

# BAZAAR<sup>Harper's</sup>

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Juliet Nicolson

## FROM JAMAICA, WITH LOVE

*Juliet Nicolson explores the idyllic Caribbean island that inspired the legendary *James Bond* novels*

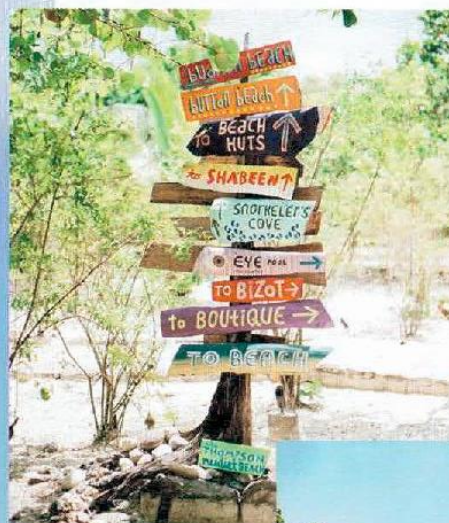


*Above left: a beach-hut terrace at GoldenEye.  
Right: a lagoon cottage at the resort*





## ESCAPE



*Right: a beach hut at GoldenEye. Below left: the Fleming Lounge at the resort*



Coming in to land in Kingston, Jamaica's vibrant capital, is like flicking the on switch in a vast and exotic ballroom hung with a thousand chandeliers. Sunshine suffuses the Blue Mountains, dazzles the Caribbean Sea with light and colour and highlights the white sand below us. The *James Bond* creator Ian Fleming was captivated by the magic of the island when he first visited as a naval officer during World War II, finding a place that matched his own description of his novels as full of 'fairy tales for grown-ups'. Three quarters of a century later, I am captivated too.

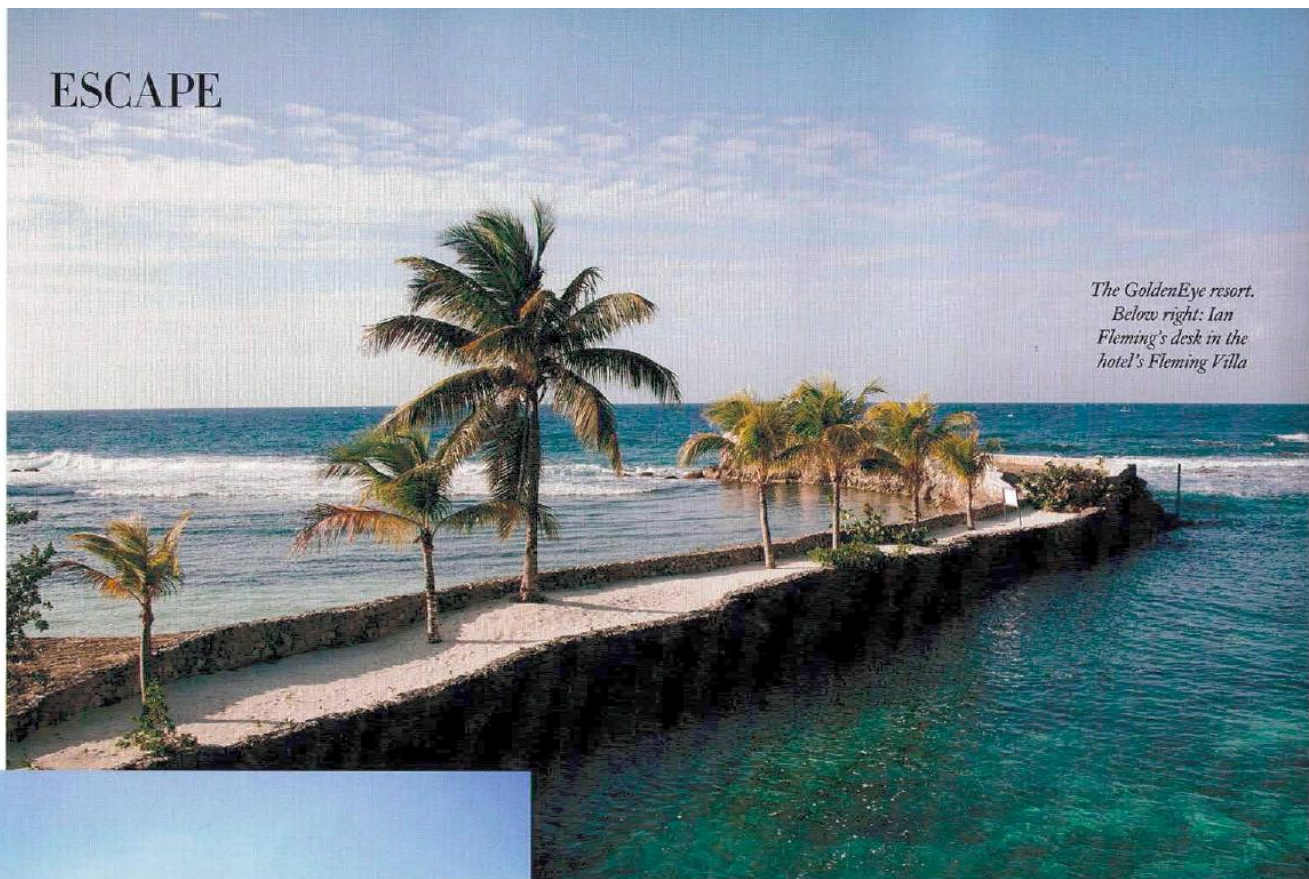
Crossing the slim waist of the island by car from Kingston's airport, we reach the deep-rooted peace of the family-owned Jamaica Inn where we are greeted with a resounding 'Welcome Home'. This glorious hotel, set in eight acres and numbering 55 guestrooms, seven cottages and the sublime, super-luxe White Suite, was founded in 1950 on one of the most golden and, at 700 feet, longest private sandy beaches in the Caribbean. A deliciously spacious terrace adjoins each light-filled bedroom, all of which face the ever-changing blues and greens of the ocean. The timelessness of Jamaica Inn is evident. It is redolent with history, a refuge during the 1950s where Winston Churchill chose to paint, Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller to romance and later, Meghan Markle and her first husband to marry. Ian Fleming and Noël Coward habitually met here to play backgammon and share a cocktail as the bartender leant over the wooden counter, explaining that in such a hot climate it is important to remember how the best martinis are 'shaken not stirred'.

