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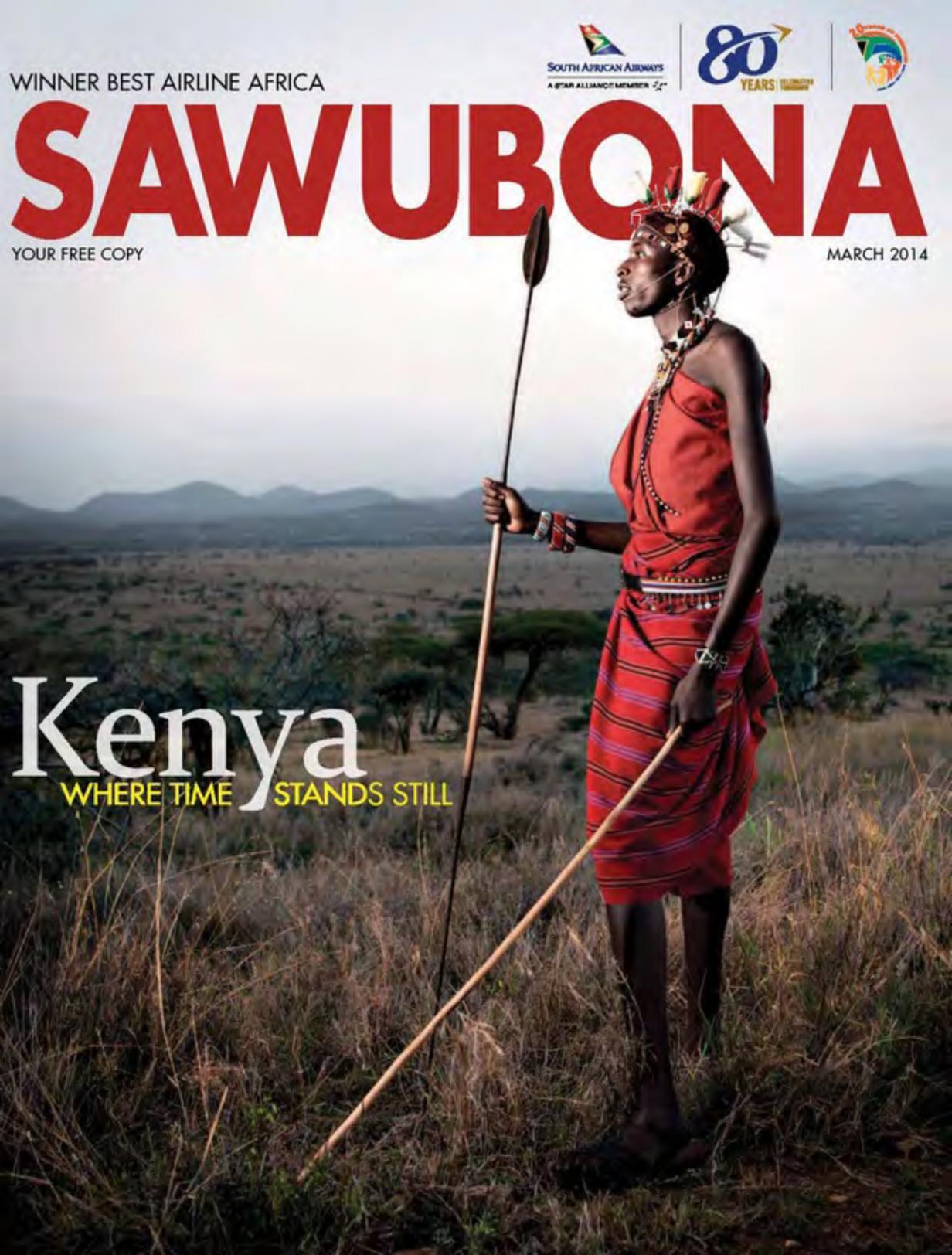


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ISLAND HIDEAWAY



Words and photographs: Frances Janisch

Located in Oracabessa Bay on the north coast of Jamaica, Ian Fleming's GoldenEye retreat – where he penned all the James Bond novels – is a favourite among those wanting to escape the public eye

If you plan to visit Jamaica, land of Bob Marley and Usain Bolt, be sure to travel along the northern coastline to the sleepy village of Oracabessa, where you'll find a heavenly retreat that's the home of 007 creator Ian Fleming.

GoldenEye – now a hotel owned by Chris Blackwell, the man who introduced Bob Marley to the world – has a colourful history. Originally a donkey racecourse, the property was purchased in 1946 by Fleming, who first came to Jamaica during World War II as a British Naval Intelligence Commander. He fell in love with the “peace, silence and cut-offness from the madding world” and vowed to

live the rest of his life in Jamaica. Fleming acquired the 6ha of overgrown land with its own coral beach and began construction on the villa, which still stands today.

