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# *Life & Arts Sunday*

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## ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

# Paradise unplugged



MATTHEW SEAMARK

Aerial view of Petit St. Vincent private island

## Petit St. Vincent private island is the antidote to post-election stress

BY DEBBRA DUNNING  
BROUILLETTE

Special to the Star-Telegram

## ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

It was Election Day in the U.S., but the sea turtles swimming near an anchorage in the Tobago Cays didn't seem to notice. We bobbed like corks above them, watching them through our masks, slowly finning through the crystal-clear water as a line of cushion sea stars inched across the white sand bottom.

On the way to the turtle-watching reserve, we passed palm-lined Petit Tabac, a film location for the desert island scene in the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie. It is one of three islets and five uninhabited islands protected since 1998 as a marine park.

Back aboard the Beauty, the Petit St. Vincent resort's 49-foot sloop used for sail and snorkel outings, we feasted on grilled Caribbean lobster and fresh-caught tuna steaks, prepared by our skipper Jeff Stevens, a self-described old salt who has spent most of his life at sea.

First mate Simba lowered the sails on the return, because the wind, which had been with us earlier in the day, diminished to near dead calm. As we slowly motored back to our private island retreat, prolonging our time on the water, we witnessed a sunset spectacular even by Jeff's standards. "This one was a 10-plus," he said, "and worthy of all those photos you've been taking."

Three days earlier, my husband and I arrived on Petit St. Vincent — shortened to PSV by those in the know — a remote outpost in the southern Caribbean, near the end of the Grenadines chain of 32 islands and cays stretching from St. Vincent in the north to Grenada in the south. The three flights and 25-minute boat ride it took to get to this private island resort were worth it, for the chance to (almost) totally unplug, not only from the media madness leading up to our national election, but from our reliance on technology in general.

Upon our arrival in Barbados, several hours late due to a delayed flight in Miami, we were met by a representative of the resort who quickly ushered us through customs and security to catch our charter flight aboard an eight-passenger Mustique Airways prop plane, which we shared with a family from North Carolina. "We're cutting it close to be able to land on Union Island," the pilot told us. "No lights on the runway." As the sun set over the water, we realized we'd be flying on to Canouan's lighted runway, the contingency plan for arrivals after dark.

## ARRIVAL IN PARADISE

The stress of a long travel day and recent media overload began to diminish the moment



DEBBRA DUNNING BROUILLETTE

Green turtle in the Tobago Cays



DEBBRA DUNNING BROUILLETTE

Petit St. Vincent's 49-foot sailboat, Beauty

### If you go

Petit St. Vincent was named to Small Luxury Hotels of the World in 2013 and is on the list of National Geographic's Unique Lodges of the World. Nightly rates start at \$1,100, higher in winter months, for a one-bedroom cottage. For more information: [www.petitstvincent.com](http://www.petitstvincent.com)

**Getting there:** American Airlines offers daily flights from DFW Airport to Barbados (BGI), connecting through Miami (MIA). Guests fly Mustique Airways to Union Island (\$615/round trip), including transfers via private water taxi to the Petit St. Vincent private island resort.

our water taxi docked on Petit St. Vincent's pier and we were handed a fruity rum drink before being ushered to our cottage situated high on a bluff overlooking the Atlantic. Sweeping views of the sea were revealed the next morning as we savored a hot breakfast delivered and set up to enjoy on the terrace.

The resort's 22 cottages, constructed of locally hand-quarried volcanic stone, are spread throughout the 115-acre

island, some near the beach and others tucked into a hillside with sea views. A digital detox of sorts is encouraged, since they have no TVs, phones or Wi-Fi. A Bose iPod docking station is the only nod to modern technology. To add to the feeling of timelessness, there are no locks on the doors and no clocks, but there is a small safe in the closet if you feel the need to secure your passport and credit cards.

For those who aren't ready to totally unplug, Internet is available in the reception area outside the main restaurant and bar. Eliminating calls, texts or social media posting after we left the Miami airport was easy, and the few minutes I spent before dinner most nights checking email and Facebook, while not a total detox, was definitely a digital diet.

