Tropical Throwback

At these five iconic enclaves, members and guests bask in low-key elegance. Written by Elizabeth Quinn Brown

The Caribbean was calling like a siren in the 1940s and 1950s, when the blue-blooded were beckoned to the islands with the region’s new—and exclusive—clubs. For all their preserved midcentury glamour, these idylls of leisure are charming discerning travelers perhaps more than ever before: a rum-mixed cocktail of discreet luxury and warm hospitality, topped with a dash of Old-Guard Northeast style. Here, an invitation to peer through the palms into these “country clubs” of the tropics. (Just remember to pack a blazer and your whites.)

Sand and Stripes Clockwise from top: the Lower Lobby at Round Hill; Teeth of the Dog golf course at Casa de Campo; Coral Beach and Tennis Club.
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
CASA DE CAMPO RESORT & VILLAS
This carnival for sporting boasts a collection of golf courses designed by Pete Dye, including the famed Teeth of the Dog. The resort comprises an airy, modern hotel and the village of Altos de Chavón (home to Casa de Campo’s mascot, a donkey named Margarita). Garner an invitation to the owner’s December “white party” to dance with the likes of Beyoncé and Jay Z.

BERMUDA
CORAL BEACH & TENNIS CLUB
Coral Beach embraces its past and its pastels with traditions like afternoon tea in the chintz-covered clubhouse. Bermuda debuted the first tennis court in the Western Hemisphere, so the island is known for the game—a heritage that is integral to Coral Beach with its competitive ladder and eight clays. To relax, members play games like bocce and croquet on the lawn.

BAHAMAS
LYFORD CAY CLUB
The warm-weather chic of this exclusive “Caribbean Nantucket” is a legacy of members like Nan Kempner, while a win on the court is toasted with a Rum Dum—a rum cocktail with a secret “sweet sauce” that we assume is ordered “shaken, not stirred” by member Sean Connery.

ANTIGUA
MILL REEF CLUB
Mill Reef was established, per WASP custom, as an enclave of understated luxe; the founding members were restricted when constructing their homes. The breezy sophistication is a credit to onetime members like Bunny Mellon and her friend Jackie Kennedy (plus the fact that children weren’t allowed until the 1980s). Today Mill Reef represents an older skew—a destination, perhaps, for “old boys” to act boyish.

JAMAICA
ROUND HILL HOTEL & VILLAS
Creating a pocket of preppiness? Call Ralph Lauren (who, as it happens, owns two villas at Round Hill). The designer was asked to redecorate the Cocktail Bar and the Grill, as well as the 36-room Pineapple House. Guests of this colonial-influenced cove (a roster that includes John F. Kennedy, who rehearsed his inauguration speech here) are welcome to golf at the esteemed Tryall Club nearby.

Go for the Jungular
From top: Round Hill’s recreation pool; the Altos de Chavón amphitheater at Casa de Campo; Round Hill’s main beach.