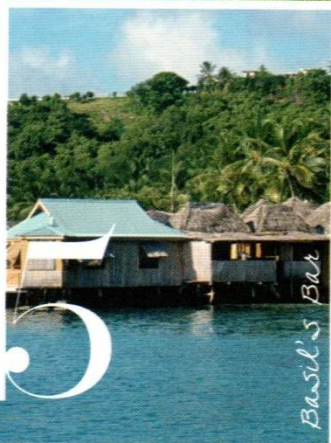
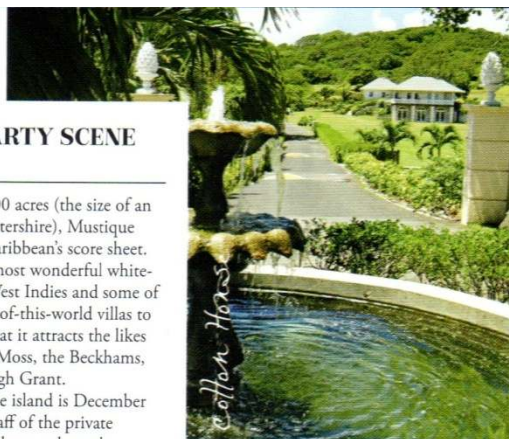


## TRAVEL

### BEST FOR A PARTY SCENE *Mustique*

With an area of just 1,400 acres (the size of an average estate in Gloucestershire), Mustique is but a quaver on the Caribbean's score sheet. Nevertheless, it has the most wonderful white-powder beaches in the West Indies and some of the most fantastical, out-of-this-world villas to rent, so it's no wonder that it attracts the likes of such A-listers as Kate Moss, the Beckhams, Tommy Hilfiger and Hugh Grant.

The busiest time for the island is December and January, when the staff of the private villas, who rent out their homes through the Mustique Company, throw open their louvered shutters and fold up the dust sheets in preparation for long weeks of parties, bridge nights and beach picnics. There's an atmosphere of a continuous party, with sundowners at Basil's Bar and get-togethers on the famous but still uncrowded Macaroni Beach. With such a small number of villas on the island, there's plenty of elbow room – and potential villa owners are vetted, so it remains a place where guests can feel comfortably and exclusively secluded. The only hotel on the island is Cotton House, a former 18th-century sugar plantation hidden amid the lush interior, looking out over the manicured and tranquil landscape, where even phone lines and power cables are buried, and unpaved paths make for minimal traffic.



### BEST FOR AQUATIC WILDLIFE *Vamizi, Mozambique*

Vamizi – a conservation project paid for partly by tourism – is challenging North Island (the Seychelles retreat where the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge spent their honeymoon) as the chicest eco-retreat in the Indian Ocean. It's all about good seafood, great diving and vast, white beaches. The villas are seriously stylish – and spaced so far apart you won't notice other guests – with beds swathed in vast clouds of netting decorated with Swahili artefacts. In other words, it's perfect for honeymooners.

New this year is the Tusitiri dhow, a chartered boat brought in from Lamu in Kenya, which enables access to many pristine dive sites in the area. Whales, dolphins and turtles are drawn to the coral reef, which is part of the Quirimbas National Park, a marine wilderness whose only downside is that it's a multi-hop challenge to reach.



### BEST FOR ALL-ROUND EXPERIENCE *Cocoa Island, Maldives*

The runaway success of tourism in the Maldives over the last 10 years is down to that perfect combination of private islands, improved access (with numerous direct flights from Europe, the Middle East and Asia), spectacular diving, reliable weather and the softest, whitest sand imaginable. Every five-star hotel company is now riding the wave, but only one – Cocoa Island – gets it absolutely right. On an island as small as this, you have to be entirely sure about three things: service, food and spa.

The food is super-fresh, drawing on the riches of the Indian Ocean (the lobster curry is more than memorable). Not only does Madhur Jaffrey rave about the cuisine at Cocoa Island; even exacting Italians, who will send back pasta

made more than an hour before, are among the resort's most loyal guests.

The spa, created by Cocoa's owner, fashion tycoon Christina Ong, is as chic as the woman herself. Ayurveda, yoga and Como Shambhala Purify facials are all on offer, to be enjoyed in breeze-filled pavilions beneath the palms.

As for the rooms, each is an overwater bungalow styled after one of the local *dhoni* (Maldivian fishing boats), with interiors that are contemporary – white voile and mezzanine-style bedrooms with double-height sitting rooms – rather than flash-in-the-pan trendy. This is another reason why the place is so beloved by the Milanese: for all the hot new hotels opening up and down the archipelago, sometimes understated style is the most enduring – especially with quiet, attentive service that you don't notice when you're there, but pine for when you're gone. ►