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Strawberry Hill forever



Photo: Helmut Dostal

As we leave the airport and bustle through the busy streets of Kingston, our driver preps us for a 50-minute climb through countless hairpin turns that'll take us 3,000 feet up into the scenic Blue Mountains. Cheerfully quoting from Bob Marley's lyrics and skillfully avoiding a checkerboard of potholes, he fills us in on the "wow" effect that we'll experience arriving at Strawberry Hill.

We've read that the historic property was deeded by the British royal family to Horace Walpole, the Earl of Orford, in 1780, and named after his English estate, a famous meeting place for musicians and aristocracy. Walpole and his family became quite fond of the place and began growing strawberries, coffee and other crops on the property. Later, Strawberry Hill enjoyed various lives as a naval hospital during the latter part of the century and as a retreat for well-known families.

Chris Blackwell, the iconic founder of Island Records, bought the 26-acre mountaintop resort in 1972. He'd fallen



Photo: Strawberry Hill



Photo: Helmut Dostal

in love with it as a child when he went there for tea with his parents and realized it would make a spectacular spot for entertaining. It was here that Blackwell played host to many a famous entertainer and musician including the Rolling Stones and, of course, Bob Marley, who convalesced at the peaceful hideaway after he was shot, almost fatally, in 1976. Strawberry Hill finally opened in 1994 as a one-of-a-kind villa hotel. Built in 19th-century Jamaican plantation-style, the well-known spot was the first Caribbean property in Blackwell's Island Outpost collection.

For our five-day stay, we're housed in one of nine charming cottages perched high on the hillside. Delicately planted on the lower slope for complete privacy, there's a choice of studios as well as luxury one- and two-bedroom villas. Each one comes with beautifully carved, locally sourced mahogany furnishings, a mini kitchen that can be stocked to order and French doors opening onto a private balcony.



The 360-degree view that we have is truly stunning, day and night. The sparkling lights of Kingston against the backdrop of a technicolour sunset to the west and the majestic mountain range to the east are simply breathtaking. And mornings have their own magic. Waking up to a cup of Strawberry Hill's own dark-roasted Blue Mountain coffee amidst the mountain mist is how every day should begin.

Meals here are a friendly affair taken on the restaurant veranda overlooking the infinity-edge pool—a million-dollar panorama. The cheerful staff have made us feel at home in an instant and the homemade-style Jamaican food is easy to enjoy.

If we had to put a simple label on the

ambience and charm at Strawberry Hill, it would be “romantic.” It's the privacy of our little cottage, the carved four-poster bed draped with a canopy of muslin netting, our quaint balcony overlooking miles of mountain and forest, and the warm glow of the fireplace in the cozy bar where the gentle sounds of reggae music are forever in the air.

Strawberry Hill may not match the standard image of a holiday-style Jamaican resort with tiki-hut beach bars and lounge chairs in the sand, but for those looking for a quiet restful luxe hideout, this may just be it. Sure was just what the doctor ordered for us! **H**

www.islandoutpost.com/strawberry_hill

Healthful living

Strawberry Hill has created a harmonious environment that includes the spa, exotic flora and fauna, use of nature trails and expert staff—all intended to provide a restful experience. The Strawberry Hill Living philosophy is built around an Aveda-concept spa that is carefully tucked away in a private corner of the resort with sweeping views of the mountains and the sea in the distance. A team of caring attendants have carefully designed a complete spa and rejuvenation program that includes yoga on the deck and a number of other outdoor activities. Those looking to tap into the magic of this island, which inspired Bob Marley, can choose the “Natural Mystic Music Tour.” Strawberry Hill offers this unique vacation package that allows guests to voyage into the vibe of reggae music and experience the serenity and clarity that Bob was able to find here. Your retreat will include a visit to the Bob Marley Museum and to his childhood home in Trenchtown, as well as the opportunity to taste “new Jamaican” cuisine and a customized spa treatment.

