

PERFECTLY PRIVATE

Petit St. Vincent in the Lower Grenadines gives visitors a healthy, lo-fi dose of old-school island charm. By Doug Wallace

For those searching for off-the-grid relaxation, the beguiling island of Petit St. Vincent (PSV) offers peaceful, phone-free indulgence in spades. Tranquil, timeless, romantic and rustic, this beach resort is a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World and offers 115 acres of private space for me time, which, with today's constant barrage of technology, is becoming increasingly difficult to find.

Opened in 1968, PSV takes you back to the simpler days of the Caribbean, to a time before chain hotels and swim-up bars, when getting back to nature was the only order of the day. Since then, PSV has changed hands only once. The first owners kept it for 40 years, during which this then-still-hidden gem remained relatively unchanged. The resort's second — and current — owners took over in 2011 with the intention to renovate much of what was on the island. But after spending

a few weeks experiencing the rustic, almost camp-like atmosphere, they decided to keep the resort as it is, with just a few restorations and upgrades. Now celebrating its 50th anniversary and a member of National Geographic Society's collection of boutique hotels focused on sustainability and excellence — Unique Lodges of the World — Petit St. Vincent maintains its charming original vibe. Guests can anticipate traditional rum punches, secluded beach alcoves and contemporary varnished-teak furnishings, as well as indulging guests with all the requisite creature comforts.

Before you book, commit to the idea of unplugging and be ready to leave your work at home. There are no TVs, with only a few phones on-site and minimal Wi-Fi available, all of which suit the resort's typically well-travelled but sensibly low-maintenance guests just fine.

You'll soon forget the lure of the laptop as

you settle into one of 22 cottages (your choice of one- or two-bedroom), each with breathtaking ocean views, and some situated mere steps from the shoreline. All feature locally quarried stone walls, exposed-wood ceilings and wooden shutters. Echoing the resort's retro vibe, the décor urges you to slip into the mode of less harried times — low-slung furniture, white canvas drapery, lamps with driftwood bases and large round shades, and wood-and-leather director's chairs. Numerous sliding glass doors frame stunning vistas, offering a seamless transition from indoors to out. Each patio is kitted out with loungers, a tree-hung hammock and an alfresco dining area. Order in breakfast and the little yellow-bellied bananaquit birds will come and keep you company in exchange for a few crumbs.

In keeping with its old-school sensibilities, the island continues to use a signature flag system for room service — a quirk still in place after >

Pristine secluded beaches are the order of the day at Petit St. Vincent — an ideal getaway for visitors seeking privacy. Photo: Mike Toy



ABOVE: Fresh seafood is front and centre at the Pavilion restaurant. BELOW: The resort's staff are solicitous but mindful of your privacy. OPPOSITE PAGE (from top): The lines are blurred between indoors and out to showcase the beach setting to advantage. Premium snorkelling and diving amenities abound at Petit St. Vincent. All photos: Mike Toy



50 years. To order lunch or a bottle of wine, you fill out a little card, roll it up, slip it into a wooden tube by your cottage gate and raise the attached yellow flag. Roving butlers driving Mini Mokes, the island's powder-blue utility vehicles, cruise by every 15 minutes or so to collect and carry out your request. Don't wish to be disturbed? Just raise the red flag instead.

Head to the Pavilion — the resort's main restaurant, surrounded by multilevel wooden terraces overlooking frangipani and hibiscus trees in bloom — for exquisitely prepared seafood dishes and island-grown fruits and vegetables. Or opt for something more casual — candlelit dinner at the Beach Restaurant, nestled right on the sand and adjacent to Goatie's Bar at the water's edge. And don't miss the wine cellar, housed in what used to be a water tank. It holds 4,500 bottles, including a discriminative collection of Champagne.

When you tire of the lounge chair and book, participate in a yoga session, play a few games of tennis or engage a personal trainer to take you through the island's outdoor fitness circuit, comprised of 20 calisthenics stations scattered along a shaded trail near the beach. A 20-minute hike up Marni Hill will net you picture-perfect panoramas of the island and the surrounding Grenadines. You can even join the staff soccer team when the players practise for the local inter-island tournaments. And once you've worked up a sweat, reward yourself with a deep-tissue massage at the Hillside Spa, which offers Balinese body treatments and a wide range of aesthetics services.

To make the most of the glorious Caribbean coastline, water is the focal point here for activity and adventure. PSV doesn't even bother with a swimming pool. Instead, you can slip into the sun-warmed surf or listen to the waves as you lounge on great swathes of white-sand beach. Avail yourself of the resort's wind-surfing, kayaking, paddleboarding and sailing amenities. Plus, there are plenty of great spots for snorkelling, particularly on the Atlantic side of the island, where the reef is more extensive. Charter a boat and take a spin around the nearby islands — PSV's wooden sailboat, *Beauty*, routinely travels the hour-and-a-half journey to Tobago Cays Marine Park, a cluster of five little islands where you can snorkel the reef and swim with sea turtles.

The five-star Jean-Michel Cousteau Dive Center, which opened at PSV in 2014, is a main draw for serious underwater explorers. Its team of pros can take you to your choice of 20 dive sites, home to incredible coral formations and plenty of ocean life, including manta rays wafting past, giant lobsters and crabs, prehistoric-looking scorpion fish and sleepy reef sharks. You might even catch a glimpse of the elusive eel or spot a school of squid drifting by in tidy rows.



Soon, you'll find yourself at PSV floating along, too — in the shallow waters and on the winding pathways on land, right through the carefree afternoons — ensconced in the moment and free of digital distractions. Expect to be so smitten by this magical getaway that you'll probably be planning your next visit before you even say goodbye.

WHEN YOU GO

Guests typically fly first to Barbados with either Air Canada or WestJet, then take a puddle-jumper flight to Union Island, followed by a 20-minute boat ride to PSV's main pier. Note that peak season is from December to April, so if you visit in May, June, July and November, you'll encounter fewer co-travellers and more attractive rates. And no need to fret about hurricane season, as the resort is located outside the hurricane belt — another factor in its favour. Room rates start at \$1,395 per night (based on double occupancy), including meals. □