Until a year ago, a flag system outside each cottage — yellow indicating a need for service and red for privacy — was the only means of communicating with the staff. Now, a one-way intercom phone in the bedroom allows calls to the office to make a request or arrange for transportation to the restaurants, spa or other parts of the island via mini-mo, similar to a golf cart, the only type of motorized vehicle on the island.

## A BIT OF BALI IN THE CARIBBEAN

Petit St. Vincent was purchased as an uninhabited island in 1966 and opened in December 1968 by three U.S. investors, including Haze Richardson, who eventually became the sole owner. In 2010, when Phil Stephenson and Robin Paterson assumed ownership, air-conditioning and other minor updates were made to the cottages and construction began on a new hillside spa, an open-air restaurant and a beach bar.

Matthew Seamark and his Balinese wife, Anie, who were recruited to manage PSV in 2011, have incorporated a bit of Bali's Tri Hita Karana philosophy, which stresses maintaining balance in all areas of life. Yoga is offered every morning in one of two pavilions, Balinese therapists offer massages in the spa, and head chef Andy, also from Bali, blends his culinary experience in Indonesia with the traditions, spices and foods of the Caribbean.

According to Seamark, privacy is a valued commodity for a segment of the island's guests, including a number of unidentified celebrities who arrive and depart without fanfare. "Some of our guests check in, take all meals in their cottage and aren't seen again until they leave."

Unlike some other all-inclusive resorts that boast a jam-packed calendar of activities, at PSV an agenda of your own making can be as active or inactive as you desire, with no guilt.

At Seamark's suggestion, my husband and I took up temporary residence one morning at one of the 13 beachfront palapas on the west end of the island. Perfectly spaced for privacy, a hammock hung under a thatched roof structure, two beach chairs beckoned on our own stretch of sand, and coral outcroppings just offshore attracted reef fish that seemed to follow us around like friendly puppies.

Our only decision was whether to stay put and wait for drinks or lunch to be delivered to us by placing our order in a bamboo tube and raising the yellow flag at a checkpoint near our hut or to hop a ride back to the beach restaurant to enjoy lunch there.

## A CARIBBEAN COMFORT ZONE

If you are a first-timer, chances are good that you'll encounter others for whom Petit St. Vincent is a regular destination. "Sixty percent of guests are repeaters," said Seamark, "and couples who honeymooned here decades ago are returning with their grown children." And it is easy to see how PSV could become a comfort zone destination. By our second day on the island, we were being called by name

SEE ISLAND, 10D

## FROM PAGE 8D ISLAND

and my preference for a special herb tea after dinner was remembered by our waiter, Keon, who had it brewing before I requested it.

Wine and rum enthusiasts should ask for a look inside the impressive wine cellar located in an area off the main dining room, which was used at the time of initial resort construction as a rainwater catchment tank. Barrel-

aged rums from all corners of the Caribbean are also available, and culinary event weeks are scheduled periodically with winemakers on site as special guests.

Jean-Michel Cousteau, eldest son of ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau, chose Petit St. Vincent as the site of his only dive center in the Caribbean. Opened in 2014, his team of dive instructors offers

guided dives and PADI dive certification for all levels of divers. Even kids ages 8 to 10 can get an introduction to what it's like to breathe underwater.

On the day we joined dive guide Giles for a relaxing reef dive, schools of blue tang surrounded us as we swam past lionfish, lobster, moray eels, and several sleeping nurse sharks.

Unlike many luxury-level resorts, there isn't a hot tub or infinity-edge pool to be found on Petit St. Vincent, but no one

seems to miss them. Not when the calm, crystalline waters of the Caribbean Sea beckon on one side, and the wilder, Atlantic waters — but not too wild — await anyone willing to navigate the two-mile circumference of the island on a Sunfish, kayak, Hobie Cat, paddleboard, or windsurfing board.

There are options for staying active on land, too. Follow the fitness trail, hike up Marni Hill to the island's highest point at 275 feet, play tennis, or arrange for a round of golf on nearby Canouan island.



DEBBRA DUNNING BROUILLETTE

Petit St. Vincent private island resort's wine cellar, with more than 4,500 bottles of fine wine and champagne.