

YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS WITH US

# VIRTUOSO LIFE

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## the travel dreams issue

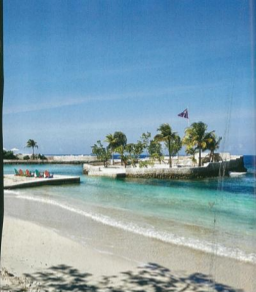
Soak it all in:  
GoldenEye resort's  
Ian Fleming villa  
on Jamaica.

YOUR TRIPS OF A LIFETIME + WISH-LIST DESTINATIONS



I  
SPY  
REVIVAL

PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY TARA DONNE



# EVEN FOR THE AUTHOR BEHIND AGENT 007,

Jamaica wasn't all swaying palms and shaken martinis. On his first visit to the island as a debonair British naval officer in July 1943, Ian Fleming cursed the "endless hairpin bends," the "unaccustomed" flavors, and how it "rained in rods" every day at noon. In short, Jamaica was his brand of paradise – fabulously exotic and anything but dull. Flying out of Kingston that summer, Fleming turned to his seatmate and vowed, "When we have won this blasted war, I am going to live in Jamaica ... and lap it up, and swim in the sea and write books."

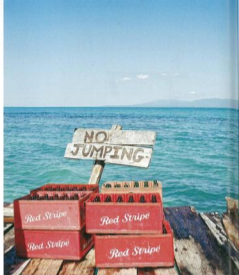
That he did. The spot on the northeast shore 20 minutes east of Ocho Rios called GoldenEye, where Fleming built a cliffside bungalow in 1946, inspired him to write all 14 James Bond novels in as many years and continues to hold visitors in its laser-like thrall. Island Records founder and entrepreneur Chris Blackwell, the producer behind performers such as Bob Marley and U2, purchased the estate in 1976 as a hideaway for his family and VIP friends; five years ago he opened it to the world as GoldenEye. The five-bedroom Fleming Villa still has killer views, as well as the author's red bulletwood writing desk. But now it's joined on 52 acres by 18 spacious villas and cottages with custom Balinese beds, retro-chic kitchen appliances, and flat screens big enough to stun Dr. No. The eco-friendly resort's nursery has raised thousands of plants and trees for use in its landscaping and the local community, and its work helping to establish a no-fishing zone has notably increased fish stocks and coral coverage in the surrounding waters. A soundtrack curated by Blackwell plays in The Gazebo restaurant, and his celebrated Blackwell rum pours freely in the oceanfront bar.

Fleming would be pleased. Jamaica is once again emerging as a place for stylish travelers to dive right in. From bustling Montego Bay in the northwest, where most international travelers arrive, to the sleeper beach coves of Saint Mary Parish in the northeast, and on into the rugged interior, a new wave of sophistication is bringing back glamour and polish to the land of the all-inclusive resort. "It's time to fall in love with Jamaica all over again," recommends McLean, Virginia-based Virtuoso travel advisor Anne Morgan Scully. "It's not for everyone: The island is funky and unique, but the weather's great, the water's gorgeous, and the service and amenities, particularly on the high end, rival anything you'll find elsewhere in the Caribbean."

I certainly have no complaints at GoldenEye, where my wife and I kick off our island discovery with the help of Virtuoso's on-site Jamaica contact. It's already a trip for the books. Arriving at the resort's outdoor Bizot Bar our first night, we join a cosmopolitan cocktail party, albeit a barefoot one, in full swing. A young London philanthropist is telling a gregarious Texas money manager and an Australian actor we recognize about a turtle sanctuary a few sandy inlets down from the hotel. Soon enough, we're all clinking Red Stripes and plotting a group outing for the next morning. It turns out to be a life-affirming excursion. As our little gang watches, a volunteer naturalist delicately digs out a hawksbill sea turtle nest and counts 83 tiny creatures wiggling up from the sand. He has us form two lines to protect the little waddlers from flying predators while they run to the sea. These amphibians are known to migrate great distances and will likely swim from here to Cuba, Florida, North Carolina, and beyond.

