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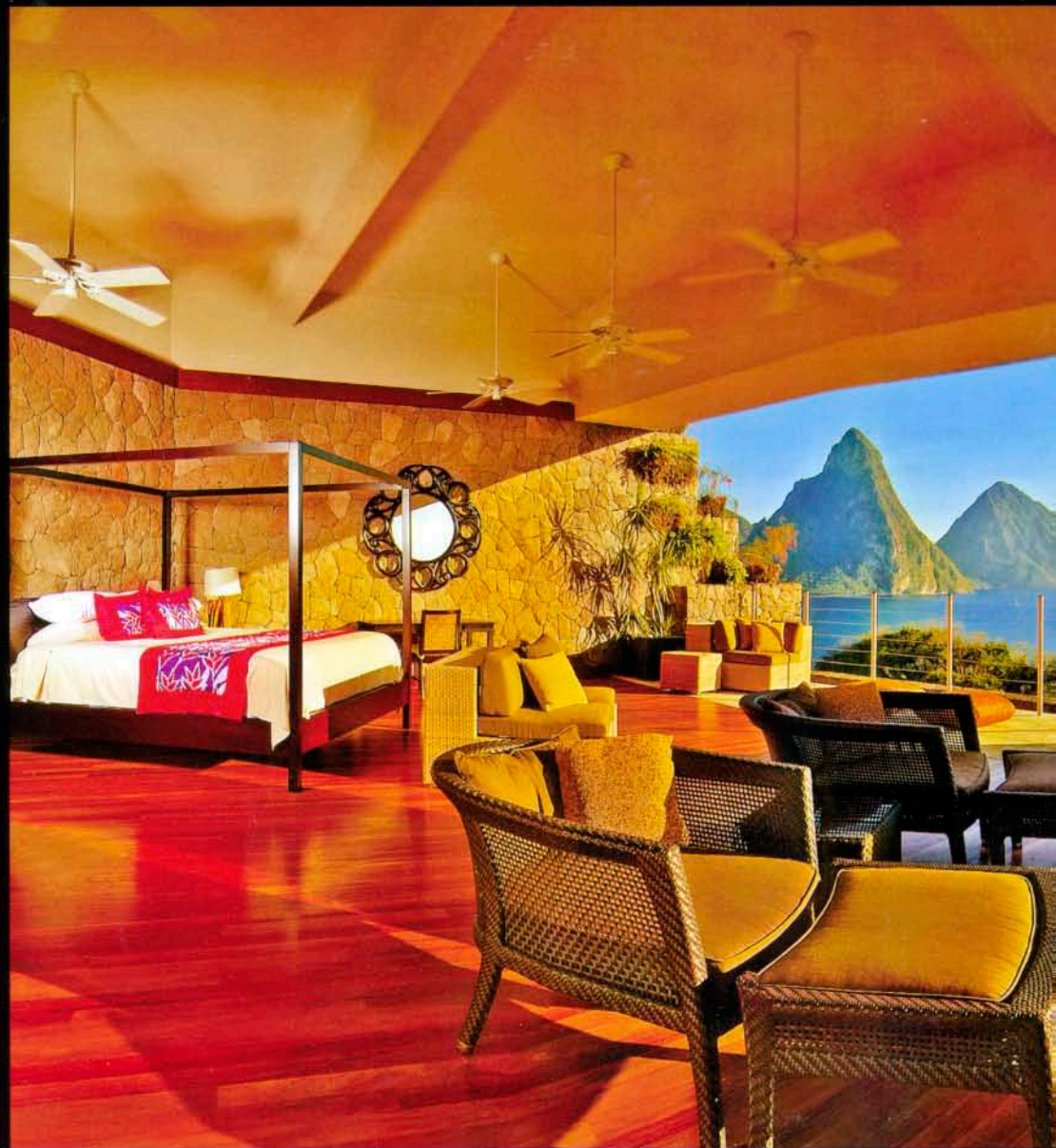
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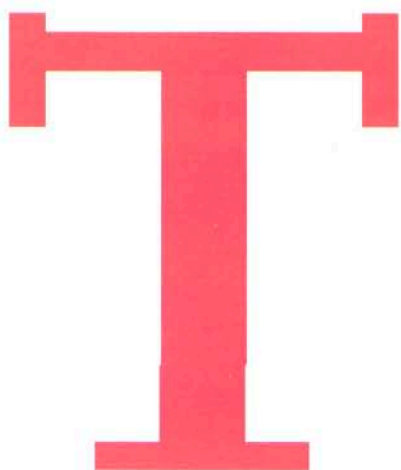
From here to eternity





With no fourth walls as impediments,
Jade Mountain Resort in St. Lucia
offers jaw-dropping views of the Pitons

Story by Sharon McDonnell • Photography from Jade Mountain



he road to Nirvana is not easy. Neither is the road to Jade Mountain. Both are fraught with obstacles to be endured, and the nagging sense one might not quite make it.

