



SUBLIME SECLUSION:
Lap up barefoot luxury
and five-star service in
the island's only resort

Millionaires' playground

NATURE has an odd way of reminding you who's boss. Just ask the Swiss-Italian banker who ploughed £105 million into the Caribbean's latest luxury resort only to watch horrified as, a fortnight after it opened, much of it blew away.

Thankfully, for Antonio Saladino and his fellow super-rich investors (including Donald Trump), the 140mph winds of last August's Hurricane Ivan are now a fading memory and Canouan Island, the sumptuous new destination for trendsetters in the heart of the Grenadines, has been rebuilt and is ready to dazzle.

Not that being this cool is easy. If you want to holiday like a gazillionaire, you should expect excitement - and even getting to the Raffles resort is a challenge.

Catamaran or six-seater Cessna? It's a tough one. We opted to fly the 100-mile hop from Barbados, swooping low over the thick green forests of the neighbouring island of Mustique.

The five-star Raffles resort already stretches across two-thirds of Canouan and, when Trump opens 60 luxury villas in the autumn, will cover much of the three square miles that

GEOFF MARSH dips a pampered toe in the champagne lifestyle at a Caribbean resort offering the ultimate in island dream holidays

make up the "island of turtles". Canouan is one of 30 or so islands that make up St Vincent and the Grenadines.

The Tobago Cays, a spectacular ocean playground of islets, golden beaches and coral reefs buzzing with tropical fish and sea snakes, are just an hour away, as we discovered when the charismatic "Captain Phil" took us out on his beloved catamaran Splendid Adventurer. We dived in for a quick snorkel session just as a peaceful, if intimidating, 6ft reef shark swam by beneath us.

Not surprisingly, the Cays have attracted many a celebrity. Pirates Of The Caribbean was filmed here and Johnny Depp, Kate Moss, Pierce Brosnan and Jamiroquai's Jay Kay have all potted around them with Phil and his charming

co-captain and wife Nicola. Raffles already offers all the essentials for the perfect holiday: a hillside spa, a cracking golf course and enough luxury to disarm even the fussiest of film stars. Guests are even given personalised golf-carts to whizz around in.

Accommodation is provided by more than 150 villas, many with plunge pools and private gardens, overlooking the ocean.

Mod cons, including gigantic plasma satellite TV sets, prevail and four-poster beds are the norm. Furnishings include teak from Venezuela and Guyana, sinks from Mexico and furniture from Morocco.

Even the resort's centrepiece, a 17th-century church for weddings,

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Idyllic life on an island of dreams



GLITZ: The bar serves \$300 Bellinis; right, snorkelling the Tobago Cays



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was transported brick by brick from its original site in England.

Although there's a distinct lack of West Indian feel in its decor, the food more than makes up for it. Jambu's, an all-day poolside restaurant, is staffed by charming locals and the beach bar and grill both offer fantastic Carib-Cuban dishes, fizzing with spicy rice, barbecued chicken and beef and fresh swordfish.

Bellini's, the island's signature bar, might owe much of its styling and menu to Italian influence but its knockout punch – or rather martini – is pure Las Vegas.

Where else in the world can you order a \$300 cocktail containing a 24-carat gold sword? Being serenaded by jewellery-touting flunkies is all very well, but most people who can afford a holiday on the island won't be impressed by a slice of bullion and a lanced olive.

What will amaze them, though, is the Trump International golf club. The par-72 championship course, designed by Jim Fazio, is as challenging as it is breathtaking. The front nine holes, which all sit in a semi-volcanic crater, are delightfully

tricky and they're surrounded by wonderful lush hedgerows and palm trees. The back nine, unbelievably, are even more spectacular, nestled along a mountain top with stunning views across the sleepy sea to the misty peaks of Mustique.

One morning, I rose at dawn and shot an appalling round, saved only by a seemingly impossible par-three across a 150ft sheer drop into a rugged canyon at the 14th. Nevertheless, I have never enjoyed a game of golf more.

My joints aching happily, that afternoon I headed to the Raffles Amrita spa, set seductively into a cliff face. Shirley Meerson, the spa director, immediately had me sold. "This is not like a city spa where you're treated as if you're on a conveyor belt," she told me enthusiastically. "Sometimes, at night, we'll take you out on to the balconies and lay out the towels to treat you."

Now I just wanted to lie down and I opted for Gentle Breeze, the spa's signature massage. At \$148 (£80), it's pricey but worth it to be lovingly wrapped in warm towels and given a gentle hour-long body and face rub.

It was then, as I lay grinning

from cheek to cheek and dreaming of Viv Richards lazily swatting a six out of the ground in Antigua, that it hit me. The turtles might be confused but Mother Nature can relax; Canouan is just as she always intended, a little taste of paradise.

GETTING THERE:

Abercrombie & Kent (0845 070 0614/www.abercrombiekent.co.uk) offers seven nights in a garden-view room at the Raffles resort from £1,709pp (two sharing). Price includes B&B, return flights to Barbados with British Airways, connecting flights and transfers.