The house he built was very basic: a modest structure consisting of three bedrooms, a large living room and a swimming pool. It was furnished simply, but the view of the Caribbean was where the luxury lay. Fleming designed the windows to frame the vista he loved so much: large wooden jalousies that remained open, unless he was sitting at his desk writing. “I wrote every one of the Bond thrillers here with the jalousies closed

so that I wouldn't be distracted by the birds, the flowers and the sunshine outside,” he said.

His wife, with whom he had a volatile relationship, sums up life at GoldenEye beautifully in this extract taken from *The Letters of Ann Fleming*: “The weather's beautiful and you would feel a different person and get small freckles under your eyes... There are plenty of butterflies and when you bathe in the dark, there's lots of phosphorus in the water and fireflies which drift about and disappear. We never wear any clothes when we bathe and it's just a question of getting out of bed and walking down the steps into the warm sea. There's a great deal to do, what with the garden and what we're going to eat and the small troubles which arise the whole time, like the Methodist parson coming to call and whether the ruined cathedral's full of 'duppies', which are the local ghosts.”

While all 14 of the James Bond books were written at GoldenEye, only three of them have plots set in Jamaica. The name of the superspy was taken from the author of a popular ornithological book, *Birds of the West Indies* – a decision Fleming once explained in a *Reader's Digest* interview: “I wanted the simplest, dullest, plainest-sounding name I could find and ‘James Bond’ was much better than something more interesting, like ‘Peregrine Carruthers’. Exotic things would happen to and around him, but he'd be a



Clockwise, from top: The Fleming Villa's private beach. Ramsey DaCosta, Ian Fleming's erstwhile gardener. Fleming's bedroom with the original desk and chair he used while writing the Bond novels. The Fleming Villa.





Clockwise, from left: The Bizot Bar. Bond memorabilia at GoldenEye. Noel Coward's home, Firefly, is now a museum. The Queen Mother's place settings at Firefly.



artist Lucian Freud, actors Katharine Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, Donald Sutherland and Sir Laurence Olivier, and photographer Cecil Beaton. Even the Queen Mother once stopped by for lunch. Firefly, now owned by Blackwell, is today both the gravesite of Coward and a museum, where the original place settings used by the Queen Mother are on display.

But what became of GoldenEye? Fleming, who was a heavy smoker

neutral figure – an anonymous, blunt instrument wielded by a government department.”

Fleming, although by nature a loner and an introvert, was also a notorious womaniser who continually engaged in extramarital affairs. Ann was away for months at a time in London and Fleming would pal around with his inner circle – American actor Errol Flynn and British humorist and playwright Noel Coward, who owned a property called Firefly a few kilometres away. A steady stream of celebrities were entertained between GoldenEye and Firefly, including novelists Evelyn Waugh and Truman Capote,



and drinker, died of a heart attack while visiting London in 1964. The property remained a part of the family estate, but in 1976 it was sold to Bob Marley. He, in turn, sold it to Blackwell, who

still owns and manages it today. Blackwell himself is something of an institution in Jamaica: as the founder of Island Records, he's the individual most responsible for turning the world on to reggae music: an accomplishment noted by the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame.

He was born in London in 1937 to Irishman Joseph (of



Above: GoldenEye Resort. Below, right: The resort offers numerous watersports.

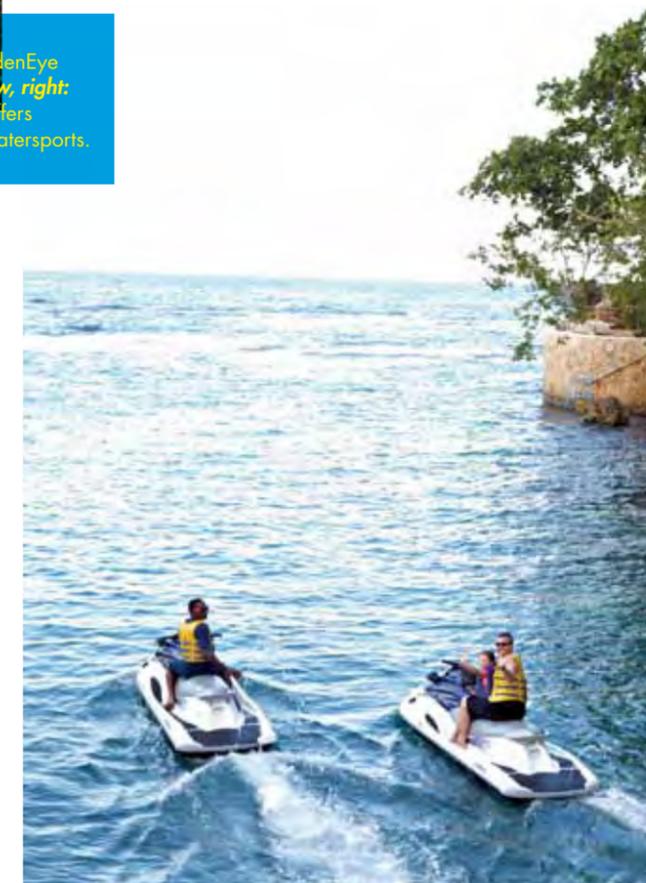
Crosse & Blackwell mayonnaise fame) and Blanche Lindo, a descendant of Portuguese Sephardic Jews who settled in Jamaica in the 1700s. The Lindos were sugar cane farmers who also made a fortune off Appleton Rum and were considered one of the most powerful families in Jamaica. Blanche, who's still alive, was a close friend (and rumoured lover) of Fleming and it's thought that the Bond character Octopussy is based on her.