On the beach, shimmering butterflies and soft-voiced doves provide the backdrop to the shifting colour of the sea as a foraging pelican skims the water. During the day the opportunities for exertion of the swimming,





# ESCAPE



*The GoldenEye resort.  
Below right: Ian  
Fleming's desk in the  
hotel's Fleming Villa*

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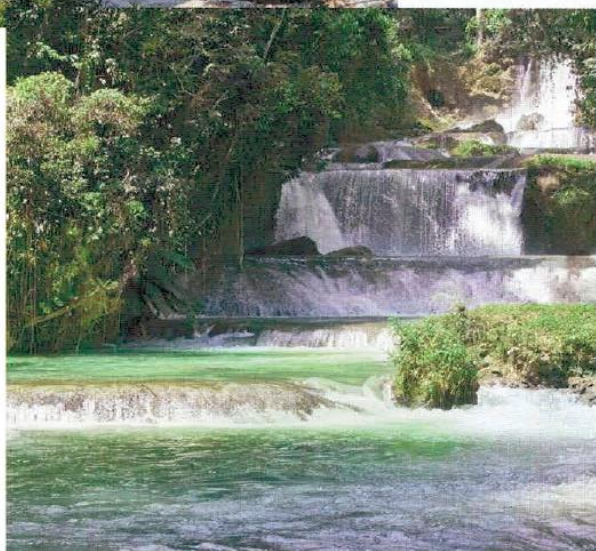
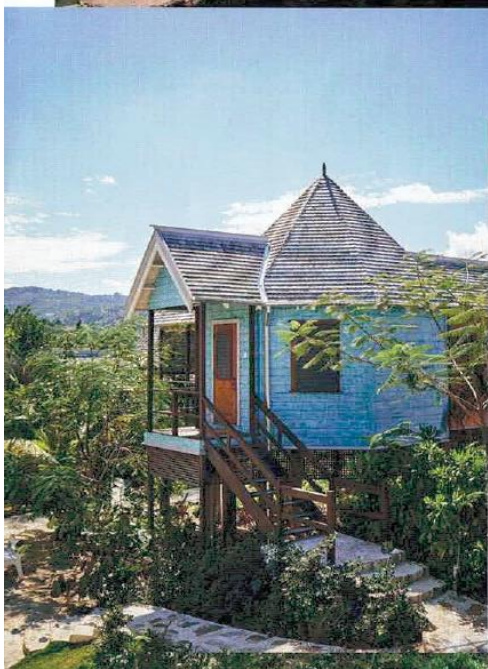
kayaking croquet-playing, and above all snorkelling kind are boundless. We explore the coral reefs in the deep-green water, just a cigar-ash flick from the promontory of Churchill's private balcony. The healing hands of an out-of-this-world spa that hangs directly over the sea, cooled by the gentle trade winds, deepen the impulse to whisper one's way through the days. If you can bring yourself to leave this haven, take a private guide to the breathtaking waterfalls at Dunn's River with Tony in his yellow-and-scarlet fishing boat or a taxi into nearby Ocho Rios to find the traditional topsy-turvy cloth

dolls in the local market.

