

MODERN LUXURY

OCEAN DRIVE



Magic Mountain

HIGH UP IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS IS A JAMAICAN PARADISE STEEPED IN MUSIC HISTORY.

BY PATRICIA TORTOLANI



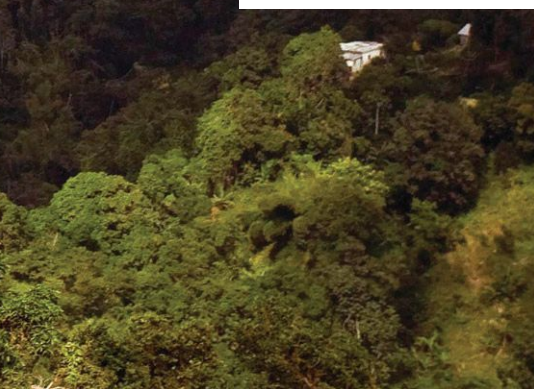
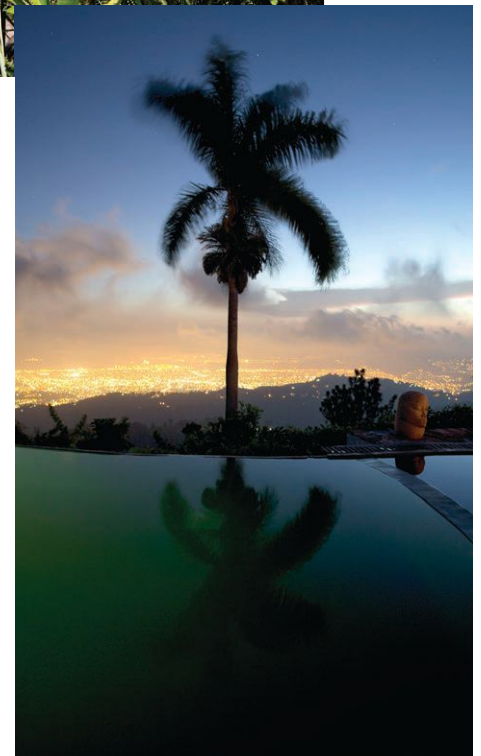
There is a spot in the infinity swimming pool at Strawberry Hill where, if you take two steps off the ledge, it appears that you are walking on water.

It's a little visual trickery (thanks to a narrow partition a few inches below the surface) that captures exactly what it feels like to stay in the magical mountain village. Strawberry Hill is one of the four luxury hotels in Jamaica owned by Chris Blackwell, the legendary Island Records music producer who made Bob Marley and Grace Jones international stars. The property—a cluster of gracious postplantation cottages surrounding a main house—is set sublimely high in the Blue Mountains (3,100 feet above sea level, to be exact) overlooking Kingston. And while the 50-minute drive from Norman Manley International Airport is not for the weak of stomach, once all the windy roads and hairpin turns have been navigated, you are rewarded with an experience like none other.

The white sandy beach you see on the Jamaica vacation brochures? You're not going to find it here. This is the real Jamaica, "the land of wood and water."



Clockwise from left: Clouds are formed directly over the peaks, giving the mountains their famous blue hue; each of the secluded cottages offers spectacular views; the pool just after sunset; the four-poster beds are as comfortable as they are inviting.



(There are some nice beaches on Jamaica, but much of the island, rising to a summit in the UNESCO World Heritage Blue Mountains, is green and hilly, and crisscrossed with rivers and waterfalls.) And Strawberry Hill—with its butterflies and hummingbirds, thick flora and ever-changing cloud formations—puts you at the center of this serenity. This is a place to relax and recharge, to find peace and inspiration. (Famously, Bob Marley

did just that when he came to the property in the '70s to convalesce from a gunshot wound.)

Activities range from sunset yoga to waterfall hikes. There are books lying around the property that you'll actually want to read. After sunset, when the tropical Jamaican heat gives way to a cool breeze, plan for dinner on the veranda followed by drinks at the charming bar. Here, wood-paneled walls are adorned with photos of

the stars from the Island Records family. The rum is smooth, and the craft cocktails are stiff. Best of all, a stone fireplace gives the entire property a warm glow.

Come morning you'll find yourself sipping the best-tasting coffee you've ever had, watching the perpetually shifting cloud formations wreath the mountaintops as they drift across from the far side of the island and wondering if you've found heaven on Earth. ■