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SECRET Caribbean

The debut of the Mandarin Oriental, CANOUAN, casts a spotlight on an UNDISCOVERED tropical paradise

COURTESY OF MANDARIN ORIENTAL, CANOUAN

By Paul Rubio

While the Caribbean is anything but uncharted, it still has at least one secret to reveal. Surrounded by jewel-toned waters, the 1,800-acre Canouan island is exactly what off-the-grid tropical dreams are made of, complete with velvety sands and dramatic mountainous terrain.

The crown jewel of the Grenadines island chain likely owes its low profile to low-density development: More than two-thirds of Canouan is privately owned as the Grenadines Estates, an expanse rife with nature and scant in man-made structures. Or, perhaps, it's because the few who've ventured off the beaten path to arrive there have deliberately

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CANOUAN'S BEAUTY INTOXICATES FROM THE AIR (ABOVE). THE MANDARIN ORIENTAL, CANOUAN, FEATURES COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY DESIGN ELEMENTS ACROSS ITS SUITES AND VILLAS. THE SOUNDS OF THE OCEAN ARE THE SOUNDTRACK TO TREATMENTS AT THE ASIAN-INFLUENCED SPA (TOP RIGHT).



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kept tight-lipped about its splendor. More likely, though, is the fact that the island never flaunted the kind of ultra-luxury resort to fit its picture-perfect surrounds, nor the infrastructure to easily welcome visitors to its remote location. But with the debut of the Mandarin Oriental, Canouan, travelers can access this secret paradise—one that's quickly making waves as the Caribbean's hautest destination.

soft floral patterns and artful depictions of life under the sea; in the master bedroom, for example, hand-painted murals of pink sand dollars, starfish, and sea turtles complement the room's sleek dark-wood furnishings.

Common areas are also festooned in sea-inspired extravagances, like a four-story Murano chandelier assembled from more than a thousand handblown glass shells and suspended through the center of the lobby's spiral staircase. Higher up in the hills, the multi-bedroom villas blend various woods, stone, and glass to create modernist sanctuaries featuring transitional indoor-outdoor spaces that take full advantage of the forest-meets-ocean vistas.

Beyond its exquisite design, the Mandarin Oriental showcases Canouan's natural brilliance, ticking every box as the ultimate island escape. Etched into a cliffside, the spa comprises 10 thatched-roof treatment suites, each with private access by way of cable car—something we've not seen anywhere else in the world. Sweeping ocean views set the stage for treatments from therapists hailing from Mandarin Oriental's top Asia properties.

Lined with pink umbrellas, the infinity-edged pool spills onto the downy sands of Godahl Beach, a breathtaking stretch that requires no filters to convey its beauty. Traverse the property's narrow lanes by golf cart and discover four—yes, four—more beaches, including L'Ance Guyac, distinguished by lush, virgin coastline and equipped with a full-service feet-in-the-sand bar and restaurant. Want to see the others? Self-explore or opt for the Beach of the Day program, which offers curated activities on a different beach every day.

Then there's the Jim Fazio-designed championship 18-hole golf course, which isn't just for teeing off. Follow the course's ascension through rolling-yet-rising hills and be rewarded with 360-degree panoramas that encompass Canouan's entirety as well as neighboring islands in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It's no wonder the resort uses the prized thirteenth hole as a preferred spot for sunset Champagne and canapes.

Parents will appreciate the colossal kids' club, which is more like a resort within a resort catering to tykes, tots, and teens. Multiple swimming pools appeal to different age groups while water slides, a swath of beach, a miniature golf course, foosball and ping-pong tables, Mac computers, and an endless selection of arts and crafts classes, beach activities, board games, and state-of-the-art toys make being over 16 seem so boring. Couples longing for anything but rowdy children and teens in their castaway fantasy need not worry: The kids' club is a good 10-minute golf cart ride from the resort's main amenities.

Back at sea level, set sail on the house catamaran to visit the neighboring Tobago Cays, uninhabited islets whose waters are home to a prolific green turtle population—we saw 12 at close range during our excursion—and patches of coral reef abundant in marine life. In between



ENJOY ARTISTIC COCKTAILS AT TURTLES LOUNGE, ONE OF FIVE ON-SITE BARS AND RESTAURANTS.

THE MANDARIN ORIENTAL'S INFINITY POOL OVERLOOKS GODAHL BEACH (ABOVE). PARENTS CAN UNWIND ON THEIR PENTHOUSE TERRACE (TOP LEFT) WHILE CHILDREN EXPLORE THE EXPANSIVE KIDS' CLUB (BELOW), WHICH IS CONVENIENTLY STOWED AWAY A SHORT RIDE FROM THE MAIN RESORT.



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dips, return to the yacht to dine on beach-conscious cuisine like wraps made with sushi-grade tuna, a detox salad of quinoa, dried apricots, island-grown spinach, and cherry tomatoes, and a small square (or two) of rich dark chocolate brownies. In line with the property's impeccable attention to detail, lunch is served in a bento box that opens to a colorful, social media-worthy presentation. And to think, this is just a sampling of what to expect from the resort's five restaurants and bars.

For more time on the water, consider taking advantage of the property's relationship with Churchill Yacht Partners. Packages such as Land and Sea in Luxury entail four nights at Mandarin Oriental, Canouan, and seven nights sailing the Grenadines on a luxury megayacht.

Thankfully, the opening of the Mandarin Oriental means reaching



FROM LEFT: GODHAL BEACH, ONE OF FIVE ON PROPERTY; THE SPA'S TREATMENT PAVILIONS.

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Canouan is no longer the deal breaker it used to be. A glittering new marina, a private resort jet, an on-island runway, and increased commercial flight service from Barbados, St. Lucia, Grenada, and St. Vincent brand Canouan more accessible than ever. That being said, the resort simultaneously welcomes a new generation of savvy travelers while intentionally remaining an under-the-radar island escape. In keeping its room count low and prices justifiably high—starting at \$1,600 per night—the Mandarin Oriental, Canouan, invites interest but still reserves its full secret for a select few. (mandarinoriental.com/canouan/pink-sand-beach/luxury-hotel) ◀◀