Tradition is observed everywhere at Jamaica Inn by the can-do-everything staff, where 80 per cent of the guests are returnees to a place they have loved for years. Late-morning trays of exquisitely mixed Planter's Punch are brought out to guests on their soft-towelled sunbeds on the beach. At teatime, thinly cut tomato sandwiches and home-made ginger cake are served outside the library, a sofa-filled room stocked with books and family photographs. In the evening, after delectable hors d'oeuvres, we descend the terrace stairs in the required formal dress of a gentler age, to watch a flaming sun set beneath the stars while dining to the sound of a smoochy, local band.

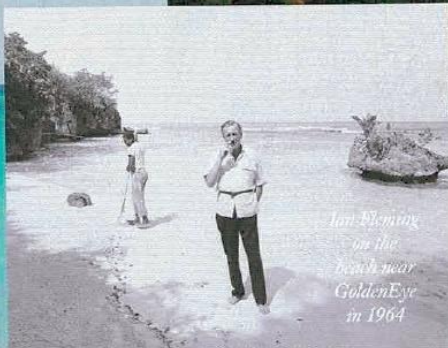
Half an hour along the north-coast road, just beyond the small fishing village of Oracabessa, a sign painted 'Private Property' in uneven writing is attached to a modest iron gate, half hidden among waving palms. Nothing prepares you for this paradise. GoldenEye, once home to Ian Fleming, now the incomparably luxurious

*Left: a beach hut  
at GoldenEye.  
Below: Dunn's  
River Falls*





# ESCAPE



Fleming house, has been extended into 52 acres of glorious beaches, tropical forests and secret coves to become the jewels in the crown of the charismatic music producer Chris Blackwell's portfolio of Island Outpost resorts.

Crossing the long suspension bridge hung above a vast lagoon, a natural infinity pool of limpid beauty, you reach the sandy beach off which the 49 huts, cottages and villas of the hotel are ingeniously scattered to make you feel you have arrived in your own personal idyll. Here is the stuff of which the most divinely escapist Bond movie is made: a blue-painted bedroom opening directly onto the sea, waking to watch

fishing boats returning at dawn with their catch, a private outside shower among hot-pink bougainvillea. Breakfast of sweet bananas and local pineapple is waiting for us at Bizot Bar, the laid-back waterside restaurant where pillars are wallpapered with posters of Bob Marley and Grace Jones in Blackwell's Island Records' portfolio. There is a chilled-out, care-dissipating vibe here, where ties are banned and flip-flops obligatory. Supper at the Gazebo restaurant presents you with the most succulent freshly caught lobster and just-picked salad. Later, you can swim, paddle-board or

Ingeniously scattered villas make you feel you have arrived in your own personal idyll

float to the lagoon spa where a massage with ginger and pomegranate oil will waft you to paradise.

Out at sea, GoldenEye's initiative (subsequently adopted by Jamaica Inn) to invite the local villagers and fisherman to help restore the eroding coral reef has transformed the ecological balance, the vitality of ocean life and the communities' livelihood. Masked and flippered in the deep ocean directly opposite Ian Fleming's villa, Xavier from Wata Sports streaks down through the sun-filtered waters, past neon-bright parrot-fish nosing their way into seaweedy crevices, and gently lifts a white sea anemone from its coral bed. For a moment I feel the grip of the suction pads as Xavier places this beauty on the palm of my hand before he dives again to return it safely to its rocky home.

On our last day I notice a handwritten note propped against the empty reception desk. 'Soon Come' it promises. My photograph of the sign now sits hopefully on my desk, next to my still golden-sanded flip-flops. □

Jamaica Inn ([www.jamaicainn.com](http://www.jamaicainn.com)), from about £300 a room a night B&B for a Superior Balcony; GoldenEye ([www.goldeneye.com](http://www.goldeneye.com)), from about £355 a room a night for a One Bedroom Beach Hut. British Airways ([www.britishairways.com](http://www.britishairways.com)) flies direct to Kingston from £524 return.