You can practically track their entire course – as we attempt to do one afternoon from nearby Firefly Estate, the mountaintop historic house run by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust. Playwright and raconteur Noël Coward spent his final years here – lively ones, judging from candid photos of a young Alec Guinness dressed as Lawrence of Arabia on a pool floaty. Firefly's dining room table remains set the way it was when Britain's Queen Mum stopped by for lunch in 1965. Out back, you can sit and admire the crashing surf just as Sophia Loren loved to do. But it's the view to the opposite side, with those misty green mountains beckoning, that captivates me.

Clockwise from top left: Outdoor relaxation at the Fleming Villa, and the resort's tranquil Low Cay Beach and tree-house Gazebo restaurant.



## THE MORE YOU DO IN JAMAICA, THE LESS YOU WANT TO DO. THE "YA, MON" SPIRIT MAKES YOU KICK BACK LIKE THAT.

The next day, we set out to explore them, driving west to the cruise port of Falmouth before taking a hard left into the jungle. Called Cockpit Country because of its humid and cramped terrain that reminded British officers of warships' lower decks, this was once a nearly impenetrable region where Jamaican slaves, known as Maroons, escaped to live free among its limestone sinkholes during colonial rule. Today it's increasingly popular with tourists. Our first stop is Good Hope Estate, a vast eighteenth-century Georgian-style plantation made rich from the sugar trade. Now it's an adventure park, with zip lines, tubing on the sparkling Martha Brae River, and a colonial village.

The crowds thin out from there. Pushing south into Jamaica's great green center, there's little more to distract us from the jungle's vines and guava and custard-apple trees than a couple of jerk chicken shacks and a few skinny donkeys. Funny to think that some of music's biggest acts traveled this lonesome road: Bono, Grace Jones, and Bob Marley's family have all frequented Pantrepant, Blackwell's secluded countryside retreat, the entrance to which is marked only by a battered sign that reads "Private Property." Last fall, for the first time since purchasing the 2,500-acre cattle estate 25 years ago, Blackwell began letting one privileged party at a time overnight in his two-bedroom guest cottage there as part of a new service at GoldenEye.

The rock-star experience starts with a swim in what used to be a stone reservoir for molasses. Afterward, with thunderheads gathering, Blackwell's longtime cook, Mama J, prepares us a feast: chicken and beef from the farm, salads as local and organic as they come (Blackwell sources the food for his island resorts almost exclusively from the gardens here). Homemade coffee ice cream with a Blue Mountain coffee pour-over makes for a fine *affogato* just as the rains arrive.

Roughly the size of Connecticut, Jamaica is easy enough to navigate. Even when you're covering "long" distances, most destinations are no more than two or three hours apart. If you prefer relaxed sightseeing to white-knuckle navigating, leave the motoring to professional chauffeurs; drive on the left is the rule of the road, and the hairpins can get quite hairy.

From Pantrepant we head a few hundred twists south to lush Saint Elizabeth Parish, which still feels untraveled in a Caribbean fantasy sort of way. On isolated Treasure Beach, painted wooden boats wait to ferry you to the offshore Floyd's Pelican Bar, a breezy, thatch-roofed cantina on stilts where the Red Stripe somehow tastes better and colder than anywhere else. Nearby, the YS Falls cascade down seven tiers of cliffs, with boardwalk pathways for easy climbing between their natural pools and guides on hand for those willing to brave rope swings that go from big to bigger to "Dude, get your GoPro!" It's a straight shot from there to Appleton Estate, one of Jamaica's oldest rum distilleries. After the fun and informative factory tour, we get a chance to sample five rums, which, come to think of it, may be the best reason of all to hire that driver.

The more you do in Jamaica, the less you want to do. The "ya, mon" spirit makes you kick back like that. There's no place better to accomplish very little than at 30-acre Round Hill Hotel and Villas, home base for the end of our trip and a longtime haven for the jet set and the beautiful. Oscar Hammerstein was Villa 12's original owner and worked on *The Sound of Music* there. Paul McCartney takes Villa 17 and a handful of others for his family holidays. Heidi Klum is practically a fixture on the beach. A decade ago, Ralph Lauren remodeled the 36-room hotel with an eye toward preserving the cottage colony vibe, and today it feels like a tropical village—for the very, very important. Though it would be impolite to name names, we share the view on our last morning at breakfast with a world-renowned architect, an Oscar-winning director, and one of the Caribbean's most distinguished families. It's easy to imagine a certain British Secret Intelligence Service agent fitting right in.