But the results are infinitely rewarding, and if you reach the new resort-within-a-resort at Anse Chastanet, after the rutted road that corkscrews steeply from Soufriere, a town on St. Lucia's southwest coast the views are infinite as well.

You will discover that your suite is missing the fourth

wall exposing such a jaw-dropping view of the Pitons - two extinct volcanoes resembling cones of green velvet - that you'll be convinced the word "spectacular" has, until now, been silly hype.

The "fourth wall," in theater and fiction, refers to the invisible barrier between spectators or readers and the work of art itself, and breaking that fourth wall signifies dissolving that barrier. It's a perfect analogy.

Here, the non-existent fourth wall (in all 24 suites) makes you feel like you're melting into the incredibly lush nature and Caribbean Sea around you, in an almost spiritual way. For the first time, you realize a window can be a ridiculous impediment.

The Pitons are an unforgettable sight on St. Lucia. They are featured on the same UNESCO World Heritage list of precious treasures as the Taj Mahal.

At Jade Mountain the peaks are so inescapable they greet you every day like old friends. I am tempted to compare views: is morning best, when sea and sky are in vivid primary colours, and fluffy white clouds fill the sky? Or late afternoon, when shadows cast on the mountain flanks grow darker? How about when sunset begins and pink and lavender pastels tinge the sky - or afterward, when the silhouettes are thrown into sharp, dramatic relief.

In my 450-square-foot infinity pool, whose luminescent emerald-green tiles fade into pink, purple, blue and yellow as sunlight hit them, I pretend to be an early explorer who fears my ship might drop off the edge because the world was flat. Later, I lie on the half-moon of coral stone edging my pool, admiring the Pitons perfectly reflected in its serene surface.

You reach your suite by walking what the resort literature refers to as a "bridge to infinity": a long, private street of coral stone.

"You've left the beaten path - you're crossing over the hill into this other world," says David Knox of Lightstreams Inc., who custom-designed the pool tiles, each in a different colour, such as turquoise, rose or maroon, and different shape.

He describes the pools as "Persian carpets of light and colour. It

is all as mystical as I feel St. Lucia is. It all sounds terribly over-the-top - until you see it."

Instead of finding a chocolate on your pillow in the evening, you will find a poem perhaps a paean to nature, or a love poem by Pablo Neruda. There's no telephone, TV, stereo or - God forbid - Internet access to distract you in your suite, and multiple ceiling fans instead of air conditioning cool your room.

For room service, a wake-up knock on the door, or housekeeping, you signal staff by hanging a coloured bag on your door handle. For music, there is a nocturnal symphony performed by an orchestra of tree frogs. The birds replace them at dawn. If fauna and water sounds attain crescendo levels, well, that's why you are given earplugs on arrival.

If the urge to socialize with fellow humans strikes - but don't count on it - you will find a huge communal infinity pool in rainbow-coloured tiles at the Jade Mountain Club, as well as a restaurant for light meals and drinks. On the Celestial Terrace, one level above, there's a 360-degree version of the view in your suite.

In addition, a shuttle will take you to Anse Chastanet's private beach, where there is excellent snorkeling off a reef just a few feet from shore. Or you may scuba-dive, go kayaking or take a sunset cruise, ride a bike through the jungle amid the ruins of an 18th-century French sugar plantation.

Since 1974, Anse Chastanet has been top-ranked on every list of Caribbean resorts for its extraordinary rooms with staggering views; its bathrooms with trees growing through the roof; its open-air showers, and its ambience of adventure and romance. "If Anse Chastanet doesn't put you in the mood for love, then call the doctor to check for a heartbeat," a scribe in *Caribbean Travel & Life* once wrote.

But at Jade Mountain, Anse Chastanet's owner/architect, Nick Troubetzkoy, a Canadian of Russian descent, chose to push the envelope even further, boldly envisioning a missing wall and infinity pool in every suite, each bigger than the biggest rooms at Anse Chastanet. "As he went higher, the walls kept dropping," jokes Karolin Troubetzkoy, Nick's Bavarian-born wife and executive in charge of operations.

Her husband has collected small jade mountains (in Chinese culture jade symbolizes heaven, earth or love, depending on its shape) for over 30 years, and Karolin says she is trying to prise some away from him to put on display. But perhaps Jade Mountain itself is enough of a work of art for those with eyes to see.

It may not be for everyone, but then neither is Nirvana. (II)

IF YOU GO:

www.jademountainstlucia.com, 800-223-1108

Nonstop four-hour flights from New York to St. Lucia are available on Air Jamaica. Nonstop flights from Miami, Atlanta, Philadelphia and Charlotte are available on American Airlines, Delta and US Airways.

