

The Allure of GoldenEye

Its legacies are many; musicians, artists and celebrities have flocked to this place of stunning natural beauty where music is in the blood – the estate that Ian Fleming christened GoldenEye

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"Everything in Jamaica," my driver says, "is music." On the bumpy road that hugs the northeastern Caribbean coastline, this is certainly true. The car radio picks up a local station with a playlist heavy on reggae. The sky is cloudy with pop-up showers.

The fat raindrops tap out a groove on the kettledrum grills lining the roadside. Men and women setting up for an evening of festivities are chopping pineapples, mangoes and papayas for the fruit stands. Everywhere – from the soft songs they hum, from the thump of the knife as it slices through fruit, from the plop of the raindrops – everywhere is natural rhythm.

This tantalizing harmony of community and nature is what pulled famed music producer Chris Blackwell back to the island of his childhood, where he had introduced the world to the sounds of homegrown artists like Bob Marley before turning his attention to developing the **Island Outpost** boutique resorts, including **GoldenEye**.

From the outside, there is not much to notice: a long stone wall, a flagpole marking a gate. There's little sign that anything of note has ever happened on this historic property.

But fans of the arts know better. They know that when Commander Ian Fleming – the creator of suave Agent 007, James Bond – first set his sights on the oceanfront property he named **GoldenEye**, he'd fallen in love with Jamaica's peace and seclusion. It was on this slice of paradise that Fleming built his villa and penned all 14 Bond thrillers with "the jalousies closed around me so that I would not be distracted by the birds and the

flowers and the sunshine outside."

It was the same natural beauty that captured Blackwell, who took title to the property by default. "In 1976 I talked Bob Marley, to whom I had just paid \$70,000 in royalties, into buying **GoldenEye**," recalls Blackwell. "But then he got cold feet; said it was too posh.

So the next year, when I was flush again, I bought it myself. The original sale document said Bob Marley and we crossed that out and wrote in Chris Blackwell."

Thanks to the dazzling blue Caribbean, a crescent of private sand beach and lush grounds, **GoldenEye** possesses a special mojo for artists, musicians, authors and actors. Blackwell's vision was to create a place that feels like visiting a good friend's home; aiming for an understated elegance that's unpretentious, in harmony with nature and appreciative of the surrounding natural splendour. It's what makes **GoldenEye** a must-stay property for regulars like Jimmy Buffett, Sting and Harry Belafonte... just a few in a long and illustrious list.

I sit on the dock of my lagoon-front cottage, dangling my toes in the water and listening to the rhythmic chirpings of the Caribbean tree frogs – the little frogs with the big voices. There's a cadence here that causes people to slow down. Dusk falls and it's another screen-saver view: torchlit pathways wind through the resort and waves lap at a white sandy shore as curvaceous as a plump French croissant. I allow myself to savour this moment.

The perfect finale to a day of sun, sand and the sweetness of doing nothing in the sultry Jamaican climate is a quick



The three-bedroom **Ian Fleming Villa** is the heart and soul of **GoldenEye**. It has a private pool and is staffed by a housekeeper, butler and private chef. Perched on the hillside and along the beach and lagoon are another 20 units, ranging from one bedroom to four bedrooms in size. Each unit has dedicated Wi-Fi, an outdoor rain shower and state-of-the-art amenities, and most have kitchens.

Guests can touch down by private plane at the new **Ian Fleming International Airport**, a 10-minute drive from **GoldenEye**, or by commercial flight to **Sangster International Airport** in **Montego Bay**, a 90-minute drive away.

The resort's **FieldSpa** offers an engaging menu of treatments infused with healing flowers and herbs like wild ginger, pimento and Jamaican wild lime. But it excels in custom programming to answer the question, "How do I want to live?", with experiences outside its walls such as posture exercises, yoga, stand-up paddling and strength training.

Kayaking, snorkelling, swimming, a glass-bottom boat excursion, windsurfing, jet skiing, birdwatching and tennis are the core of the resort's activities.

Popular day trips include tubing along the remote **White River**, enjoying the magnificent views at **Firefly**, climbing **Dunn's River Falls**, ziplining and a driving tour into the mystical **Blue Mountains**.

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ocean dip before climbing the steps to **The Gazebo** restaurant, perched on a promontory overlooking the lagoon and the sea. The bartender is whirling together a mixture of pineapple and orange juices, crushed ice and rum to make tumblers of the signature libation, **The GoldenEye**. True to Blackwell's 'roots philosophy,' the rum of choice is Blackwell's **Well Black**, made at **GoldenEye** and based on an old family recipe dating back to the time when his ancestors traded in rum, sugar and coconuts.

The chef is one step ahead of me. He delivers a tasting menu that starts with a bowl of spiced pumpkin soup, dabbles in the sparkling lime and Scotch bonnet pepper burn of fresh *ceviche*, and moves on to pan-seared parrot fish before finishing with a scoop of warm bread pudding topped with coconut sorbet.

There's a holy trinity of flavours in many dishes at both **The Gazebo** and the beachside **Bizot Bar**: fiery Scotch bonnet peppers, scallions and sprigs of thyme make many of the traditional Jamaican dishes sing. Most of the fruits and vegetables on the menu come from the resort's own 2,500-acre organic farm. Fresh fish and Caribbean lobster are caught daily by local fishermen.

Here is another of Blackwell's truths: his guests are gently nudged past the gates to mingle with the locals in neighbouring **Oracabessa**. For most of its history, **Oracabessa** was a sleepy little banana port tucked into a natural harbour near **GoldenEye**. The banana industry slumped in the 1970s and now **Oracabessa** remains home to local farmers, fishermen and many of **GoldenEye's** staff. Want to explore a little farther afield? Local guides can navigate the backroads to gems such as **Firefly**, the hilltop home of playwright Noël Coward (who was also **GoldenEye's** first paying guest, when he rented the property from Fleming), or a drive into the lush mountains to **Nine Mile**, Bob Marley's boyhood home.

GoldenEye is the home of a friend, just as Blackwell intended. A friend who wants you to understand the people, the flavours and the melodious riffs of Jamaica. That's why the luxurious villas and cottages are built with local woods and designed in ways that minimize their impact on the fragile environment. It's why torches light the way up the hillside in the evening, and why the tree frogs provide the evening's music.

After all, what are good friends for? ☑