Local favorites at Pelican Bar. Opposite (clockwise from top left): A roadside conch stand, beach essentials, Montego Bay craft market finds, and a Pelican Bar water taxi.

Round Hill's beach on Montego Bay  
and (inset) a Classic Villa Suite.

## tip

"Jamaica is great for large family reunions. Spread out in a seven-bedroom villa complete with a private pool, golf carts, and a butler, chef, and housekeeper at Montego Bay's Half Moon Resort."

— Sheila Gallant-Halloran,  
travel advisor, Toronto



## FROM JAMAICA WITH LOVE

Create your own international thriller at one of five historic resorts.

Vacation like 007 at **GoldenEye**, built around a four-acre lagoon on quiet Oracabessa Bay. In addition to the five-bedroom Fleming Villa, guests can book 11 one- and two-bedroom beach and lagoon villas with full kitchens, six lagoon cottages on stilts, and an oceanfront villa with a wide deck for sipping sundowners. Doubles from \$620, including breakfast daily and a \$120 resort credit.

Just south of Montego Bay but a world away from the clamor, **Round Hill Hotel and Villas** has been a celebrity favorite since opening in 1953, thanks to its 27 villas, which come with a personal housekeeper and breakfast cook, and, in most cases, a private pool. Its

Pineapple House offers 36 heavenly white suites designed by co-owner Ralph Lauren. Doubles from \$399, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.

A former sugar plantation estate outside Montego Bay, **Tryall Club's** 13 Great House Villa Suites (one- and two-bedroom) and 75 estate villas mix modern and colonial decor. The resort's lauded 18-hole championship golf course counts the Caribbean itself as a hazard on the signature par-three fourth hole. Doubles from \$400, including breakfast daily cooked in villa (guests provide groceries) and round-trip airport transfers or one round of golf for two.



East of Montego Bay, the landmark **Half Moon** resort opened in 1954 on 400 acres with two miles of private beach. It has evolved into a 197-room, 31-villa resort city with a dolphin attraction, horseback riding, golf, shopping, a spa – even its own hospital. Doubles from \$215, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.

Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller honeymooned at **Jamaica Inn**, and it's still among the island's finest for newlyweds. All 47 suites and five cottages overlook the white-sand beach a couple of miles east of Ocho Rios. Doubles from \$329, including breakfast daily and a boat ride to Dunn's River Falls. »



Chris Blackwell  
outside his Island  
Resort offices.

British music producer **Chris Blackwell** helped turn performers such as Bob Marley and U2 into worldwide sensations. At 77 and retired from showbiz, he's building a legacy in Jamaican tourism with his boutique resorts. Here's what makes his heart sing about his adopted paradise.

***What sets Jamaica apart from other Caribbean islands?***

The richness of the music, the culture, the scenery, and the cuisine. No other place has that alluring combination of ingredients, except maybe Cuba. And right now, Jamaica has far better options for welcoming tourists and enhancing the nature of so many wonderful attributes.

***How have things changed since you opened your first hotel in the 1950s?***

We've seen big all-inclusive

resorts come in. But the little places are where you get the authentic experience, where you feel the connection to the people and the personality I love so much about Jamaica. We encourage guests to go out and experience it. We push them, actually. The roads have improved. Safety has increased. It's a great shame to come to the island and stay within the confines of your hotel.

***You now have three hotels and a premium rum company under your***

***name on the island. What's next?***

All our properties have a huge amount of space for expansion, and my plan is to grow them little by little. I plan to open 25 octagonal houses at GoldenEye – I'm addicted to them. They have shuttered windows on six sides, and if there's a breeze or rainfall blowing from the west, let's say, you simply close the west shutters. It's a way to experience the environment without ever closing yourself off from it. In Jamaica, you have to be open to things. **VL**

CHRIS BLACKWELL: CAMERON PESTI; TAYLOR MCCABE/RETNA

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