



High in the hills of Jamaica, Pantrepant Farm

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PAMELA WRIGHT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A modest Georgian farmhouse sits at the top of a hill at Pantrepant Farm.

A wisp of an old man with waist-long dreadlocks and a bamboo cane walked a small herd of buffed mahogany cattle across the field in front of us. It was early morning and the vision was blurred. A heavy mist rose above fields of lemongrass. On the horizon, a low fog hugged the floor of a thick rain forest. The old man and his herd came in and out of view. Perhaps it was a mirage. Perhaps it was a fuzzy daydream, brought on by inhaling the vapors of Jamaican “herb.” We were ultra relaxed, and nearly alone, surrounded by acres of fields and forests. Somewhere, a donkey brayed; birds sang; the wind rustled in the trees and field grasses.

We were staying in the small guesthouse at Pantrepant Farm, an 800-acre cattle and organic farm high in the hills of Trelawny Parish, off Jamaica's northwest coast. The property, a former sugar cane plantation, dates back to the 1700s. There are thousands of tropical fruit trees, thick orange and coconut groves, rows of pineapple plants. Dense wooded hills and lush rain forests. Herds of cattle and galloping horses. Flocks of ducks and geese. Buzzing honey bees and squawking parrots. At the top of a hill sits a modest Georgian farmhouse, shaded by a giant 300-year-old guango tree. Possibly the prettiest tree we've ever seen.

It is far from the Jamaica we know, the antithesis of the island's slick, gated resorts. And it is exactly what owner Chris Blackwell wants us to see. The legendary Blackwell, founder of the Island Records label that made stars of Bob Marley, Grace Jones, U2, and others, is arguably Jamaica's greatest ambassador, nearly evangelistic about showcasing its rich culture and diverse landscape, far from the maddening, all-inclusive, beach-going crowds. Blackwell developed Island Outpost Resorts, which includes Strawberry Hill, his one-time retreat in the hills above Kingston, which now welcomes guests to 12 wood-framed cottages; Goldeneye on Oracabessa Bay, with a cluster of private villas, cottages, and beach huts; and The Caves in Negril, with 12 cliffside cottages. Until recently, his beloved Pantrepant Farm was open only to family and friends. Now, guests at Blackwell's other resorts can also spend a night or two on the farm in a lone guesthouse.

"It's like the earliest Walt Disney films, when a paintbrush introduced the title," Blackwell says of the nearly surreal setting of Pantrepant Farm. We thought: a Claude Monet painting, a Mikhail Larionov landscape.

Mayva greeted us at the door of the guesthouse with a broad smile, a singsong patois welcome, and a cold glass of Blackwell rum punch. The villa had two bedrooms, two baths, and separate dining and living areas, decorated with handcrafted wood furniture. There was an airy veranda, with a hammock strung across one corner. Reggae music played on the Bose sound system. The mini refrigerator was stocked with essentials (wine, beer, water) and the bar with premium liquors.

That evening, we walked the dirt paths crisscrossing the farm, strolled through fields, and then dined on roast chicken, raised on the farm, a medley of steamed vegetables, grown in the gardens, and ice cream made from the morning's milking. Mayva served the home-cooked meal at our dining room table, paired with wines. The next morning, she brought glasses of fresh-squeezed juice, cups of steaming Jamaican coffee, just-baked pastries and

fruit. Eggs from the farm's flock of chickens, nestled over seasoned callaloo, followed.

There are things to do here, if you must. You can go horseback riding, or tour the gardens, walk endless paths into the forest, explore an old Taino cave or plantation ruins, enjoy a massage. We walked to the farm's impossibly clear, blue lagoon, fed by a sparkly waterfall and the rumbling Martha Brae River, where the staff had laid out cushions and towels, and a cooler of drinks. We swam and sunned before walking back to the plantation house for lunch. (A swim in this lagoon is not to be missed.)

Also not to be missed is lunch at the farm, prepared by Mamma J, who's been working here for more than 25 years. The spread of traditional Jamaican home-cooking was impressive — and delicious — with ingredients sourced largely from the farm. There was pumpkin-stuffed chocho, curried goat, jerk chicken, salads, salted fish, and a spicy bean stew. We dined al fresco, under the canopy of the old guano tree.

We left after lunch, traveling the jarring, twisting dirt road through the hills, already missing the farm. One night at dreamlike Pantrepant was not enough.

PANTREPANT FARM, 800-688-7678, www.pantrepant.com. The guest villa starts at \$1,500 a night, all activities and meals included.

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