

THE HIGH LOW

MUSTIQUE, ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES



WORDS PHOEBE HUNT
IMAGES THE MUSTIQUE COMPANY

It may lure rock stars and royalty to its sun-drenched shores, but the tiny Caribbean island of Mustique is all about low-key glamour. Feast on West Indies-inspired seafood at the Veranda, or come barefoot from the beach to the legendary Basil's Bar for tequila and tacos

Mustique isn't your regular private island. The tropical idyll was bought by late British peer and socialite Lord Glenconner in the 50s, and a sort of aristocratic commune was established over the decades to follow. The hundred or so homeowners of Mustique – a number which has included Princess Margaret, David Bowie and Mick Jagger – each own a slice. They vote on local rules, decide who can build houses where and veto the development of things like golf courses or luxury hotels.

The status quo here is understated and off-duty. Entrepreneurs mingle with retired rockstars. Supermodels, finance gurus, artists and royalty, all relaxing into the gentle rhythm of the week: a cocktail party at the Great Room on Tuesdays, to which all guests are invited; Jump Up at Basil's Bar on a Wednesday; Backgammon at the Veranda on a Thursday.

There's a delightful lethargy in the way Mustique hasn't allowed big brands to take over the restaurant scene. "All too often destination hotels around the world fly in a big-name chef to produce a menu that could be served anywhere," explains Emilie Polastron, General Manager of Cotton House, the only hotel on the island. "On Mustique, however, word spreads that today's catch has landed and then the island's chefs start to work their magic."



Whether you're enjoying refined small plates or a laid-back beach bar, the vibe on Mustique is always glamorous but never pretentious. You can rock up wearing Gucci if you like, but don't you dare let anyone know about it. Here are two local highlights that are equally different and special.

THE SHOWSTOPPER: THE VERANDA

For an evening of fine dining, book an ocean-facing table at the Veranda, set within the Cotton House hotel. The food is inspired by flavours of the West Indies and cooked using traditional methods, such as spice rubs and marinades, smoked and grilled over an open flame.

The Veranda, wrapped around the Great Room, was championing hyper-local before it was a thing – its menu incorporates the freshest island produce imaginable. "If a food mile is the precise distance your ingredients have travelled before arriving on your plate, then line-caught local tuna landing at the end of the Cotton House jetty becoming surf-fresh sashimi 50 metres away is surely a winning combination," says Head Chef Neil Ramsay who runs the hotel's kitchens both at the Veranda and its Beach Café.





“Sometimes the seasonality of our ingredients can be a challenge,” admits Polastron. “But who needs caviar when you can choose mouth-watering smoked chicken, jerk shrimp or kingfish sashimi made with local ingredients and a lot of love?”

Micro greens from the island’s permaculture garden, mangoes, bananas and pineapples from small farms in nearby St Vincent, mahi mahi fresh from the neighbouring island of Bequia and lobster caught in local waters are some of the raw ingredients Mustiquan chefs are lucky enough to work with. From the regularly changing menu, sharing dishes including squash and coconut arancini with banana ketchup and tiradito sashimi are perennial highlights. Over the open fire, the catch of the day is served either with smoked butter or tamarind and coconut, while spiny lobster tail, bavette steak and BBQ chicken tikka are also options. Don’t skimp on dessert: the key lime pie is somewhat legendary among islanders, while a Calypso coffee is a wonderful end to a meal.

mustique-island.com/dining/the-veranda#the-veranda

THE INSIDER SPOT: BASIL’S BAR

For nearly 50 years, Basil’s Bar has been where the real Mustique mojo happens. Jutting out over Britannia Bay on wooden stilts, the bar is synonymous with rock stars

and royalty partying away from prying eyes and paparazzi. Basil’s was given a full refurb in 2016, with French architect Philippe Starck preserving all the Treasure Island DNA in the new design. He added a water-level walkway surrounding the entire bar for watching colourful fish flash past; it’s especially enchanting at night when it’s all lit up.

There are strong green credentials running through Basil’s Bar, too; paying attention to waste and resources is paramount on such a tiny island. Environmentally-friendly practices such as composting, solar-panel-heated water, use of eco cleaning products and recycling programmes are all in place across Mustique: excess cooking oil is even used as fuel on the island’s organic farm.

The refurbishment also meant gleaming new open-plan kitchens, where Head Chef Luke Ferguson and his team prep out loaded nachos, crispy jerk wings and signature burgers to the sound of gently lapping waves. On Thursdays, taco and tequila nights bring in a fun crowd, which invariably descends into a long evening. On Wednesdays, meanwhile, the weekly ‘Jump Up’ gathering is an island tradition. From the neighbouring islands of St Vincent, band Splash and local DJ Static get the party started... and keep it going long into the night. As Ferguson aptly puts it, “I don’t think there is anywhere quite like it in the world.”

basilsbar.com

