

Condé Nast  
**Traveller**

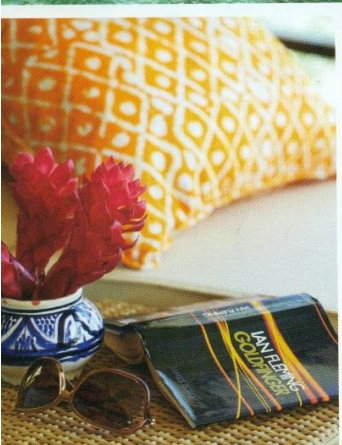
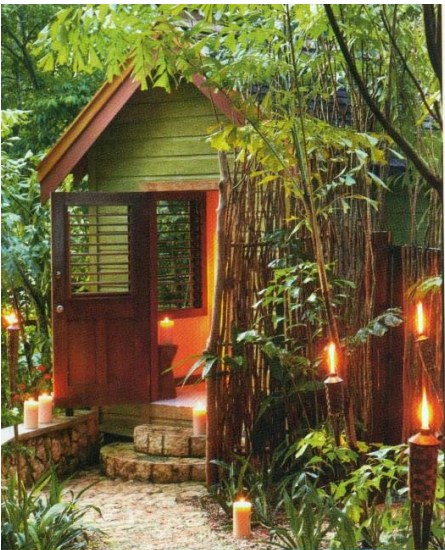
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# BEACH HITS

SUNSHINE SUPERSTARS FOR STRIPPED-BACK, BAREFOOT FUN





## BEST FOR: ALL AGES

GOLDENEYE, JAMAICA

THE WIND IS HOWLING, BATTERING TREE BRANCHES against the walls and whistling angrily around the building. Lightning flashes come with ferocious cracks of thunder. Things clonk onto the roof and the gentle whoosh of waves that lulled us to sleep has blurred into a roar. The children are wide-eyed in the dark. The cabin creaks like a wooden ship riding out a storm. By dawn, the raging squall has calmed, scudding up the coast and off out into the Caribbean. The message is clear. Here, nature is wild. And big. And we are open to it.

Here is Oracabessa, a small town dotted with wooden huts and tin-roofed shacks on the north Jamaican coast. A place whose coves and cliffs were made legendary not just by Henry Morgan and his buccaneering pirates, but by a glamorous set of mid-century carousers, including Noël Coward. Ian Fleming made his home here in 1946, and reminders of his legacy are everywhere: tales of debauchery and creativity, and the cinematic history made when Ursula Andress emerged from the sea onto a nearby beach in that bikini.

The thing is, the children have taken one look at their house on the sand and gone all irie. They don't care about Bond. They're too busy collecting pearlescent shells on the beach and too taken with the curvy swimming pool that looks out across the sea and by Xavier the lifeguard ('there's a lifeguard whose name is actually SAVIOUR!'). They want to know why the seeds falling from the trees are so big and to study the creatures living in the outdoor shower (disappointingly few if you're aged four, appealingly few if you're 40). When you get good at liming, the local word for just hanging out, doing not a lot, you start noticing these things.

They've seen Jamaican culture before, these kids, but not like this. Growing up in Brixton meant school trips to market stalls heaving with plantains and mangoes, summers on the street, dodging the river of fish juice on Atlantic Road, and playing out to an overloud dancehall soundtrack. But the real thing was so much better, neighbours kept telling us. Not for us the cultureless postcard beaches of Antigua, the megayacht bling of St Barth's or the too-hard-to-reach coasts of Tobago. We wanted the real West Indian deal, the hustle and bustle, the spicy jerk and the rastas and their One Love message, touted for tourists but resonant all the same. And we wanted comforts, too.

So we've come to GoldenEye, famous among Caribbean hotels for its funky vibe and barefoot millionaires. It may once have been rejected by Bob Marley for being 'too posh', but unlike the region's plasticky manicured hotels, this is a place of understated chic, where cabins are brightly coloured and guests get refunds for not using the air-conditioning, where the Daiquiris are heavy on the rum and reggae beats float on the breeze. It doesn't take long to be lulled into a soporific, dreamy state.

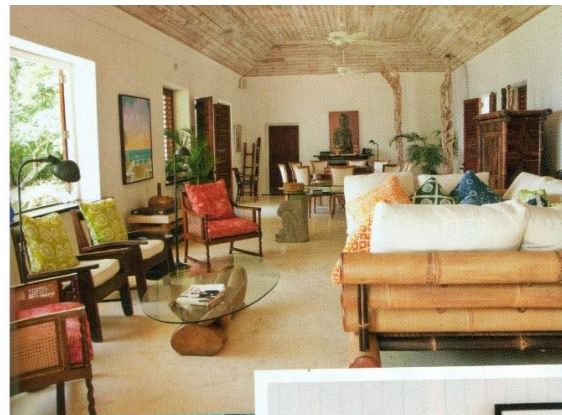
We discover the lagoon, the very word conjuring up *Swallows and Amazons*-style adventures (with hotter sun and better snacks). With mangrove plants in a riot of over-saturated turquoise and green, the tropical vegetation is so thick its tendrils creep, snakelike, onto the water. Our kayak glides out across the blue as my eldest child takes the oars and donks and spooshes erratically across the paths of paddle-boarders, ruining the peace of anyone snoozing in the hammocks of the shady villas.

Gibraltar beach, a few coves away, is almost completely hidden from the road. To get to it, you have to navigate through the lobby and rooms of a deserted hotel, its peeling paint and crumbling floors giving in to a veil of green leaves, its walls a playground for butterflies. This beach isn't in the guide books and most people leave it alone, which makes it a great nesting spot for endangered hawksbill sea turtles. Protecting them from being turned into turtle soup is the work of Mel, a retired teacher from England who provides a hands-on lesson in conservation. The kids can hardly believe it as miniature heads emerge from strangely soft eggs and the baby turtles lurch on tiny flippers down the sand towards the sea. It's like something out of *Planet Earth*. This kind of natural encounter is a balm for parents trying to sidestep the clichéd crayons-and-crafts approach of the average hotel kids-club offering.

Up the road from the hotel you can stroll past walls covered with thick bougainvillea, giant palm leaves browned on the ground, and dozens of stray dogs which the kids will want to take home. There are rickety, painted wooden restaurants vibrating underneath huge speakers blasting out Buju Banton and serving only jerk chicken. We don't know if Dangel's is actually better than Chris's Cook Shop down the road but it puts on a good show of authenticity. The children sit on its steps slurping slowly on Tropical Rhythms, their lips turning orange, their heads gently nodding to a soundtrack of Skip Marley (Bob's grandson) and waves. This liming thing? They've got that down. EMILY MATHIESON

**BOOK IT** ITC Luxury Travel offers seven nights at GoldenEye from £7,299 per family, based on two adults and two children sharing a two-bedroom Beach Hut, including flights to Kingston, transfers and breakfast. +44 1244 355527; [itcluxurytravel.co.uk](http://itcluxurytravel.co.uk)

PHOTOGRAPHS: CEDRIC ANGELES/INTERSECTION PHOTOS; MATTHIAS CLAMER; CHRISTIAN HORAN



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