

DEPARTURES

MAY/JUNE 2012

THE CULTURE ISSUE

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LONDON 2012 FESTIVAL

TURKEY'S MAGICAL MYSTICAL TOUR

THE NEW LAST DAYS OF POMPEII

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ALICE MARSHALL PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Low Cay Beach at the 18-acre GoldenEye Hotel & Resort

"Home again at Blue Harbour and everything is unbelievably lovely. The garden has grown so fast that it is quite unrecognizable. The air is warm and soft and so is the sea. I have fallen in love with the place all over again and this time next year I shall install myself for six months instead of seven weeks."

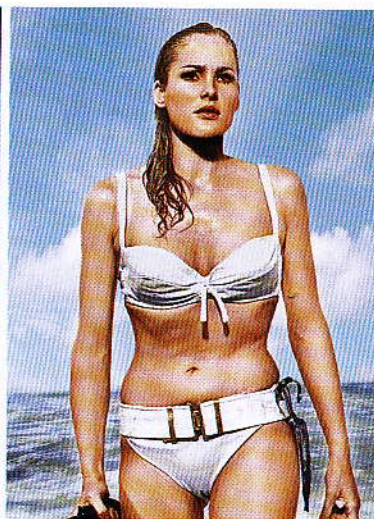
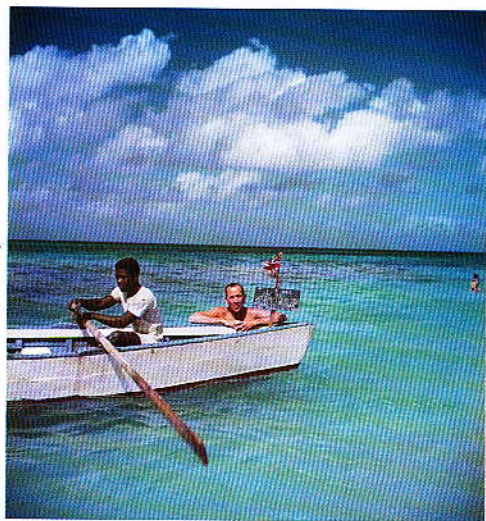
—NOEL COWARD, DECEMBER 15, 1949

LUXE LIFE

From Jamaica with Love

Back in the day, the north coast of the island was a magnet for writers like Noël Coward and Ian Fleming. And GoldenEye, Fleming's house, was at its core.

JOSHUA COOPER RAMO visits Chris Blackwell's latest guesthouse-cum-resort.



Clockwise from top left:
Noël Coward, 1953; Ursula
Andress in *Dr. No*; the
resort's lagoon-side Field
Spa; Ian Fleming, 1964.



When the great men of politics write about travel, they tend to produce something that reads like military history, bluff with logistics, times and checkpoints. Great artists are different. They travel to feel. In fact, one of the surest guides to a retreat is to follow the footsteps of an artist who has been there before you. Henry James's reports from Italy would be one such record. Or Flaubert's letters from Egypt: "...I live like a plant, filling myself with sun and light, with colors and fresh air," he wrote of the wandering years of smoking and whoring and gambling that preceded *Madame Bovary*. "...afterwards the digesting..."

Noël Coward's diaries—and the clearly endless pleasure he took from his breaks along Jamaica's north coast at his house,

GoldenEye has a
GRITTY PLEASURE
that you won't get at other
luxury Caribbean spots.

called Firefly—would be another example. You might not expect to find culture here, in the rugged part of an island most famous for its rum and its pirates, but in the decades following World War II, the northern coast was a magnet for English writers. They brought their culture with them (and their tea and scones and messy off-the-books romances), and then, like Flaubert in Egypt, they absorbed the light and colors, digested them and worked.

Coward had an industrious sense of humor about his Jamaican breaks. Days began quietly, but by the end, he had packed them: painting, drinking, visiting with Hollywood guests and then—always—writing. He fell in love with this part of Jamaica. Unlike the more frequented destinations of Round Hill or Negril, the landscape here is both wilder and more inviting. It rewards nothing so much as perception. Green mountains—a patchwork of every shade you can imagine—pour off the center of the island and down into the turquoise seas.

