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AMONG THE PALM TREES AND CARIBBEAN SEA, ELISABETH VON THURN UND TAXIS DISCOVERS THE MYSTIQUE OF MUSTIQUE.

Mustique is a speck of a Caribbean island with a large reputation. There are few cars there (mainly golf carts), few restaurants (we counted two), a pair of hotels, a rather rustic bar called Basil's—and, of course, an abundance of quite illustrious villas. The stories I'd heard made the place sound almost intimidatingly cool: full of rock stars (Mick Jagger, David Bowie, Bryan Adams) and eccentric lords and ladies (Lord Lichfield, Princess Margaret). My mother told me my father took her there shortly after they got married, and she remembered two things: the beauty of the landscape and a lot of wild parties at the houses of very drunk, very posh Brits.

Notoriety arrived in Mustique with Colin Tennant, one such Brit, who my mother says was an “absolute gentleman and wonderful host.” He fell in love with the place, decided to buy the island in 1958, and built himself a sort of fantastical home where one party followed the next. He gifted a plot of land to Princess Margaret, who sailed the Caribbean on her honeymoon. Fast-forward several decades, and I delightedly accepted an invitation to Villa Zinnia, house of the late Prince Rupert Loewenstein, a great friend of my parents', grand seigneur, and former manager of the Rolling Stones.

My best friend, Olympia Scarry, and I spent our days walking along the beach, taking long swims—even a few cheeky skinny-dips—in complete solitude. We looked at nature's almost fluorescent colors and had to pinch ourselves to make sure we were not dreaming. My mornings were devoted to scuba diving with the fabulous and buff Brian, who, with a gold hoop in each ear, looked exactly like Mr. T (his words). He took me to a shark cave one day and all along beautiful coral reefs teeming with fish every other.

The Mustique I found was not the decadent island of the seventies—but admittedly I was quite relieved. Who doesn't enjoy a bit of peace and quiet in paradise? On my evening hikes I'd typically encounter red-footed tortoises shuffling along the road. Twice we saw a manicou, a long-nosed, cute little furry thing, hopping along ahead of us. My walks ended in pitch darkness—there are no street lamps.

Of course, the place does feel wildly exclusive too. The grand (and sometimes questionable) taste of some of the villas is proof of that. An Italian-inspired palazzo towers somewhat forlornly on the island's highest point. Another looks like its owners mistook the island for a Moroccan medina. My favorite villa had every comfort imaginable, and was made mostly from bamboo. Surreally, for the very lazy they installed a cable car bringing you down to the water in seconds. In the words of a local: “People come to Mustique to build their dreams.” And yes, I definitely can see why. □

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LIFE'S A BEACH
OLYMPIA SCARRY ENJOYING SOME TIME OUT OF THE SUN IN WHAT PASSES FOR DOWNTOWN MUSTIQUE.

