

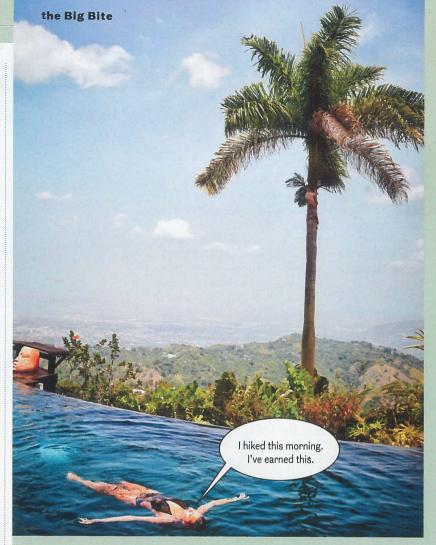
## TRAVEL

## WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Rum. Coffee.
Pool. Repeat: TIME TO GO
back to JAMAICA.

Climbing up into the Blue Mountains on snaky roads in an old Land Cruiser, you see the city of Kingston shrinking to your left. To your right, tree roots are at eye level, punching through walls of dirt. The roads are narrow enough that when the car slows down along curves or for the errant goat—he will find his way back home at night, the driver tells you—you can open your window to touch the gnarly flora. The humid air enters: It smells like grilled food wafting from shacks with enviable views of the hills, and flowers from the brightred Flame of the Forest trees, with a hint of gasoline—a touch of reality in a jungle paradise.

These hills are a part of Jamaica that few travelers see, opting instead to get shuttled directly to their beach resort and then back. Such is the standard Caribbean vacation. You could go with the prepackaged version, but you'd miss out on hikes to majestic little waterfalls and churches from the early 1800s. You'd miss out on the different outposts amid the thick wildlife of the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park, some of which were started by slaves escaping British plantations on the coast. You'd miss out on Blue Mountain coffee farms whose beans are prized worldwide but best sampled at the source—smooth, subtle, and gentle, a cup of joe without the



FLOATING ABOVE

The infinity pool at Strawberry Hill has tremendous views of Kingston.



jitteriness. You'd miss out on a day trip to Kingston, to visit Trench Town, to see one of the oldest markets in the Caribbean and the mansion of the first black millionaire in Jamaica.

And mainly, you'd miss out on Strawberry Hill, one of those magical hotels in the world that are a bit off the beaten track but so worth it. Like sister resort Golden-Eye, this collection of cottages and villas connected by rambling paths is owned by Chris Blackwell, founder of Island Records. It's where Bob Marley spent time recovering after being shot in the mid-'70s; before that, he enjoyed many "romantic rendezvous" here, as the website states. Witness one sunset from the edge of the infinity pool with a rum punch in hand as the lights of Kingston begin to sparkle and you don't have to read between the lines to understand what that phrase means.

At night, the temperature drops, and the murmur of crickets is punctuated from time to time by the bass of reggae emanating from somewhere, somehow, in the hills. In the morning, it fades into the sound of roosters and tropical birds, with the faint buzz of smallengine motorcycles in the distance blasting music. Always music. What a soundtrack, you think. The beach can wait a day. —Kevin Sintumuang