Coward came to Jamaica as a guest of his friend Ian Fleming, who spent every January

DETAILS

Take a chartered flight to Ian Fleming International Airport, just a ten-minute drive from GoldenEye. Rooms start at \$560; 876-622-9007; goldeneye.com.

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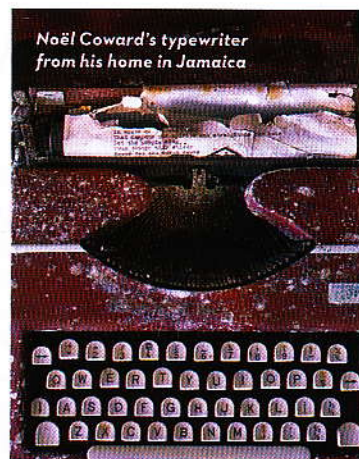


to March writing—with an efficiency Coward admired—one James Bond thriller a year for 14 years. Fleming fell in love with Jamaica in 1942 and, after returning from war, christened his house GoldenEye, allegedly after a commando operation he devised for British Naval Intelligence. The locale lent itself to Bondian inventions: A local mine was a set during the filming of *Dr. No*. A beach near GoldenEye carried Ursula Andress's Honey Rider step by white-bikini step out of the water. Coward so fell in love with the view and with the charm of life around GoldenEye that he built a house on a hillside nearby.

Recently renovated into the first really credible world-class resort on this part of the island, GoldenEye Hotel & Resort has a gritty pleasure you won't get at other luxury Caribbean spots, which specialize in relaxing polish. The staff feels honestly warm, not trained to be. And the food feels really, honestly cooked in the local style—which, alas, is not one of the strong points of Jamaica. But each small villa is a retreat. The 21 bungalows hover by the ocean or over lovely lagoons, and none is more than a few paces away from the water. And what Coward says about the astonishing speed of growth around his own house is apparent here too. "If you leave for three weeks," says the music producer Chris Blackwell, who spent much of his youth here and now owns GoldenEye, "this is a different place. The lushness can be overwhelming at times."

But somehow the sea balances this furious lushness. Every morning Fleming would write in a room—you can book his own house at the resort—with Ping Pong table-sized windows so he could rest his eyes on the sea when he wasn't writing. Then he would wander to a garden and sit for breakfast. Around him all sorts of drama could play out: the romantic adventures of passing British friends, the queen mother coming to visit Coward or, during one memorable week in 1956, the arrival of his old friend Anthony Eden, then prime minister, who came for a rest at the height of the Suez Crisis.

If you pour through the diaries of the men and women who flitted around Jamaica at this time, you discover one of those charming Bloomsbury webs, where everyone was sleeping with each other—love affairs and wild scenes alternated. And you



Coward came here as a guest of Ian Fleming, who wrote **ONE JAMES BOND** thriller a year for 14 years from his island outpost.

can almost taste the iced pea soup Coward prepared when the queen mother came to visit. There is a humanness about these intertwined lives that make them alive for us still; that lushness all around Coward and Fleming matched a wildness in their hearts. Coward could come here to Jamaica and love whom he wanted, as he wanted. Fleming and his wife, Annie, bounced from affair to affair and found each other again through tragedy—"Annie miserable tonight," Coward wrote after one evening visit. These people lived with an admirable, terrible habit of employing the human heart as a machete. It showed up in their writing—which is what they wanted all along.

Coward died at Firefly in March 1973, at age 73, having had a hell of a life. He is buried there now, overlooking the velvet view he enjoyed each evening. You can sit there for a moment and catch a scent of his life and a feel for the land. Writers have that wonderful habit of capturing the deepest feeling in the shortest space, and Coward was no slouch: "We swam in the velvet sea" is not a bad six-pack for his 50th birthday; but perhaps not as perfectly compact as what you'll find at the end of the menu he drafted for the queen mother, a Jamaican dish that, in three words, describes just the sort of life we might all aspire to here: rum-cream pie. The name alone is enough to suggest that, with a slice or two close at hand, even a 90th birthday would cause no great trouble to the mind. ■