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Travel

THE ISLANDS

Grenadines: "Ciao, Bella!" boomed an excruciatingly handsome Italian as he greeted various females with much kissing of cheeks. They had all descended on Canouan, a tiny speck of an island just north of Grenada, to attend a wedding at the **RAFFLES RESORT CANOUAN ISLAND**. As I watched them, I kept thinking that I'd witnessed this scene before.

I had, actually, or something close to it. Five years ago, I landed here to take a look at the first version of the resort, then called Carenage Bay, and was swept up in another swarm of dressed-to-perfection Italians. Then I got to the resort and found it to be a floridly painted re-creation of a Sardinian village. Weirder still, the local Canouan staff was attempting to speak Italian.

It seemed very *Twilight Zone*...and it was. Two years later, plagued by bad marketing, Carenage closed. But financier owner Antonio Saladino, who in 1990 had signed a 99-year lease with the St. Vincent government, brought in big guns to relaunch. Last November, the resort reopened under the dual imprimatur of the Singapore-based Raffles International and real estate impresario and TV icon Donald Trump.

The improvements are visible immediately. For starters, the staff, a sort of "It's a Small World" mix of 24 nations led by Austrian-German management, is now supremely genial and efficient.

The look is also more sophisticated and serene. The

Raffles designers have replaced the Sardinian theme-park apricot, pink and lemon colors of the main building with off-white, and created a high-style, open-air reception area with gauzy white banners and curved white settees.

The rooms haven't changed, which is wonderful—they were lushly beautiful before. The sponged apricot-colored walls, Mexican tile sinks, sharp accent pieces such as mirrors in painted gold and white frames, and couches in Italian cotton fabrics give the rooms a mix of comfort and snap.

There are 156 rooms in this sprawling resort, each allotted a golf cart so guests can maneuver up and down the hills. Those who want an intimate place would be better off elsewhere. "It isn't a resort, it's a village," as general manager Louis Sailer says. It will become even bigger when Trump starts building his planned 135 villas and estates.

Trump is also behind the 18-hole golf course designed by Jim Fazio on hilly terrain bordering the sea that is scenically spectacular (the high-altitude 13th hole serves as a sightseeing perch for most of the Grenadines). He's also behind the hilltop casino Trump Club Privee, meant to be more Monte Carlo than Atlantic City.

One of the few additions not to carry Trump's name is



Island in the sun: Canouan

Raffles's Amrita Spa, and it's a knockout—a collection of 11 open-air treatment rooms: two in Polynesian-style overwater bungalows reachable by boat, nine built into the side of the hill and reached via funicular. The treatment menu was still evolving when I was there, but the setting—rooms painted the colors of gemstones, in open, thatched cottages overlooking the hypnotic aqua water—is soothing enough on its own.

The only aspect of the resort that needed work was the food at the main restaurant, Jambu's, which emphasized pan-ethnic cooking, sometimes within a single dish (chicken teriyaki and Szechuan beef pizzas, anyone?). With the exception of the perfect breakfast ingredients, I found

EYES ONLY

Raffles Resort Canouan Island, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, \$675-\$1,770. For reservations: (877) CANOUAN, www.raffles-canouanisland.com.

the food strangely middling.

Easier to enjoy is the range of martinis in the Jambu Bar. One specialty is a martini priced at \$300. The reason for the steep markup: a tiny, handcrafted 24k-gold sword crusted with an array of gems to hold the onion or olive. But, no, it's not called the Trump martini...at least not yet.

—LAURIE WERNER