hikes that reveal yet another side to the island. One day we walked the entire periphery, moving from idyllic Caribbean beaches to wild Atlantic ones. We ended up on a volcanic promontory where multiple cairns were testament to those who had walked before us — although we saw no one for most of the day, only lizards and tortoises and a sea view so vast that we could see the curvature of the Earth. On walks like this, one also feels a sense of the effect of environmental change, through the many washed-up plastic bottle tops, the clumps of sargassum moss that reappear as quickly

as they are cleared, and the erosion of the beaches. The famous L'Ansecoy Bay has pretty much disappeared over the past five years. Mick Jagger has maintained his section with large stone groynes, and Peter Lynch is giving millions to try to help to save it, but the problems are numerous and varied, including the dying of the seagrass.

The development of the island is partly to blame, but there are global factors too, which are harder to tackle. Still, Mustique's new environment officer, Vincent Kneefel, is trying. There is a coral growth programme, where visitors can transplant tiny corals on to the reefs to try to restore what has been lost. Furthermore, a ban on turtle hunting has resulted in an increased population, and one of the most exhilarating activities here is to strap on a snorkel and swim around Britannia Bay, where the underwater life is even more colourful and exuberant than the crowd gathered around the beach bar.

The Terraces costs from £150,000 a week for the nine-bedroom main villa, an additional guest cottage and staff (mustique-island.com)