Blackwell formed Island Records in Kingston in 1960 and went on to launch the careers of not only Bob Marley and the Wailers, but also Cat Stevens, Stevie Winwood, Grace Jones, Burning Spear, Brian Ferry, Tom Waits, King Sunny Ade and U2. In 1989 the company was bought by Polygram, although Blackwell stayed on to supervise.

In the early 1990s he created Island Outpost, a hotel and

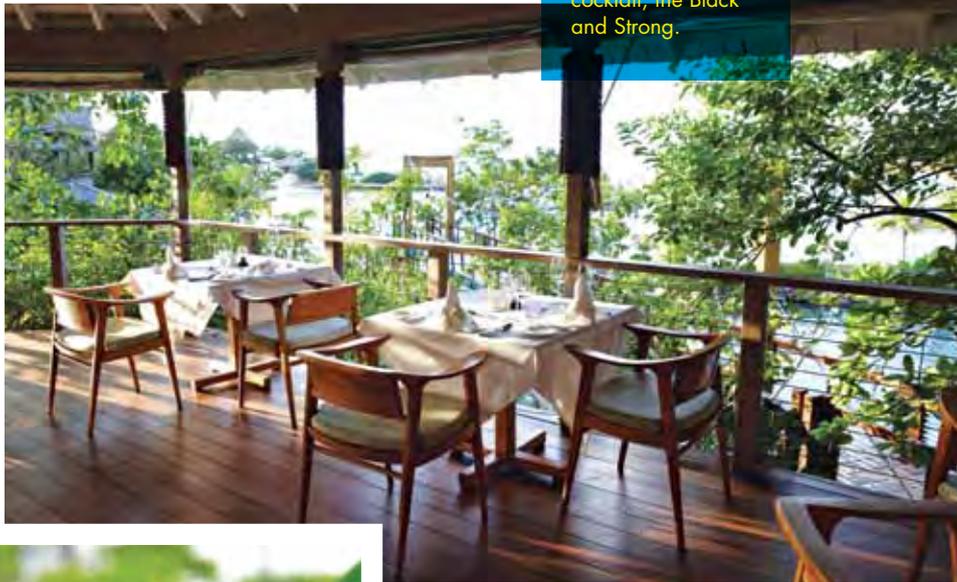
resorts group which now has three properties in its portfolio: Strawberry Hill, in the Blue Mountains just above Kingston, The Caves in Negril and GoldenEye. The latter consists of the Fleming Villa, which has been expanded and can accommodate 10 guests. Due to the secluded nature of the property, as well as its private beach, it's become increasingly popular among celebrities seeking to escape the media.

Adjacent to the villa, further down the property, is the GoldenEye Resort consisting of 13 villas, six lagoon cottages, a small beach, two swimming pools (one in the shape of an eye) and two restaurants which serve excellent food. It's very easy not to want to leave the resort once you settle into a chaise-longue with your Black and Strong (one part Blackwell





Clockwise, from left: Meals are a delicious experience. The Fleming Villa's private beach. The Gazebo restaurant. GoldenEye's signature rum cocktail, the Black and Strong.



Rum, four parts ginger beer and a dash of bitters). However, if you'd like to move some or all of your limbs, there are limitless watersports, most of them free. There's also tennis, bird-watching and yoga, or you could take a guided drive around the island – some of the best food I've had was in Jamaica. Frankly, though, it's far easier settling in under an umbrella and simply watching the waves rolling in.

If no-one's occupying the Fleming Villa, you can ask the concierge to let you have a look around. You'll see the original

writing desk where Fleming banged away at his gold-plated typewriter. If you're lucky, you'll also run into Ramsey DaCosta, now in his 80s, who was once the gardener for Fleming (or "the Commander", as DaCosta still refers to him).

Blackwell can also still be seen walking around his property, stopping to chat to guests at the Bizot Bar or entertaining friends at The Gazebo. As you sit in the warm, tropical wind listening to Bob Marley, sipping your Red Stripe beer and surrounded by Bond memorabilia, it's quite extraordinary to think that this little oasis of history still exists. And Blackwell does a fine job of keeping it that way. 🇯🇲

ILLUSTRATION: SIYAMTHEMBA BOBOTYANA.

NEED TO KNOW

Rates start at \$620 per room per night, including breakfast, and from \$5 500 for the Fleming Villa. ★ Jet Blue and Caribbean Air fly directly to Montego Bay and Kingston from JFK Airport in New York. ★ Transfers to GoldenEye (approximately two hours' scenic driving) are available upon request and cost \$200 from Kingston or \$165 from Montego Bay. 📄 www.goldeneye.com